A NEO-TOLSTOYAN RESPONSE TO KITSCH

_____

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

_____

by

Daniel Joseph Cabal

December 2018

APPROVAL SHEET

A NEO-TOLSTOYAN RESPONSE TO KITSCH

Daniel Joseph Cabal

Read and Approved by:

_____
Mark T. Coppenger (Chair)

_____
Esther R. Crookshank

_____
James Parker III

Date_____

For Jesus, Mendy, Sophie, and Jet;

Love is stronger than death.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

Chapter Page

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

Oh, that space permitted the inclusion of everyone who has enriched my life, because a doctoral degree is not earned in addition to one's life but seemingly in place of it for a period of years. Here, I have space only to thank those whose influence in the doctoral program has been greatest, with family first. My mother instructed me in appreciation of the arts in childhood and has now equaled that kindness with years of the encouragement unique to motherhood. My father inculcated my interest in philosophy and has matched those heady days in the past with practical tips for surviving a doctoral program in the present. My mother- and father-in-law incentivized the completion of my dissertation with a gift whose absence would have extended the writing process by months, if not years; I extend all my family deep thanks.

Next, I am grateful to the professors (and students) whose insights I gleaned in colloquia and seminars. In particular, my gratitude goes to Jim Parker, for his stories of how aesthetics collides with apologetics and philosophy of religion in the real world, Esther Crookshank, for her ability to exfoliate dense musical theory so that the meaning shines through, and Douglas Blount, for an amazing class in Christianity and pop culture that first exposed me to Tolstoy's *What is Art?* Most of all, I've been impacted by Mark Coppenger, doctoral supervisor *par excellence,* a man whose learning is oceanic in breadth and depth and whose character is Jesus-aimed.

My wife, Mendy, is the favorite part of my life. Those who know her as a friend realize that attempting to describe her runs the risk of rendering one wordless, for she outshines words. She is beautiful of face, heart, and actions. Comparing life with her

to an assortment of diamonds and rubies would miss the mark, for she is not just worth far more but ever grows in value. The children she gave me, Sophie and Jet, are my second-favorite things in life; they are flowers, sent by God as living beauties in a dying world. God has not righted the wrongs of our crooked planet yet, but he continues to send flowers, that we might seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any of us.

Daniel Cabal

Louisville, KY
December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The thesis presented here is that a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic can answer the challenges of kitsch theory.[1] It is important, then, to discuss what the challenges of kitsch theory are and to detail a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic. Before appreciating a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic, one must first understand Tolstoy's aesthetic as set forth in his book *What Is Art?*[2] Yet before learning Tolstoy's aesthetic, the questions "Why this aesthetic?" and "Why Tolstoy?" need to be answered.

Most Americans equate the name "Leo Tolstoy" (1828-1910) with little more than "author of huge books." If they have had a little college, they may think of him alongside Dostoyevsky as one of the greatest Russian novelists.[3] Yet Tolstoy's influence on the West is powerful because it remains under the surface.

For Tolstoy's effect on the West has been sublimated. This sublimation (i.e., when one thinks Tolstoy's thoughts as if they were naturally one's own without knowing

---

[1]Like unwinding a scroll, the purpose here is simply to lay out the thesis and track its extended argument. Like answering a child's questions about why the sky is blue instead of another color, the explanation offered here is substantially more lengthy and difficult than the initial question. The difficulty—and enjoyment—comes in answering subsequent questions that arise as the thesis is followed to its conclusion. Structure is provided by the natural unfolding of those questions, utilizing the tension which springs from posing a question and explaining it with an answer which contains, in itself, the seed of another question.

[2]Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers, 1899).

[3]Fyodor Dostoyevsky does not play into discussion here at all. Persons new to the study of Russian literature will be familiar with the names Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, but they will not be aware that literature professors see far greater differences than similarities between the two authors. Fairly recently, authors such as Rozenblium and Volgin have discovered corresponding ideas, but the parallels are admittedly speculative, as Dostoyevsky never met Tolstoy. Lia Rozenblium, "Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (Closing the Distance) At the Turn of the 1870s-1880s," *Russian Studies in Literature* 45, no. 4 (2009): 62-97, and Igor Volgin, "Tolstoy and Dostoevsky," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 50, no. 3 (2012): 57-67.

they originated with Tolstoy) lends the effect of his ideas greater power. Indeed, apart from his novels Tolstoy's non-fiction writing had tremendous effect. Outside of Russia (where his influence is incalculable), Tolstoy's non-fiction writings spread south in Asia, west to Europe, and then onward to the Western Hemisphere.

Russian literature professor Hugh McLean argues that outside of Russia, the two countries most affected by Tolstoy's ideas are India and then the United States. In India, Tolstoy directly influenced Mohandas Gandhi through Tolstoy's re-discovery and subsequent insistence on following Jesus' command of non-resistance to evil. Tolstoy and Gandhi carried on correspondence, writing letters discussing ways to acquiesce to evil people without joining them in sin. McLean observes, "It was precisely these doctrines that through Mohandas Gandhi inspired one of the great social metamorphoses of our time, the attainment of India's independence by nonviolent means."[4] In one letter to Tolstoy, Gandhi "praises *The Kingdom of God is Within You* as the work that has inspired him most."[5] Famed Princeton philosopher Walter Kaufmann recognizes that the message of the Bhagavad Gita is in some ways antithetical to Gandhi's beliefs and that "it would be a *gross understatement* to say that Gandhi owed more to Tolstoy than he did to Hinduism."[6] So it is no *overstatement* to claim that Tolstoy's literal interpretation of Jesus' words on responding to evil changed the course of India's history.

"Through Gandhi's impact on Martin Luther King, Jr.," McLean explains, Tolstoy's ideas "left their mark on contemporary America."[7] Tolstoy realized that Jesus advocated giving in to evil people's desires, thereby exposing their evil both to

---

[4]Hugh McLean, ed., *In the Shade of the Giant: Essays on Tolstoy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 2.

[5]Donna Tussing Orwin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45.

[6]Walter Arnold Kaufmann and Paul Gottfried, *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 7, emphasis mine.

[7]McLean, *In the Shade of the Giant*, 2.

themselves and the world. The ubiquity of this idea in the United States speaks to its impact. Tolstoy's advocacy of non-violent responses to evil spread throughout Russia, becoming an actual practice even in his lifetime. Tolstoy's larger-than-life ideas led to his becoming a living legend, and with the advent of mass media his influence was amplified.

In fact, Tolstoy found his voice literally amplified when in 1908, Thomas Edison sent Tolstoy a dictaphone to record his thoughts for the world.[8] Subsequently, Tolstoy's words impacted people around the world, including Ludwig Wittgenstein in Austria who "had the profoundest admiration for Tolstoy," according to Kaufman. "When he inherited his father's fortune, [Wittgenstein] gave it away to live simply and austerely,"[9] directly in accordance with Tolstoy's later thinking on wealth and land ownership. India, the United States, Wittgenstein, and more thinkers[10] show that Tolstoy's ideas directly impacted Russians in his own time but that through subsequent activists and thinkers adopting his ideas, other countries were affected.

Writing about "the borderline of art and philosophy,"[11] philosophy professor Louis Flaccus remarks that when people "get beyond the artist's pose and the philosopher's clannishness, [then] you will find them both creatively self-expressive. There the common bond seems to lie."[12] Remembering that philosophy was formerly written with more narrative and poetic power (but that this writing style has fallen out of favor with current philosophers), Flaccus includes Tolstoy as an example of

---

[8]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion*, 44.

[9]Kaufmann and Gottfried, *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus*, 7.

[10]The second chapter offers additional examples of Tolstoy's influence on people and ideas. The first dissertation written in the United States concerning Tolstoy's thought was in 1913. Hallmur Khan, "Doctoral Dissertations Written in the United States and Canada on Leo Tolstoy, 1913-1996," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 9 (1997): 85.

[11]Louis W. Flaccus, *Artists and Thinkers* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), 1.

[12]Ibid., 5.

a person who was both an artist and a thinker: "Tolstoy was a keen observer of nature, but not a philosophical interpreter."[13] To put it more bluntly, Tolstoy was a substantially better writer than he was a philosopher. That is why the theory offered in *What Is Art?* provides valuable insights yet remains encumbered by untenable aspects of Tolstoy's thinking.

What Is Art? was attacked upon its release by virtually every outlet: artists and art critics scrambled to publish articles shrieking that it had unsolvable problems, and eventually philosophers began writing uncharitable descriptions of its problems. Tolstoy pushed buttons with his definitional answer of art, and the book has never lived down its initial reception. Professor of Russian Joseph Troncale reports that *What Is Art?* "continues to be received with dismay by many scholars whose responses range from anger to condescension of the worst sort,"[14] and these precise emotions—often uncoupled from actual analysis—are present across dozens of references to Tolstoy's aesthetic. However, in addition to the problems that art critics imagined it suffering, *What Is Art?* contains real problems, and a strong, neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic emerges out of addressing the actual problems present in the book.

Even with a fortified, neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic however, kitsch theory proposes serious challenges about the nature of art. In particular, common definitions of kitsch pit it directly against a neo-Tolstoyan view of what good art encompasses. Fortunately, these challenges of kitsch theory can be rebutted or incorporated, thus forcing helpful clarification onto neo-Tolstoyan aesthetics either way.

Outline of the Argument

Exploring the thesis necessitates an inter-disciplinary undertaking which brings

---

[13]Flaccus, *Artists and Thinkers*, 160.

[14]Joseph Troncale, review of *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and His Art*, by Rimvydas Silbajoris, *Russian Review* 52, no. 1 (1993): 105.

the thought of a nineteenth-century, Russian text against Western ideas that arose in the next century on (bad) art. To make understanding the task easier, it will be helpful to show how each chapter contributes to the research from which the argument springs. This first chapter provides information on kitsch, definitions, and of course, the already-offered information on Tolstoy.

Chapter 2 looks at Tolstoy's life and influences because Tolstoy allows his preferences to creep into his aesthetics without acknowledging that they are only preferences not integral to his argument, as biased as if an ice cream machine's manual insisted that chocolate and strawberry never be included as ingredients. Having preferences, of course, is both fine and unavoidable, but trained thinkers try to bracket their own taste when theory-making. To extract Tolstoy's personal opinions from *What Is Art?* requires one first to be aware of what his preferences were.

Additionally, people are somewhat impacted by the books they encounter, and readers' responses are necessarily *responsive* to ideas arising outside themselves. Similarly, emphases in Tolstoy's theory that may strike one as misplaced or even strange make more sense in light of the thought to which he was responding, and that is why the second chapter also examines the ideas and pressures of Tolstoy's time. Because Tolstoy himself was a very religious person and felt no qualms utilizing his religious views as the basis of the moral criteria he employed for his aesthetics,[15] it is particularly important to detail the religious environment surrounding Tolstoy.

The third chapter follows the natural progression and turns its focus on *What Is Art?* More than a summary of the book, chapter 3 singles out the most important ideas in

---

[15]Scholars should be on guard "against reducing Tolstoy's views on art to an ethics," insists Harvard professor of Slavic studies Julie Buckler in a review of *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy,* ed. Donna Tussing Orwin, *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 14 (2002): 156. Buckler is correct because judging an artwork by its morality alone would elevate much bad art far beyond its worth. Yet ignoring the morality of immoral art would elevate that art beyond its worth as well. Ethics and aesthetics may relate to each other in many ways, but the relationship described in chap. 4 is that the moral components of one's aesthetics are drawn from one's pre-existing ethics.

Tolstoy's view of art. However, even broadly read scholars may not be familiar with the voluminous literature (much of it angry) surrounding *What Is Art?*, so the third chapter offers an overview of Tolstoy's own view of aesthetics and dives deeply into its valuable insights. Chapter 3 closely follows the approach of Northwestern professor Gary Saul Morson and Princeton professor Caryl Emerson, whose analysis of *What Is Art?* remains the most even-handed in the field. Emerson's approach in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy* is particularly refreshing.[16] She remarks that despite her awareness of Tolstoy's quirky and even "most peculiar" views on art, she intends to interact with his work "from within and on its own terms."[17] Her interactions with Tolstoy are sympathetic and patient, even when she disagrees with his view or tone. Emerson refuses to judge his aesthetic before she understands it as a totality, unlike many of Tolstoy's historical critics.[18]

Although occasional supplements are made with statements recorded in Tolstoy's published stories, treatises, and even his diaries, the viewpoint expressed in *What Is Art?* constitutes the primary research source. *What Is Art*? receives pride of place for three reasons: first, it represents his most-developed thinking on art; second, Tolstoy writes more on the subject there than anywhere else; third, his thinking by that stage is more advanced than his earlier thought.[19] Since *What Is Art?* has been significantly misrepresented at best and flatly dismissed at worst, Emerson and Morson's

---

[16]Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics" in Donna Tussing Orwin, Ed., *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 237-51. No one has written a more clear-eyed treatise on Tolstoy's aesthetics than Emerson in that chapter. Additionally, Emerson proves to be just as approachable, personable, and helpful in personal correspondence.

[17]Ibid., 237.

[18]Ibid. Emerson also acknowledges that Tolstoy's views on art have "a surprising toughness, subtlety, and integrity . . . which Tolstoy's categorical tone often masks" (237). Philosophy and literature would be less smoky if their practitioners imitated Emerson's willingness to approach views openly until they are understood from the belief-holder's perspective.

[19]Because the purpose here is not to develop a history of Tolstoy's thought, early ideas he later abrogates are not referenced.

approach needs to be followed in attempting to explain Tolstoy's thought as Tolstoy himself understood it.

However, even when Tolstoy's aesthetic is given as generous a reading as possible, it still contains significant problems. Those problems need to be explored, and after being understood they can be resolved. Addressing those problems in the first half of chapter 4 results in the development of a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic. The value of this neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic lies in its ability to retain Tolstoy's best insights about art while excising incorrect assumptions, shoring up poor arguments, and utilizing a Christian worldview to account for important questions about humanity.

The second half of chapter 4 offers additional buttressing of a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic, making it capable of more robustly accounting for developments in art that have arisen since Tolstoy wrote. Art such as film, which is created by hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of people, was not common in Tolstoy's life, nor did he write about time-related processes surrounding the emotion and development of art. The fourth chapter covers both these eventualities. In addition, the weak moral base of Tolstoy's aesthetic needs to be shored up. As the aesthetic developed here deeply reflects Christian ideas, its moral authority is shifted from Tolstoy's conception to one rooted in what theologians call God's general and special revelation.[20]

Because many art theorists and critics discuss kitsch without actually defining what it means (or even simply what it means to them), chapter 5 attempts to disentangle the dialogue surrounding it. Academics differ in their diagnosis of what makes something kitsch, so their descriptions will be examined and compared. Even though scholars disagree on the nature of kitsch, they certainly agree that it is negative.[21] Even

---

[20]Chapter 4 also examines the clashes between philosophical modernism and modern art. The fourth chapter does not propose in any way that the Bible solves these clashes. Rather, it simply suggests that a morality derived from general and special revelation is substantially more satisfying than Tolstoy's morality (explained in chap. 2).

[21]Scholars' disagreement on the negativity of kitsch calls to mind Tolstoy's own phrase that

when their descriptions misidentify the core of kitsch, critics' insights still help in determining what makes an artwork bad. So, the review of kitsch theory in chapter 5 offers a holistic understanding of art problems related to bad art and kitsch. Relevantly, it should be noted that "kitsch" is often used in academic circles as an epithet. In fact, virtually no academic[22] use of the word "kitsch" is positive, despite the various meanings attributed to it.

Chapter 5 also references the Paradox of Fiction, the idea that feeling any emotions in response to fictional art is irrational. While a full explanation of the Paradox of Fiction must wait until that chapter, scholars have offered different suggestions on how to resolve (or acquiesce to) the Paradox of Fiction. Certain of these suggestions result in sophisticated philosophical and neurological ideas, the most notable of which is positing the existence of quasi-emotions. Scholars who affirm quasi-emotions discard traditional understandings of emotion and declare instead that emotional responses to art are qualitatively different from actual emotions. So, two camps have emerged in response to the Paradox of Fiction with one camp acquiescing to the idea that feeling emotion in response is irrational (hence, their positing quasi-emotions) while the opposing side continues to attempt to defuse the Paradox. Fortunately, both camps agree on the validity of the current empirical research, but the two camps also view the evidence as fitting their own theory best!) Chapter 5 argues both that quasi-emotions unnecessarily complicate art and that the Paradox of Fiction devalues art. The chapter closes with an account of emotions more suitable to a framework of psychology, art, and kitsch.

"happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina,* trans. Constance Garnett, ed. Leonard Kent and Nina Berberova (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 3.

[22]In a rare, positive, use of the word, Thomas Kinkade's daughter Merritt says that after attending a symposium on it and having gained "a deeper understanding of what kitsch is, I am comfortable saying that Thomas Kinkade created art that is kitsch." Merritt Kinkade, "The Kitsch Controversy," accessed April 17, 2017, http://www.kinkadefamilyfoundation.org/blog/the-kitsch-controversy.

The discussion of kitsch then continues in the sixth chapter with an examination of the description of kitsch that most challenges a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic. Supplementing that description with the other descriptions of kitsch already presented offers as strong and explanatory an understanding of kitsch as possible. In this regard, Karsten Harries' thought on kitsch proves particularly helpful. Perhaps because of his years of experience teaching philosophy at Yale, Harries' work remains conceptually solid, and it contributes to a working definition of kitsch. At its most challenging, this definition of kitsch brings out the weaknesses of a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic.

Thus, the seventh chapter offers a hybrid theory that retains the strengths of Tolstoy's aesthetics while accounting for the artistic and moral failures of kitsch. Subsequently, the strengths of kitsch theory and the strengths of a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic become clearer as well. Chapter 7 presents a matrix which distills the neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic into accessible criteria for art, and the chapter closes using the matrix to examine various artworks.

Because a neo-Tolstoyan approach clarifies some of the theoretical relationship between artists, audiences, art critics, and Bible scholars, chapter 8 concludes with suggestions on how these groups can assist each other in specific, art-related topics. On art topics of shared knowledge and interest, respectful and open dialogue can bring those involved in the conversation to more fruitful understandings of how their fields interact with each other. The suggestions in chapter 8 are intended to benefit art scholars and Bible scholars from the gains made in each other's fields.

Definitions

For ease of communication, it is important to denote certain words often used in relation to art. Explicitness is crucial because, as Philosopher Stephen David Ross declares, "Throughout all human cultures art has taken a bewildering multiplicity of forms, in the many arts—story-telling, painting and sculpture, music, dance—and in the

immense variety of forms within any art."[23] Ross does something interesting in that sentence: he mentions that a wide variety of things have been referred to as art while unintentionally illustrating the need for clarity as he uses the word "form" to denote two different things. Academic writing on art requires words which have only one referent, and this section presents explanations of commonly utilized words, starting with the word "artform."

When reference is made to *artforms*, broad fields such as painting, sculpture, writing, and music are intended. In other words, Ross' initial usage above will be utilized here. Variations arising in artforms will be called *genres*. So, Mexican sugar skulls and Mesopotamian pottery constitute genres under the artform of sculpture while Mongolian throat-singing or American blues become genres under the artform music. Subsequently, genres themselves contain many sub-genres, such as rock music encompassing the sub-genres of prog, alternative, surf, and soft rock, among many others. Individual expressions of an artform by an artist (or a collective of artists) will be designated *artworks*. So, both Michelangelo's sculpture *David* and the Beatles' song *She Loves You* are termed artworks here.

Nothing prescriptive is intended in these definitions. Further, artworks regularly shift between various sub-genres, genres, and even artforms in ways difficult to quantify, such as a movie filmed in Russia's Hermitage museum about a French aristocrat who presents European paintings accompanied by a full orchestra performing Tchaikovsky's music.[24] A definition of art should encompass all these artforms, genres, and artworks while at the same time excluding non-art. Yet most definitions of art struggle with excluding objects that many people consider artworks. Ross summarizes

---

[23]Stephen David Ross, ed., *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 1.

[24]*Russian Ark*, directed by Aleksander Sokurov, Seville Pictures, 2002.

the problem, stating, "The variety of different points of view [about art] is testimony not only to the imaginative inventiveness of philosophers confronted with the complexity of artistic achievements, but to the complexity and variety of artistic works themselves."[25] No wonder then that aesthetics has long grappled with the titular question of Tolstoy's book.[26]

The word *affect* is avoided here primarily because Tolstoy himself does not use the term and secondarily because current usage seems fraught with ideology. One wonders how, for example, a sense that "there seems to be a growing feeling within media and literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information- and image-based late-capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have foundered" actually clarifies what affect is.[27] Prophetic adjectives ("late-capitalist"), post-modern angst about truth, and the idea that affect possesses a more central place in "information-based" cultures than other (non-information-based?) cultures—these all conspire to cast doubt on the place of affect in a work of limited scope like the argument here.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that art literature and ethnographic literature mean different things by the word kitsch. Current ethnographic study applies the word kitsch to the chintzy souvenirs sold at tourist shops, even if that kitsch is subsequently transformed through nostalgia into a meaningful object to its owner, as described in DeLyser.[28] Art historian Judy Attfield describes kitsch in the context most

---

[25]Ross, *Art and Its Significance*, 1.

[26]Defining art takes up a portion of undergraduate classes in art appreciation. The question "What is art?" still influences books as varied as Edith Schaeffer's *Hidden Art* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972), which opens with the question, and art critic John Canaday's *What Is Art*? (New York: Knopf, 1980).

[27]Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 88.

[28]Dydia DeLyser, "Collecting, Kitsch and the Intimate Geographies of Social Memory: A Story of Archival Autoethnography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40, no. 2 (2015): 214.

commonly associated to it: home decor. "It is most commonly a form of ornamental non-functional object associated with the domestic interior and as such," Attfield writes, "representative of popular taste."[29] These kinds of figurines, found on the shelves of many American grandmothers, are certainly representative pieces of kitsch. The ethnographic definition likely aligns with most people's conception of kitsch (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Picture of kitsch objects by Dydia DeLyser

Yet when "kitsch" is discussed throughout this argument, the ethnographic definition is not intended. Instead, the broader conception given to kitsch in art literature

[29]Judy Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch: The Politics of Design," *Home Cultures* 3, no. 3 (2006): 202.

is used, which shows what makes certain artworks (including some home decor) kitsch. Attfield agrees that kitsch is not primarily individual objects. She further asserts, "By decontextualizing kitsch from any of the customary slots where it is usually found," such as home decor or chintzy bric-a-brac, "it is possible to attend to a category of mass design that continues to be absent from most academic fields, particularly those associated with art."[30] She explains that by "contextualizing it within aesthetics, popular taste and contemporary culture studies," the conclusions of kitsch analysis may be applied "to other fields such as anthropology, material culture studies, and ethnology."[31] So kitsch encompasses far more than figurines.

Kitsch encompasses more than its other instantiations as well. Kitsch apparel, decoration, artworks, speeches, policies, and even thinking exists, yet these do not exhaust kitsch either. In other words, kitsch is not just its numerous embodiments but an idea underlying (and often hiding behind) those embodiments. Kitsch as a word functions analogously to the way art as a word is used in popular discourse, both referencing individual works and (more often) the idea behind artworks. Throughout the argumentation here, kitsch refers to the idea behind the individual instances. What the idea of kitsch actually *is* constitutes a major discussion in chapter 5 and culminates in the seventh chapter. This section uses *via negativa* definition for kitsch to prevent the common meaning of knick-knacks and anticipate the complex theorizing of chapter 5. Similarly, the terms artform, genre, and artwork are narrowly defined because in examining subject matter (like art) prone to ambiguity and complexity, an exact meaning prevents accurate comments about one area (such as genres) from being applied incorrectly to another area (such as artforms).

All Russian names and words follow the practice of transliteration employed in

---

[30]Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch," 203.

[31]Ibid.

The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy, which utilizes "a modified version of the Library of Congress system" except for "established English spellings of Russian names."[32] The most prominent example of established spelling is, of course, writing "Leo Tolstoy" instead of "Lev Tolstoi" or any of its other Russian or French variants. The transliteration here is intended to make the writing easier to follow. Similarly, all umlauts, accents, and other non-English marks are dropped from other languages' words (e.g., "Silbajoris" instead of "Šilbajoris") to facilitate ease of reading.

Analytical philosophy is the primary influence on the argumentation and methodology present in the coming pages. Indeed, the tools of close reading and formal logic significantly detangle the misunderstandings surrounding Tolstoy's aesthetic and kitsch. The tools of philosophical analysis will also be supplemented by the interdisciplinary methods advocated by ethnodoxology. Ethnodoxology, an area of study invented in the late twentieth century, draws upon the resources of ethnography and ethnomusicology to assist minority Christians in developing ways of praising God that are meaningful and appropriate to their culture.[33] Because ethnodoxology is a uniquely Christian approach to other cultures' artforms, it dovetails with a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic well.[34] In short, an author-centered, textual approach[35] will be augmented with careful research and logical argument to develop a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic and subsequently challenge it with the problems of kitsch theory, arriving at a fuller and clearer

---

[32]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion*, xv. Time constraints prevented my learning Russian for research. Although scholars have expended great energy translating Russian articles into English, other sources remain exclusively in Russian. The absence of these articles here is regrettable.

[33]To be particular, "the term 'ethnodoxology' was coined by David Hall in 1997," according to an article giving its history. Scott Aniol et al., "Worship from the Nations: A Survey and Preliminary Analysis of the Ethnodoxology Movement," *Artistic Theologian* 3 (2015): 2.

[34]Although their views differ to some extent, most Christian ethnography and ethnomusicology practitioners tend to work in the sphere Richard Niebuhr describes as "Christ transforming culture" in *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

[35]Despite the current unpopularity of an author-centered approach! Reader-response hermeneutics was developed after Tolstoy's death, of course. Its fires have created more smoke than light, and the audience's role in art is better explained by the neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic detailed in chap. 4.

understanding of both.

Observant readers will notice that the givens of other aesthetic theories have not been employed yet nor will they be utilized in subsequent chapters. Although reference will be made to the ideas of other aesthetics such as the trifecta of truth, beauty, and goodness when Tolstoy himself references them, his aesthetic is grounded in different criteria entirely. Judging one theory of art's standards by using those of another encourages a clash of values not necessarily helpful to either of them. Of course, if one already favors one over another, then the exercise seems to be an opportunity to explain why one is preferable to the other. Additionally, placing Tolstoy's aesthetic under the scrutiny of a wide variety of aesthetics would broaden the scope so much as to create a project with the scale of a lifework.

CHAPTER 2

INFLUENCES IN TOLSTOY'S LIFE AND AESTHETIC THOUGHT

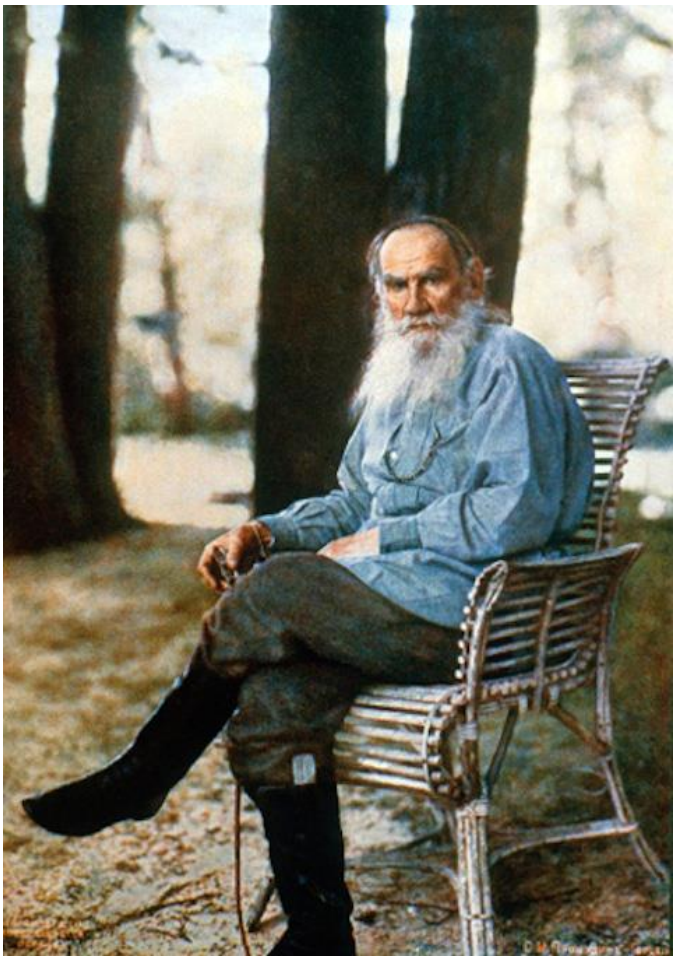

Figure 2. The first color photograph taken in Russia, showing Leo Tolstoy in 1908

Like all great thinkers, Tolstoy both transcended the thinking of his own time and was yet beholden to it. While Tolstoy's history and environment did not determine what he wrote, they certainly influenced what he wrote *about*, and examining his social circumstances assists in determining what Tolstoy meant when he wrote. Therefore, combining a brief biography of his life with an examination of Russian society at the time adds an additional level of explanation to Tolstoy's aesthetic. Admittedly, the idea that one should read an author's writing to determine what s/he meant is not academically popular at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Literature professor Amy Mandelker writes, "In the current climate of literary criticism, it seems somewhat anachronistic to encounter assertions about authorial intention."[1] Yet being considered out-of-step (pejoratively termed "anachronistic") with popular literary criticism need not be a fear.

This chapter unashamedly investigates Tolstoy's history so that the next chapter can interact directly with Tolstoy's stated and unstated-but-implied *intentions*. First, a brief biography of Tolstoy's life is presented before turning attention to the influence Tolstoy left on his country, on world literature (including other authors), and on related fields such as film-making. Then, attention is paid to the ways Russian religion influenced him, including the three most prominent influences: the Russian Orthodox Church, monasteries, and Holy Fools. Tolstoy does not seem aware of how smitten he was with theological liberalism so its influence on him will be delineated as well. Finally, Tolstoy's own spirituality is examined, including his famous conversion. These areas offer helpful context to Tolstoy's ideas in *What Is Art?*

Tolstoy was the first mass-media celebrity in Russia. A description of Tolstoy near his eightieth[th] birthday obliquely references the early effects of mass media, announcing, "All Russia and indeed the world is familiar with his broad, rugged face, so

---

[1]Amy Mandelker, review of *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and His Art*, by Rimvydas Silbajoris, *Slavic Review* 51, no. 2 (1992): 384.

expressive of tremendous strength of character, his thick bushy eyebrows, protecting small steel-grey deep-set eyes, his flowing grey beard and thin wavy locks—a bit of animated granite" (see figure 2 above).[2] Indeed, the first media circus in world history ensued at Tolstoy's death, with dozens of reporters showing up to record their impressions and taking film footage even of Tolstoy's deathbed.[3] While he was still alive, Tolstoy's response to being a mass media celebrity was prototypical for subsequent celebrities all over the world: he placed an increased value on privacy while still wishing to retain a platform for sermonizing on issues important to him. Despite the near-countless works discussing Tolstoy's literature, there have been only five biographies of Tolstoy himself in English and three in Russian according to Tolstoy scholar Michael Denner[4] so the following biography should be read in the context of Tolstoy being born an aristocrat and turning into the first, Russian, mass-media celebrity.

Tolstoy was born to a count and a princess in 1828. "As a child [Tolstoy was] known as 'Lyova-Ryova' (Crybaby Lev) because he [was] so sensitive and crie[d] so easily."[5] Tolstoy was born on the family estate, named Yasnaya Polyana which is located approximately 130 miles south of Moscow.[6] Yasnaya Polyana subsequently featured prominently in Tolstoy's remembrances and novels. In fact, Patricia Carden, a professor of Russian literature, reveals

> At the heart of *War and Peace* is the imagined world of the past at Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's family home. He peoples his novel with the members of his

---

[2]Robert Sloan Latimer, *With Christ in Russia* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 131.

[3]Michael Katz, review of *The Death of Tolstoy: Russia on the Eve, Astapovo Station, 1910*, by William Nickell, *Slavic Review* 70, no. 2 (2011): 479.

[4] Michael Denner, review of *Tolstoy: A Russian Life*, by Rosamund Bartlett, *Slavic Review* 72, no. 3 (2013): 664-65. Denner drily remarks that of the three Russian biographies, Biriukov's is read by "no one . . . except other biographers" (665).

[5]Donna Tussing Orwin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

[6]Ibid.

> family of the two previous generations, beginning with his father and his mother, who figure in the novel under their own names of Maria and Nikolai, and continuing back into the generation of his grandparents. The two principal families of the novel, the Rostovs and the Bolkonskys, transparently recreate the characters and conditions of life of the Tolstoys and Volkonskys.[7]

People who have read Tolstoy's fiction may thus have encountered thinly disguised biography under the guise of certain characters. Tolstoy certainly mined his own past for inspiration on some of the characters, stories, and insights found in his stories. At the same time, even some of Tolstoy's supposedly biographical writing was fiction.

Tolstoy's fiction, specifically his novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, were hugely popular during his lifetime, and it is undoubtedly as a writer that Tolstoy is most known outside Russia. Tolstoy was drawn to writing from his youngest years, and since the focus has turned to his writing anyway, now is a good place to discuss how writing fit into Tolstoy's life. In his younger years, Tolstoy followed the career path expected of aristocracy: military service, to be followed by as comfortable an appointment as one could achieve through networking, marriage, or sheer force of will. While soldiering, however, Tolstoy showed little ambition toward an appointment, instead chasing after women and gambling. Both led to crushing amounts of debt, and with regards to the former, syphilis.

Tolstoy's mercurial personality shows through in his writing of this period. His journals reveal a man whose conscience is tormenting him for his deeds, yet the only relief Tolstoy encounters from his deeds is committing those same sins again. Tolstoy then returns to berating himself and hoping to discover a peaceful life through disciplining himself to act only according to self-set rules.

Tolstoy's writing and soldiering coalesced during his time at Sevastopol where his accounts of war were published and read around the country. Specifically, Tolstoy's

---

[7]Harold Bloom, ed., *Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 104.

war stories were read with horror by the cultured citizens of Russia because he showed that lower-level officers' tactics in battle were not directed well, leading directly to soldier deaths.[8] Yet despite his attempts to keep the ascetic rules he developed for himself, Tolstoy's gambling debts had continued to accumulate even in the military. He left active military service with an indication that writing could pay down those bills.

After leaving the army, Tolstoy married a wealthy woman named Sophia and returned to Yasnaya Polyana, where he worked his land and wrote. He would spend most of the day writing until dinnertime, and after supper he would spend time with his family and any guests.[9] Tolstoy and his wife had a total of thirteen children, although their marriage relationship deteriorated over time. Living in the same home as the most famous man in the country greatly influenced the Tolstoy family, and many of the children went on to be authors themselves—often writing memoirs of their father.

Tolstoy's Influence

Tolstoy's influence was not least felt in those immediately around him. Tolstoy's daughter Alexandra relates that in 1917, "vicious rumors were spread, causing terror to the inhabitants of Yasnaya Polyana. They said the peasants from neighboring villages were coming to destroy Yasnaya Polyana. The rumors proved true. The mobs came nearer and nearer."[10] Tolstoy's remaining family was preparing to flee when "suddenly news came—the Yasnaya Polyana peasants had met the mutineers with spades, scythes, pitchforks, and chased them away."[11] A great deal has been written about the regard Tolstoy had for "common people," and subsequently how loved Tolstoy

[8]It is inconceivable to believe Tolstoy's later pacifism is unrelated to the needless death he saw at Sevastopol.

[9]Mason Currey, *Daily Rituals* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2013), 170-71.

[10]Alexandra Tolstoy, *Tolstoy: A Life of My Father*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 524-25.

[11]Ibid., 525.

was by Russia's non-elites.[12]

Of course, Tolstoy also influenced intellectuals, even directly inspiring the creation of a college in the United States, now known as Delaware Valley College.[13] The influence of Tolstoy on other writers has not been lost on scholars either. Kathryn Feuer documents how closely Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's writing resembles Tolstoy's writings, from parallel themes[14] to "extremely large casts of characters whose coming together, however unlikely, is made to seem natural and believable."[15] Certainly there are differences as well, and in some instances such as "narrative structure, the similarities between the two authors are perhaps outweighed by the differences."[16] Tolstoy's influence on Solzhenitsyn, however, is undeniable. Similarly, its presence is felt very obviously in Viktor Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization,[17] the idea that art makes familiar things strange, allowing one to see them in a new light. Shklovsky, in fact, bases the theory of defamiliarization on Tolstoy's ability as a writer to cause his audience to think about common encounters from unusual perspectives. People who have not read Tolstoy's fiction may expect it to be very "difficult," but a great deal of it is both simple and evocative.

Scholars in literature have long attempted to unearth the techniques Tolstoy utilized to create what seems to be immediately understandable writing. Perhaps the most impressive feat Tolstoy accomplishes is indicating people's thoughts through their

---

[12]The mutual admiration between Tolstoy and the Russian public is returned to later in the chapter.

[13]For a history of how Tolstoy inspired the college's creation, see Peter Kupersmith, "The Whole World of Tolstoy," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 18 (2006): 70-74.

[14]John B. Dunlop, Richard S. Haugh, and Alexis Klimoff, eds., *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1973), 141.

[15]Ibid., 130.

[16]Ibid., 131.

[17]Douglas Robinson, "Tolstoy's Infection Theory and the Aesthetics of De- and Repersonalization," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 19 (2007): 49.

actions. Well-regarded author Larry Woiwode attests of Tolstoy's mastery of writing:

> When Tolstoy realized the effect of gesture and peeled his prose away to reveal each as pure action, he became Tolstoy. The crux of his understanding was this: If I can picture an action as it runs its course or see on a face an exact expression, rather than compose a bagful of prose to explain those, my writing's moving into another realm. The best of that work is pictorial, and he anticipated what would overwhelm our century: first film, then television.[18]

On the other hand, famed writer Vladimir Nobokov (who when he was a boy briefly encountered Tolstoy) argues that Tolstoy's presentation of how time passes is the best ever achieved in fiction. Nobokov believes that the technique Tolstoy "discovered [is] a method of picturing life which most pleasingly and exactly corresponds to our idea of time. He is the only writer I know of whose watch keeps time with the numberless watches of his readers."[19]

These writing techniques explain how some have misinterpreted Tolstoy's genius, as does theologian Donald Nicholl when he asserts, "Tolstoy is not, in the conventional sense, an imaginative writer. On the contrary his temperament, like his prose style, is very matter of fact. But because he had a genius for observation he noticed clearly those things that ordinary mortals can only dimly imagine."[20] Nicholl's observation that Tolstoy was a brilliant student of human nature undermines his initial observation that Tolstoy was not an "imaginative" writer because *Tolstoy wrote fiction*. Tolstoy wrote extensively about his fictional characters' internal lives, and the realism depicted there led to Tolstoy's designation as the Father of Psychological Fiction. It also leads authors such as Nicholls to mistake Tolstoy's realism for reality. Tolstoy's art has not only been examined by academics however.

---

[18]Larry Woiwode, *Words for Readers and Writers: Spirit-Pooled Dialogues* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 98-99.

[19]Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1981), 141.

[20]Donald Nicholl, *Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1997), 199.

Tolstoy's stories themselves have been turned into operas,[21] films, and graphic novels.[22] His art also shaped future artists and their art. Perhaps more than any other area of art besides writing, Tolstoy's influence was most profound on Broadway and Hollywood.

Because even theater and film historians may not be aware of Tolstoy's connection to their mediums, here is how Tolstoy's thought grew so influential: It started when Tolstoy's play *The Fruits of Enlightenment* was produced in Moscow by Konstantin Stanislavski,[23] who went on to become world-renowned for his method of actor-training that later became known simply as "The Method" and finally just as "Method." Yale professor Richard Hughes explains, "Only a decade separates the publication of Tolstoy's general theory of art from Stanislavski's specific analysis of the art of acting, and we know from [Moscow Art Theater co-founder Vladimir] Nemirovich-Dantchenko how potent an influence Tolstoy was on the Moscow Art Theatre."[24] Hughes goes on to show precisely how Tolstoy influences Stanislavski, disclosing that in *What Is Art?* one of Tolstoy's examples of art (a boy recounting how he encountered a wolf) is very near to acting.[25] In doing so, Hughes convincingly argues that Method is the result of applying Tolstoy's aesthetic directly to acting. Tolstoy thus influenced Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro, and all other famous Method actors.

In his own country however, Tolstoy's relationship to the government was fraught with surveillance and distrust.

---

[21]Bernhard Joseph Stern and Samuel Smith, *Understanding the Russians: A Study of Soviet Life and Culture* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1947), 123.

[22]*Anna Karenina* alone has been given several cinema adaptations in addition to numerous made-for-tv movies.

[23]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 142.

[24]Richard I. G. Hughes, "Tolstoy, Stanislavski, and the Art of Acting," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (1993): 39.

[25]Ibid., 40.

> Watched with suspicion from above, with hatred from below, the very few cultivated and capable nobles who did not follow the fashion in entering the service of the State might almost be forgiven for shirking the routine duties of landlordism and seeking oblivion abroad or in the hollow society of the two capitals. Those who, like the great statesman Kosheleff and the great artist Tolstoy, dared to think the betterment of country life a worthy task were regarded as a slightly superior class of social lepers.[26]

In this context of serfdom amid feudalism, it is necessary to remember that Tolstoy was "a feudal lord in a society that was, in many ways, still medieval."[27] While startling, this insight is helpful because it reflects on the lived experiences of Tolstoy and the peasants in the first half of the eighteenth century in Russia.[28] The Russian aristocracy shuddered at Tolstoy listening not just to academics but to the peasants themselves. Tolstoy neither belittled nor idolized Russian commoners, but unlike many other wealthy people in his country, he was interested to learn both about and from them.[29]

Despite the tremendous influence Tolstoy had on thousands of other people's lives, Tolstoy was often unhappy in his own. Tolstoy's personal life was marred by marital problems and his finances were mishandled.[30] While he wished to renounce his land ownership (not because of any belief in Marxism but rather out of concern that he had so much while the peasants worked for him on land they did not own), Tolstoy never let it go due to his wife's desire to continue her lifestyle as a countess. On the other hand,

---

[26]George Herbert, *Leo Tolstoy, the Grand Mujik: A Study in Personal Evolution* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1898), 41.

[27]Jeffrey Meyers, "Filial Memoirs of Tolstoy," *Biography* 11, no. 3 (1988): 236.

[28]Tolstoy was influenced by Enlightenment thought, yet his own beliefs in perceptual inaccuracy and self-deception (resulting from humanity's inherent subjectivity) are themes more explored in his stories than explicitly stated in treatises. His straddling of the borders of modernism will be returned to shortly.

[29]Tolstoy's daughter Alexandra asserts of Russian peasants in 1960, "Fifty years have gone by [since Tolstoy's death]. The worst elements of whom Tolstoy was always afraid now rule Russia, but Father's faith in the Russian people is justified. Oppressed by the Communist rulers, driven by force into collective farms, deprived of disposing of their produce . . . the peasantry has remained opposed to Communism for forty-two years." Alexandra Tolstoy, "Tolstoy and the Russian Peasant," *Russian Review* 19, no. 2 (1960): 155-56.

[30]It is commonly known among Tolstoy scholars that he was deeply ambivalent about the need for land or copyright ownership. While he wished to renounce his land, he chose not to deny his holdings for his wife and family's sake. However, later in his life he *did* renounce the copyright to all the books he had written up to that point.

in his later years he did renounce the copyright on all the books he had written up to that point. As an artist (who renounced the right to further payment on his books) and as a landowner (who wished to give his land away) Tolstoy puzzled his peers.

Emeritus Professor at the University of Leicester Geoffrey Bantock asks, "Is there any necessary connection between his extreme sophistication on one level and his naivety on another?"[31] For while Tolstoy was a man of immense skill and knowledge, he struggled with going to extremes, in areas ranging from food to education to sex. Professor of Russian W. Gareth Jones offers his take as follows:

> A review of his writings in all their variety through sixty years shows that two constants are identified in Tolstoy's thought. First, there is his urge to cut through sophisticated complexities back to the certainties held by peasants and children, back to a simple righteousness . . . in art as in life. Secondly, in demanding fearless adherence to unattainable principles . . . he was making demands not on his fellows, but principally on himself. What set him apart from the contemporary regiment of reformers with their prescriptions for regenerating society was his stress on personal responsibility, his own need to seek out and tell the truth.[32]

Jones correctly notes Tolstoy's persistent demands of adherence to pharisaically strict rules. Tolstoy's emphasis on personal responsibility infuriated his more liberal friends while his liberal ideas infuriated his more conservative friends. Noted Tolstoy scholar Donna Tussing Orwin recognizes there is a "mixture in Tolstoy of conservatism and radicalism."[33] Nowhere are Tolstoy's conservatism and radicalism more clearly seen than in his views on sex.

Indeed, Tolstoy's attempts to combine extremes resulted in particularly strange ideas about sex. From reading his diaries and stories, sex as a topic seems never to have been far from Tolstoy's mind, even in his later years when his thinking on it grew so

---

[31]G. H. Bantock, *Studies in the History of Educational Theory* (Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1980), 1:127.

[32]W. Gareth Jones, review of *Tolstoy*, by Henry Gifford, *The Modern Language Review* 78, no. 4 (1993): 998.

[33]Donna Tussing Orwin, review of *Tolstoy*, by A.N. Wilson, *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 2 (1989): 73.

unusual. He decided that sex should be avoided even in marriage, although he still sired at least thirteen children. It requires only minimal speculation to suspect his wife was embarrassed by Tolstoy's loud rejections of sexuality—while she was pregnant with his child.

Tolstoy's fascination with sex seems to be what drove his subsequent rejection of it. He would write risqué stories, but they were stories which ultimately condemned their own sexuality. The combination of sensuality and judgment caused them to be simultaneously banned and immensely popular. Tolstoyan translator Rosemary Edmond mentions "the conflict in Tolstoy between Puritan and Epicurean,"[34] with the conflict made obvious in Tolstoy's story *The Kreutzer Sonata*.[35] It was so popular that "in 1889, when copies of the banned story by Tolstoy circulated in pirated form, people reportedly no longer asked each other, 'How do you do?' when they met on the street. Instead they asked, 'Have you read *The Kreutzer Sonata*?'"[36] The practice of depicting sexuality followed by condemning it foreshadows the biblical epic movies popular in mid-twentieth-century America, where the camera lingers on dancing women before the film reproves the women for dancing.

Tolstoy's perspective on sexuality seems to have been influenced by the Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov's far-out theory that related sex to resurrection. Fedorov's idea was that one's abstinence from sex would lead to the bodily resurrection of one's ancestors. "Although unpublished and little known, Fedorov had a profound influence on some of his contemporaries, especially Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Solovev,

---

[34]Leo Tolstoy, introduction to *Childhood, Boyhood & Youth* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 8.

[35]Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata* (London: Remington, 1890). Given the content of the story, even the title reveals Tolstoy's deep ambivalence about the power of music. The next chapter explores his ambivalence about music further.

[36]David Jasper and Mark Ledbetter, eds., *In Good Company: Essays in Honor of Robert Detweiler* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 310.

all of whom grappled in their own way with similar questions."[37] Indeed, Tolstoy entitled his final novel *Resurrection*. It prominently features the protagonist Nekhlyudov intentionally giving up marriage for the sake of religious morality.

Religious Influences in Russia

Orthodox scholar John Meyendorff explains that scholastic works on Russia draw "conclusions [that] are generally limited by the obligatory Marxist presuppositions that all social and religious developments are determined by economic factors. This means, in fact, that their inquiries stop at the very point where the religion of the Russian people starts."[38] Russian culture certainly strikes many Westerners as not only exotic but mysterious, and Marxist explanations do not adequately explain these nuances. Oxford professor in Russian religious studies Nicolas Zernov has written tirelessly on elucidating these distinctions. "The secret of Russian culture," Zernov reveals, "is that it is both Christian and non-European, and therefore stands apart."[39] Zernov does not just claim that religion is important to understanding Russian culture, but in fact that "it is impossible to understand them [the Russians] without a knowledge of their religion. This conclusion is not merely a casual impression. . . . The Russians cease to be a puzzle as soon as their religious ideas are properly grasped."[40] To understand Tolstoy then, one must understand him in the context of Russian religious life.

In Russia during the nineteenth century, religious life was directed by three authoritative spheres. The spheres operated largely independently from each other but were viewed by most of the populace as having mutually beneficial influences, lifestyles,

---

[37]Robert P. Hughes and Irina Paperno, eds., *Russian Culture in Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 161.

[38]Georgy P. Fedotov, foreword to *The Russian Religious Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), xi.

[39]Nicolas Zernov, *The Russians and Their Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), 2.

[40]Ibid., 5.

and messages. The three primary sources of religious authority were the monasteries, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Holy Fools, a people still observed in parts of Central Asia.[41] Each was viewed as having separate but unique authority.

The history of the monasteries in the time leading up to Tolstoy is particularly intriguing for "in the eighteenth century all populated monastery lands were managed and administered by the state. The Russian monasteries, which had made use of many of the country's social and economic forces and resources, returned them to secular society in a developed and considerably improved form."[42] The monasteries were thus held in high renown by most members of Russian society.

No one considered the monasteries to be just buildings any more than churches are simply buildings. They were enclaves of people, ran by the *startsy* ("elders" who ran the monasteries).[43] In fact, the elders running the monasteries generally viewed their mission in life as listening to people who visited then counseling them with the wisdom gained from approaching God through the monastic lifestyle. The Russian public believed that "the elder combined the spiritual activity of a monk with the life of a layman and the sanctification of a priest, nourished by the mystical experience of the Eucharist."[44]

---

[41]Travelling in Central Asia, I saw people with obvious mental problems walking the streets and being treated with reverence reminiscent of the "holy fools." A possible analogue in the United States may occur when it is said of some mentally ill people that they are "touched" (by God).

[42]S. G. Pushkarev, Vladimir Stepanov, and Gleb Iākunin, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union: Reflections on the Millennium* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 17.

[43]According to an expert in Russian religion, Michael Bourdeaux, "The *staretz* (plural: *startsy*) has had basically to adopt his role in order to continue as the spiritual dynamo of the Russian Orthodox Church, the inspiration of the people. The 'holy man' (literally 'elder'), quite outside the formal structures of the ecclesiastical establishment, does not need to officiate, to visit parishioners, to organize anything. He just needs to be. Wherever he is, deep in hiding in the forests, in a side-street, anywhere, people will find him and send others to him." Michael Bourdeaux, *Risen Indeed: Lessons in Faith from the USSR* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 74.

[44]Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 394.

So, it is not overblown to claim that "the most powerful impulse in Russian religious life comes from the monasteries. Monasticism in its best aspects and richest gifts was a reality which conveyed the spirit; the monastery and the cell of the *staretz* became centres of a refined inner asceticism."[45] Over time certain monasteries distinguished themselves even among their peers. For example, "the nuns of Shamordino, where Tolstoy's sister was a nun, established a public health and welfare center, according to the best techniques of their time."[46] Of all the monasteries though, none were more well-regarded than Optina Pustyn.[47]

Renowned historian of Russian Orthodoxy Michael Bourdeaux teaches, "After many years of neglect, the monastery of Optima Pustyn was rebuilt in 1796. It soon became the most famous place of spiritual refuge in Russia, not because it was accessible or favoured by the hierarchy—rather the opposite."[48] The *startsy* at Optina Pustyn were highly acclaimed, with one pair of authors comparing their hard work to that of Jacob laboring for Rachel and Leah.[49] The authors go on to write, "The cultural landscape created by the ascetics of Optina, the natural and architectural style of the monastery, are stamped with the features of the spiritual style of the hermit."[50] Under the leadership of its *startsy* "the Optina hermitage . . . [became] a beacon of intellectual and literary brilliance in the nineteenth century."[51]

---

[45]Giuseppe Alberigo and Jose Oscar Beozzo, eds., *The Holy Russian Church and Western Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 21.

[46]Helene Iswolsky, *Christ in Russia; The History, Tradition, and Life of the Russian Church* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1960), 185.

[47]The "father of the Russian elders," Paisius Velichkovski was "directly connected" to Optina Pustyn according to historian Georgy Fedotov, who further describes Optina Pustyn as one of the "bonfires at which frozen Russia warmed herself." Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 394.

[48]Bourdeaux, *Risen Indeed*, 75.

[49]Alberigo and Beozzo, *Russian Church and Western Christianity*, 29-30.

[50]Ibid., 30.

[51]Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*

Given Optina Pustyn's reputation and the fact that it was only five days' walk away from Yasnaya Polyana, it is likely not surprising to learn that Tolstoy travelled there.[52] In fact, not just Tolstoy but "perhaps the three greatest Russian prose writers of all time—Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy—were frequent visitors to Optina Pustyn. . . where elders served as spiritual mentors and advisors to laymen as well as novice monks."[53] One of the reasons Tolstoy visited Optina Pustyn was to talk with "Alexander Michaelovich Grenkov (1812-1891) better known as *Staretz* Amvrosy."[54] *Staretz* Amvrosy "was recognized as a leading spiritual authority,"[55] and Tolstoy undoubtedly had a great deal to discuss with him concerning Tolstoy's own spirituality.

Yet despite how Optina Pustyn "stood as a vital symbol of Russian spirituality throughout the ages,"[56] Tolstoy's conversations there later led him—perhaps unintentionally—to take on the role of an unofficial *staretz*. After all, unlike celebrities who shun house visitors, Tolstoy welcomed them into his home, speaking with strangers at length. Tolstoy may not have viewed himself as a *staretz*, but a subtle similarity exists between people seeking elders at monasteries and seeking Tolstoy at his estate. Malcolm Muggeridge eschews this subtlety and goes so far as to outright proclaim Tolstoy "a *staretz*, a Holy Man, having some special relationship with life—the trees, the wind, the toil and passions of men—whereby he understands its true nature."[57] Notwithstanding

---

(Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 144.

[52]Bourdeaux, *Risen Indeed*, 75.

[53]John Witte and Michael Bourdeaux, *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 63.

[54]Francis House, *Millennium of Faith: Christianity in Russia, AD 988-1988* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 29.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 58.

[57]Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Third Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 168.

hagiographical remarks like that and his own conflicts with holiness, Tolstoy did come to be viewed by the nation similarly to a *staretz*.

Far removed from the image of a dignified, wise old man was that of the Holy Fool. The behavior of holy fools was, even at the time, acknowledged to be highly unusual and out-of-line with cultural expectations. Their propensity to wander, beg, and live outdoors likely strikes Westerners as similar to contemporary, mentally troubled, homeless people. In Russia, however, they were viewed as living foolishly in order to show an insane world the inscrutable wisdom of God. Generally, people were undecided on whether the holy fools chose their lifestyle or had been chosen by God to live that lifestyle, but the public looked with a mixture of respect, curiosity, and awe at them.

The following story is related by Ewa Thompson, an expert who literally wrote the book on holy fools:

> According to nineteenth-century descriptions, holy fools were dirty and uncouth, and their filth was not caused by poverty but by a defiant refusal to wash. In the seventeenth century, says an apocryphal *Life*, when a certain pious woman washed Prokopil of Viatka and gave him a clean shirt, he tore it up into strips and rolled naked in the dirt as soon as he left the woman's house.[58]

Thompson is not sympathetic to the traditional understandings of holy fools. Denouncing the actions of the man in that story, Thompson asserts, "To interpret such resentful behavior as either a sign of humility or as a moral lesson seems farfetched. Such behavior is either a sign of mental abnormality, or it expresses a gnostic rejection of the material aspect of life."[59] Certainly, Jesus in the Gospels does not advocate the behaviors common among holy fools. Jesus prescribes his disciples to take no extraneous items for one mission he sends them on in Luke 9, but he simultaneously commands them to accept any hospitality they receive and to preach the arrival of God's kingdom. Holy Fools were

---

[58]Ewa M. Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 19.

[59]Ibid.

not known for either of those activities.

For politically sly purposes, Tolstoy himself was accused of being a holy fool. Thompson shares:

> The 'fishing in muddy waters', or accusing one's political opponents of insanity, was first used by Tsar Nicholas 1 in regard to the writer P. I. Chaadaev, but the diatribe of the prominent liberal G. G. Belinskii against Nikolai Gogol also follows this pattern. Likewise, [Tolstoy] was accused of insanity by the tsarist police. The much more pervasive Soviet practice of attributing insanity to political dissenters seems to have its roots in the same tradition.[60]

Tolstoy, however, does not seem to have taken the news badly. Thompson discovered that Tolstoy wrote in his diary, "I have often thought that holy foolishness [presenting oneself as worse than one is in reality] is the highest achievement of virtue . . . Now I think that it is not only the highest but also the most indispensable and fundamental condition of all virtuous life."[61] Thompson adds her own commentary on Tolstoy's journaled thoughts, and if biting, her commentary is nonetheless truthful:

> One wonders what "reality" [Tolstoy] had in mind, and how it was possible to reconcile consideration for one's fellow men with a rather selfish desire to make a certain kind of impression on them no matter what. This passage seems to reflect Tolstoy's self-centeredness and his gnostic sympathies rather than the precepts of the Gospels. It also disregards the fact that the great teachers of morality taught virtue by practicing it rather than by pretending to be immoral."[62]

This story and commentary paints an interesting and evocative picture of Tolstoy. In conflating disregard for cleanliness with Tolstoy's regard for inner purity over outer appearance, Thompson has identified troubling aspects of Tolstoy's morality. He should have sensed these difficulties; instead, one suspects that being called a holy fool made Tolstoy very proud.

Unlike his direct relationship to the monasteries, Tolstoy endured a complicated relationship to the Russian Orthodox Church which ultimately turned

---

[60]Thompson, *Understanding Russia*, 45.

[61]Ibid., 19.

[62]Ibid.

negative, as the Russian Orthodox Church excommunicated him toward the end of his life. Writing of Tolstoy's excommunication by the Russian Orthodox Church, biographer Andrew Wilson comments

> If this measure was intended to discredit Tolstoy with the Russian people, it had a very mixed success. At the time, a portrait of Tolstoy by Ilya Repin was on exhibit in a St Petersburg gallery. It depicted Tolstoy at prayer. 'Repin painted me barefooted in a shirt. I have to thank him for not having taken off my trousers as well,' Tolstoy commented.[63]

While Tolstoy took the attacks on his character with a sense of humor, the Russian Orthodox Church's responses were serious.[64]

It is important to keep in mind that the Russian Orthodox Church never had its own Reformation.[65] So the climate surrounding an attack on a state church was different from Europe or the West more broadly. In expressing his disagreements with the church, Tolstoy used humor and laid bare the church's hypocrisy, neither of which were received well.

Additionally, Tolstoy's disagreements on the church were not just doctrinal. Instead, the outlooks undergirding the ideas of Tolstoy and the Russian Orthodox Church were different. Ethics professor Robert C. Roberts reveals a key component of these undergirding outlooks; Tolstoy, he writes, "accepted a nineteenth-century version of what we would call scientific positivism, namely that the physical sciences are the court of last appeal on questions of what is real."[66] More specifically, Tolstoy was a symbol of late-modernism, still believing in the existence of absolute truth but thinking it more likely to

---

[63]Leo Tolstoy, *The Lion and the Honeycomb: The Religious Writings of Tolstoy*, ed. A. N. Wilson, trans. Robert Chandler (London: Collins, 1987), 128.

[64]Indeed, the Russian Orthodox Church grew frustrated with Tolstoy to such an extent that in the year 1908 of Tolstoy's 80th birthday, "the Synod published a message appealing to all true sons of the Orthodox Church not to participate in the celebration." John Shelton Curtiss, *Church and State in Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 243.

[65]Andreas E. Buss, *The Russian-Orthodox Tradition and Modernity* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 57.

[66]David W. Gill, ed., *Should God Get Tenure? Essays on Religion and Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 60.

be found in science, unwilling to accept the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church that originated in tradition.[67]

The church responded as all institutions under attack do—by defending, counter-attacking, and excluding. In an essay about the effects of modernity on the Russian-Orthodox Church, anthropologist Andreas Buss suggests,

> There was something modern in Tolstoy's defense of traditional religious art. While traditional man generally considers his culture as the only culture and devalues all outsiders so that they are accepted only on an inferior level, Tolstoy accepted individualism on the global level in the sense that he recognized all true artistic cultures as equal individuals, for he considered that there have been many true arts, each of them corresponding to the religious view of life held by the people among whom it arose.[68]

While it is certainly true that he values various cultures' "traditional" arts, Tolstoy does not value all genres, so it is not clear where Buss got the idea that "he recognized all true artistic cultures as equal individuals."[69] Nevertheless, Buss has accurately identified that the clash between Tolstoy and the traditional church was not rooted in doctrinal disagreement alone.

Although Tolstoy exposed the Russian Orthodox Church's hypocrisies, what undoubtedly hurt them most was being attacked by their own scriptures. In a feat that would impress most seminary professors, Tolstoy taught himself Greek and Hebrew in order to translate the Bible into Russian. However, Tolstoy both excised passages he thought impossible and translated the remaining ones in ways that go beyond idiom and into eisegesis. Textual scholar David Matual has produced an exciting commentary comparing the original Koine Greek to Tolstoy's Russian results. Reading Matual's textual study of Tolstoy's Gospel translation—used in the loosest sense of the word—

---

[67]Buss, *Russian-Orthodox Tradition*, 146.

[68]Ibid., 177-78.

[69]The next chapter offers substantially more information on Tolstoy's devaluation of various genres and artworks.

reveals just how much Tolstoy was willing to apply creative translation principles to fortify his own religious beliefs. Tolstoy's translation habits reveal an intention not to translate accurately but to twist clear passages to support his positions. For example, Matual suggests that anti-Semitism in the Gospels is turned into anti-Orthodox sentiment in Tolstoy's very loose translation.[70] Although the idea that the Gospels endorse any anti-Semitic sentiment has vigorously challenged in academia,[71] Matual has done solid work identifying anti-Orthodox jabs in Tolstoy's translation. If one were unfamiliar with the New Testament and had only Tolstoy's translation to go by, Matual proves one would come away likely thinking that Jesus himself condemned the Russian Orthodox Church.

Yet it often happens that in death, bitter words are forgotten.

> When Leo Tolstoy died, the representatives of the Church proclaimed him as their own. "He was with us," they said. It reminds one of the Russian fable about the fly and the ox. The fly was lazily resting on the horn of the ox while he plowed the field, but when the ox returned home exhausted from toil, the fly bragged, "*We* have been plowing."[72]

That Tolstoy would have been pleased by this rapprochement seems unlikely.

It would be flippant to state that the path of the Russian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century was easy. Writing less than twenty years after Tolstoy's death, Richard Cooke concedes, "Like the Church in France when the Revolution swept down upon it, the Russian Church was helpless before the onslaught of the Bolsheviks."[73] Looking at the next seventy-six years of the Russian Orthodox Church's history makes its spats with Tolstoy seem negligible in comparison.[74]

---

[70]David Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels: A Critical Study* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 126-47.

[71]Matual himself does not argue at length that the Gospels are anti-Semitic; in fact, he seems to take it for granted.

[72]Emma Goldman, et al., *The Social Significance of Modern Drama* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987), 152, italics in original.

[73]Richard J. Cooke, *Religion in Russia Under the Soviets* (Cincinnati: Abingdon Press, 1924), 50.

[74]Academics familiar with Tolstoy likely understand why religious sects are not included

In addition to the three primary sources of religious authority that affected most Russians, Tolstoy was affected, perhaps more than he was even aware, by the ascendant religious liberalism sweeping Europe. At multiple times—and without referencing his sources—Tolstoy discusses what he views as the two central points of religion, the benevolence of God and the need for men to be united under him. The similarity between these goals and the "brotherhood of man, fatherhood of God" espoused by subsequent Christian liberalism is self-evident.

Tolstoy's Apparent Conversion

All the same, Tolstoy continued to struggle with his inability to live up to his ideas of holiness. "Tolstoy's sensuality, his spirituality, and his keen intellect were constantly at war, buffeting him from one extreme to another—from debauchery to asceticism, from haughty arrogance to unaffected simplicity."[75] It was about the age of fifty that Tolstoy had a conversion experience that permanently changed the rest of his life. Tolstoy welcome it with relief and began writing moralizing treatises instead of novels.

---

among the three major influencers of Russian religion, but the reasons should be stated anyway. First, it has not been shown that Tolstoy adopted a sectarian outlook even when he shared individual sentiments with some of them. The plight of the Dukhobors, the government-oppressed sect which spurred Tolstoy to write *Resurrection* (in order to donate the profits), did not cause him to adopt their outlook. Second, the sects simply did not play a primary role in influencing the public's ideas on religion. While everyone was familiar with holy fools, the elders running monasteries, and the Russian Orthodox Church, the sects never gained more than a foothold on the public's imagination. Iswolsky details the lesser influence of the sects on Tolstoy well:

> The famous writer, Leo Tolstoy, took an interest in the sects, whose ideology was so near to his own pacifism and anti-State theories. . . . As a rule Russian intellectuals had a liking for the *sectanty* (members of sects), respected their convictions, and were often inclined to share them, or sympathize with them. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were from thirteen to fourteen million *sectanty* in Russia, according to available statistics. This is but a minority compared to the many millions of Russian-Orthodox who belonged to the established Church or to the Old-Believer groups. But the influence of this minority should not be ignored by those who seek a deeper understanding of the religious life in Russia. Iswolsky, *Christ in Russia*, 119.

The sects captured Tolstoy's sympathy more than his mind.

[75]Thomas Froncek, *The Horizon Book of the Arts of Russia* (New York: American Heritage, 1970), 201.

The scholarship closer to Tolstoy's time took his conversion at face value, resulting in two camps. The first camp thought Tolstoy's novels were substantially better than his post-conversion output. This camp still exists, with John Bayley for example, charging that Tolstoy's earlier novels and later essays exist "in a perpetually antithetical relation without any chance of synthesis."[76] The other camp was critical of drawing a distinction in artistic quality and was impressed by the unapologetic moral teaching of Tolstoy's later works. Tolstoy's contemporary William Scott was typical of the second perspective, contending Tolstoy's later life shows greater character than his earlier writings.[77] "There may be more continued praise for his writings than for his life, but this only argues the feebleness of our instincts," according to Scott.[78] Scott continues, "Here was perhaps the greatest man in the world of his day, with the most acute vision of life, and he could live by the narrowest interpretation of Christ's words, and could find such uncommon satisfaction that he could exhort the world to taste and see. In this great example we have cause for rejoicing."[79] Thus, their reactions to Tolstoy's subsequent writing varied, but both camps were united in accepting his conversion.

A third perspective in Tolstoyan scholarship has since arisen. Tolstoy scholars grew increasingly uncomfortable with certain aspects of Tolstoy's conversion, and although disagreeing with a person's conversion experience is surely ice upon which to tread most carefully, scholars began asking new questions. Their areas of research on Tolstoy's conversion offer significant explanatory value for understanding what to make of inconsistencies in Tolstoy's life.

---

[76]John Bayley, review of *Tolstoy: The Critical Heritage*, by A. V. Knowles, *The Review of English Studies* 32, no. 125 (February 1981): 92.

[77]William Thompson Scott, *Chesterton and Other Essays* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1912), 141-44.

[78]Ibid., 142.

[79]Ibid., 143.

Tolstoy scholar Gary Morson asserts that with any conversion experience, personality and intellectual areas of interest often remain the same.[80] In Tolstoy's life, these areas not only remained the same but do not seem to have been much affected by his conversion. What Tolstoy calls his conversion seems to have been a permanently-kept commitment to "clean living." Essentially what happened is that Tolstoy used the language of conversion[81] to describe a renewed interest in asceticism.

Two writers' evaluations of Tolstoy's conversion fit broadly into the more recent view of scholarship. Philosophy professor Radoslav Tsanoff asserts, "It is a mistaken notion that at the age of fifty, after having written *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy suddenly turned right about face and changed his entire course of life."[82] Likwise, the novelist Vladimir Nobokov argues that Tolstoy the moralist and Tolstoy the novelist always co-existed, observing the supposed gap between Tolstoy's earlier and later works has been greatly exaggerated.[83] However, historian V. V. Zenkovsky writes that Tolstoy's "negation of contemporary life extended further and further and reached its apogee in the book *What is Art?*"[84] Zenkovsky incorrect; for one, Tolstoy continued to write stories even after the publication of *What Is Art?* and secondly, Tolstoy did not reject progressive values either, as shown by his willingness, for example, to embrace

---

[80]Gary Saul Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions: Reflections on the Silbajoris Thesis," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 4 (1991): 116-17.

[81]Concerning conversions to Christianity being evidence for truth, Professor Mark Coppenger states, "Of course other conversions result in better behavior. . . . This alone does not prove the validity [of a religion]. First, there is no substitute for truth. But also one's performance must be taken as a whole." Mark Coppenger, *Moral Apologetics for Contemporary Christians* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 180. In other words, a conversion experience counts as evidence for one's religious beliefs in conjunction with other accurate beliefs and ongoing, moral living. Thus, conversion constitutes only a portion of the overall evidence in favor of or against a religious belief system.

[82]Radoslav Andrea Tsanoff, *Autobiographies of Ten Religious Leaders; Alternatives in Christian Experience* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1968), 210.

[83]Nabokov, *Lectures*, 140-41, 143.

[84]V. V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Thinkers and Europe*, trans. Galia Bodde (Ann Arbor, MI: J. W. Edwards, 1953), 122.

new educational processes in the school he established at Yasnaya Polyana.

As has been previously noted Tolstoy embraced extremes (often embracing both ends of a spectrum at the same time!), and for the remainder of his life Tolstoy utilized extreme willpower to adhere to his strict moral code, even when that code caused him or his family unpleasant consequences. Borrowing the language of geographers to describe Tolstoy's life, Morson describes Tolstoy's life a case study of uniformitarianism versus catastrophism. "In a quiescent world, catastrophes constitute an interruption, but if normal time is composed of catastrophes, then eruptions do not contradict, but confirm, a uniformitarian picture. This is, in effect, a catastrophist uniformitarianism."[85] Geographers might say Morson is utilizing wordplay to describe catastrophism, but in Tolstoy's case, crises did shape his outlook—and his outlook caused many of his crises.

A particularly compelling example of Tolstoy's catastrophic embracing of extremes is his near-Gnostic contempt for the body, as explained by Emerson. With the disgust Tolstoy seems to have felt "for such a body, a feeling of wholeness is possible only through the renunciation of temptation."[86] Along these lines, Emerson speculates that Tolstoy adopted vegetarianism not because he believed in the sanctity of all life "but because he had a strong liking for meat, and valued the self-discipline involved in giving that pleasure up."[87] Tolstoy, in his moralistic writings, does not make allowance for the temptations of other people but instead wishes them to follow his own prescriptions:

> Tolstoy . . . could create marvelously persuasive fictions from the point of view of a woman, a child, a Caucasian tribe, a horse [but he] found it exceptionally difficult, in the ethical realm, to imagine a genuine, fully-embodied other. That real others could, say, be indifferent to the seductions of music or poetry; not care for meat, tobacco, or wine and thus feel obliged neither to exaggerate their effects nor to forbid their consumption; assign sex a defined but minor role in their lives and thus

---

[85]Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions," 121.

[86]Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics: A Harmony and Translation of the Five Senses," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 12 (2000): 13.

[87]Ibid.

> see genuine grace, physical discipline, and beauty in ballet rather than 'naked legs'; listen to Beethoven but not feel threatened, be unbothered by Wagner; if such ideas occur to Tolstoy at all, he quickly banishes them.[88]

Emerson has correctly identified Tolstoy's remarkable inability to enter the minds of others. A partial explanation for Tolstoy's strong insistence on people following his rules is that those most tempted by something are the people most likely to vociferously warn against it. Emerson is pointing out that Tolstoy did not understand how others could not feel as tempted (and therefore not act as cautiously) as he was.

Many writers believe Tolstoy was a Christian both because a great deal of the literature already refers to him as such and because he refers to himself as a Christian. When one reads his writing extensively, however, one is likely to realize that Tolstoy did not adhere to the propositional beliefs associated with Christianity historically. A conclusion concerning someone's faith needs to be supported by strong evidence, so the next section offers a summary of the relevant research.

Tolstoy seems not to have believed in the resurrection of Jesus, nor does he seem to have believed in Jesus' divinity, virgin birth, or sinless life. Tolstoy's translation of the gospels strengthens this likelihood, as his harmony of the gospels "emerges enveloped in a negative space populated by absent verses."[89] In Tolstoy's story, the Nativity is "invented in an effort to disguise his illegitimate origin,"[90] John the Baptist becomes a "critical mentor,"[91] and Jesus dies without coming back to life.[92] Kaufmann agrees that Tolstoy's beliefs, when compared against views historically understood to be Christian, are found to be in substantial variance.[93]

---

[88]Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics," 12.

[89]Ani Kokobobo, "Authoring Jesus: Novelistic Echoes in Tolstoy's Harmonization and Translation of the Four Gospels," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 20 (2008): 12.

[90]Ibid., 4.

[91]Ibid., 8.

[92]Ibid., 11.

[93]Walter Arnold Kaufmann and Paul Gottfried, *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus* (New

Tolstoy's theology, like his translation of the Gospels, is shaped as much by what is not present as what remains. Tolstoy's view on Jesus is important, and it can be shared best in his own words.

> The doctrine of Jesus, like all religious doctrines, is regarded in two ways: first, as a moral and ethical system which teaches men how they should live as individuals and in relation to each other; second, as a metaphysical theory which explains why men should live in a given manner and not otherwise. One necessitates the other.[94]

Tolstoy's quote about Jesus broadly summarizes his religious writings. Tolstoy views Jesus primarily as an ethical teacher, and anything Jesus taught that was not directly ethics-related is submersed by Tolstoy under an ethical teaching. Matual's comparison of the Greek original to the Russian shows how Tolstoy attempts even "to place Christ himself beyond the faith of his countrymen,"[95] and Tolstoy does so by making the Jesus of history quite unlike the Christ of the New Testament.

Upon his excommunication by the Russian Orthodox Church, Tolstoy wrote about his supposed beliefs,

> Then it is said that "he denies God worshipped in the Holy Trinity, the Creator and Protector of the universe; denies our Lord Jesus Christ, God-man, Redeemer, and Savior of the world who suffered for us men and for our salvation and was raised from the dead; denies the immaculate conception of the Lord Christ as man, and the virginity before his birth and after his birth of the Most Pure Mother of God." That I deny the incomprehensible Trinity; the fable, which is altogether meaningless in our time, of the fall of the first man; the blasphemous story of a God born of a virgin to redeem the human race—is perfectly true. But God, a Spirit, God, love; the only God—the Source of all—I not only do not deny, but I attribute real existence to God alone and I see the whole meaning of life only in fulfilling His will, which is expressed in the Christian teaching.[96]

In the context of the above quote, this chapter makes no judgment on Tolstoy's good will,

---

Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 8. Kaufman does not indicate that he finds this variance disturbing.

[94]Leo Tolstoy, *The Wisdom of Tolstoy*, trans. Huntington Smith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968), 83.

[95]Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation*, 126.

[96]Leo Tolstoy, "A Reply to the Synod's Edict of Excommunication,"(1901?), quoted in Walter Arnold Kaufmann and Paul Gottfried, *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 132.

intentions, or spirituality; it is Tolstoy himself, rather, who claims not to believe in the biblical events referenced.

Writing within a few years of Tolstoy's death and faced with the question of Tolstoy being a Christian or not, William Scott replies, "The answer is Yes and No. Conventional religion says No, for he strikes his mace against their creeds. Vital religion says Yes, for he counts life greater than formulas."[97] Scott's judgment would likely strike Tolstoy as fair. The twentieth-century designation of "spiritual but not religious" would apply well to Tolstoy. Even if scholars of religion might poke holes in it, adherents of spirituality view it "as more personal, less corporate, less dogmatic and more experiential than religion. Spirituality, so defined, is thus in one sense a rejection of organized religion, but in another sense dependent on the wisdoms of religion."[98] Tolstoy prototypically evinces the "grab-and-go," cultural buffet of various, religious, moral rules amalgamated into a personal belief system.

As Tolstoy does not seem to have believed that people needed to be "saved" from their sins through rebirth by the Spirit of God in belief of Jesus Christ as the Son sent by God the Father, a condition inherent to being a Christian, the conclusion is that Tolstoy most clearly resembles a liberal Christian, not a historical Christian.[99] For those who have lionized Tolstoy as a Christian, Kaufmann dryly mentions that "it is rather odd to hold up as an example of what is possible within Christianity a man formally excommunicated, a writer whose views have not been accepted by any Christian denomination—a heretic."[100] This chapter has so far shown how the three major

---

[97]Scott, *Chesterton*, 126.

[98]Dan Moulin, "Leo Tolstoy the Spiritual Educator," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13, no. 4 (2008): 350-51.

[99]Slavic studies scholar R. F. Christian also arrives at the same conclusion in his introduction to Malcolm Jones, ed., *New Essays on Tolstoy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10.

[100]Kaufmann and Gottfried, *Religion*, 8.

influences on Russian religious life affected Tolstoy in confluence with the religious liberalism sweeping his time, so it only remains to examine how Tolstoy's religious beliefs subsequently affected others.

Roberts has developed the best explanation of how Tolstoy's religious beliefs ultimately influenced his actions and writings over the second part of his life. Because it is so helpful, here is Roberts' summary quoted nearly in full:

> Though Tolstoy sees clearly that it is not rational, in a broad sense, to leave the infinite out of one's thinking about human life, he continues to find strongly compelling the strictures imposed on belief by what he takes to be scientific rationality. In particular, while he feels vividly the need to be related to God and eternity, his concept of rationality makes many of the central beliefs of orthodox Christianity repugnant to him. This thralldom to a constrictive ideology of reason exists side-by-side with his hunger for God, creating strong conflicts and extreme emotional shifts. . . . Tolstoy resolves the tension between what he takes to be 'reason' and faith by trusting *both* his God-libido and his positivistically motivated repugnance for traditional Christian theology. Accordingly he rewrites the Gospels, excising from them anything that offends his "reason," but leaving enough of the 'infinite' to satisfy the cravings of his spirit.[101]

Tolstoy's theology is a mixture of individualistic modernism and the gospels. Russian historian Pavel Miliukov pithily judges Tolstoy's theology, writing, "In a religious sense it was inadequate, while from the point of view of philosophical rationalism it contained too much religion."[102]

Wilson draws a symmetry between Tolstoy's ideal of political anarchy and what Wilson calls Tolstoy's "religious anarchism,"[103] speculating, "Perhaps the error of it springs from his fundamental theological inability to understand the Incarnation. His religion was ultimately a thing of the Law rather than of Grace, a scheme for human betterment rather than a vision of God penetrating a fallen world."[104] Wilson's

---

[101]Gill, *Should God Get Tenure?*, 67. Italics in original.

[102]Pavel Miliukov et al., *Outlines of Russian Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942), 145.

[103]Tolstoy, *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, 17.

[104]Ibid.

summation of Tolstoy's religious thoughts is entirely correct.

As one learns of Tolstoy's religious beliefs, one might wish to ask Tolstoy by whose authority he chopped up the gospels and prescribed moral rules for others. So, it is incredibly gratifying to find that the book *With Christ in Russia* contains this precise question. The book contains an account of a missionary approaching Yasnaya Polyana only for Tolstoy himself to leave the house on a walk and invite the missionary along. On the walk the missionary began asking Tolstoy what his beliefs about Jesus were. Tolstoy remarked that his "New Testament is much smaller than yours" and that he rejected "the miracle-stories," the writings of Paul, and the Resurrection.[105] Then, the evangelist asked him "by what authority" Tolstoy rejected the Bible's miracles and claims. Tolstoy's answer was "My own opinion, of course."[106] Tolstoy then grew frustrated and indicated that he did not wish to speak further of these matters, and after a meal at the house, the missionary left. The story clearly reveals that Tolstoy looked to himself as the primary moral arbiter.

Last and most relevant to the argument, if Tolstoy was not a historical Christian, his aesthetic should not be classified as Christian. Therefore, it can be remodeled from a Christian perspective. Before attempting to adapt a Christian perspective of Tolstoy's aesthetic however, one must first understand the aesthetic itself.

---

[105]Robert Sloan Latimer, *With Christ in Russia* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 134-35.

[106]Ibid., 134.

CHAPTER 3

OVERVIEW OF TOLSTOY'S *WHAT IS ART?*

Slavic Professor Richard Hare attests that upon its release *What Is Art?* "provoked a storm of furious derision, verging on hysteria, among professional art critics of the day."[1] That was true at its publication, true in the 1950s when Hare wrote it, and true through the remainder of the twentieth century. So, a reception history of *What Is Art?* sets the stage for what comes next: an exegesis of the book's logical argument, presented without judgment of the validity of Tolstoy's points. Readers will need patience in this section because Tolstoy's arguments have holes despite their length; some of those holes, however, are addressed by Tolstoy in later sections of the argumentation.[2] The primary themes of the argument are revealed by examining *What Is Art's* history of modern conceptions of beauty, the central role of infection to Tolstoy's theory of art, ethics as Tolstoy's secondary criterion of art, communion as a necessary product of art, the requirement for artworks to be new, and Tolstoy's take on art's effects. Then, the chapter closes with an examination of the philosophical pedigree behind *What Is Art?*[3]

---

[1]Richard Hare, "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose the Disease of 'Modern' Art?" *The Slavonic and East European Review* 36, no. 86 (1957): 181.

[2]The rest of the holes—the ones Tolstoy does not acknowledge—are addressed in the next chapter.

[3]The examination of the philosophy behind *What Is Art?* comes at the end of the chapter for two reasons: First, the underlying philosophy and philosophers are not actually referenced in *What Is Art?*, and second, the argument itself deserves to be seen without prior bias due to rejecting the philosophers who influenced Tolstoy.

Reception History

Imminent literary critic Harold Bloom calls *What Is Art?* "the notorious polemic."[4] English professor Douglas Robinson charges not only that Tolstoy's ideas on art are "stupid"[5] but that analysis is needed of "Tolstoy's psychological disorder."[6] Famed author Madeline L'Engle expresses a sense of disappointment with Tolstoy's ideas and calls herself "naïve" to have expected better ones from him.[7] Philosophers Gilbert and Kuhn simply dismiss Tolstoy's view of art as "inadequate" and do not comment on it further.[8] Philosophy professor Charles Daniels states that "one cannot consistently hold such views [as Tolstoy's] and be a fine art lover."[9] R. F. Christian, the English editor and translator of hundreds of Tolstoy's thousands of letters, describes *What Is Art?* as "stimulating, irritating, and iconoclastic,"[10] a summary which many scholars echo in their most charitable moments.

A final example of typical disagreement with *What Is Art?* needs to be mentioned, this one coming from philosophy and aesthetics professor Stephen Pepper. Pepper dismisses Tolstoy's theory of art because of "animism." To arrive at that remarkable conclusion, Pepper first collates Tolstoy's religious beliefs with

---

[4]Harold Bloom, ed., *Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 2.

[5]Douglas Robinson, "Tolstoy's Infection Theory and the Aesthetics of De- and Repersonalization," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 19 (2007): 43.

[6]Ibid., 35.

[7]Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith & Art* (Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw, 1980), 6.

[8]Katharine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953), 501.

[9]Charles B. Daniels, "Tolstoy and Corrupt Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 8, no. 4 (1974): 41.

[10]Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy's Letters*, trans. R. F Christian (New York: Scribner, 1978), 2:513. This chapter examines only Tolstoy's iconoclastic stances, but Alain Besancon offers a comprehensive and helpful history of iconoclasm in *The Forbidden Image*, trans. Jane Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000). In the realm of Christian aesthetics, one finds strident defense of art against iconoclasm by H. R. Rookmaaker.

"fundamentalist beliefs," then he collates those "fundamentalist beliefs" with "animism," and then he dismisses Tolstoy's art theory as being based on those religious beliefs (i.e., "animism). "Tolstoy's criticism is vitiated by its dependence on a washed-out animism," Pepper writes. "His *What Is Art?* boils down to an appeal to judge art by certain religious criteria which he enunciates in *What is Religion?* These latter turn out to be thin conceptualizations of animism."[11] Careful readers may be starting to suspect the existence of something "behind the scenes" in the criticisms levelled at *What Is Art?*

Likewise, Hare incredulously observes, "It almost looked as if the writers who abused Tolstoy most loudly had in fact never read *What Is Art?* except those few sentences of it which wounded their personal vanity."[12] That is, in fact, what happened. The English translator of *What Is Art?* Aylmer Maude wrote a history of the book's release and reception, a history invaluable for understanding academia's subsequent interaction with the book. Maude explains that before the book was published, the publisher realized that one chapter in the book "mentioned in scathing terms some forty French poets, novelists, and painters of the day" and subsequently the publisher "unscrupulously sold that chapter for publication in a Paris monthly magazine."[13] As expected the chapter outside of its context was taken "as a gratuitous, unprovoked, and personal assault," by both the public, intelligentsia, and artists themselves.[14] Thus, when the book itself appeared, "it was virulently attacked, grossly misrepresented, ridiculed, and denounced by almost the whole literary, artistic, and

---

[11]Stephen Coburn Pepper, *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 14.

[12]Hare, "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose," 181.

[13]Leo Tolstoy, *Recollections & Essays,* trans. and ed. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), x.

[14]Ibid.

critical world of Paris."[15]

The response in Paris, however, was only the beginning of the book's disastrous reception. For the cultural elites of England took their cues from Paris and heaped new mockeries, untruths, and dismissals onto *What Is Art?* when it was released there. Maude details at length how reviewers even invented fabrications about Tolstoy himself in order to tarnish the book.[16]

When the critics were not calling the book and its author downright insane, they badly misinterpreted what Tolstoy wrote. As an example, Maude presents how many critics took Tolstoy's assertion that "even children and peasants can understand art" to mean that they, the experts, must not be able to judge art correctly.[17] Maude explains that Tolstoy simply meant that even peasants could choose art that speaks to them.[18] Maude shows that Tolstoy's point was "fantastically misrepresented as claiming for the peasant some peculiar quality making him a touchstone or criterion of art—not only of the work of art *he* requires, but of all art of all ages and all nations and all classes of mankind."[19]

With the benefit of thirty-nine years to think since the publication of *What Is Art?* Maude concludes,

> Given the personal animosity aroused by the premature publication of a detached chapter of the book, and the readiness of critics at a time of excitement to repeat what someone else has emphatically declared, it is not very strange that the first reception of the book should have been so hostile. What is extraordinary is the tenacity with which this absurd misrepresentation has been repeated during a whole generation and is still kept alive.[20]

---

[15]Tolstoy, *Recollections & Essays,* x.

[16]Ibid., x-xv.

[17]Ibid., x-xii.

[18]Ibid., xii.

[19]Ibid. Italics in original

[20]Ibid.

Although he was stunned with how vitriolic the backlash against the book continued to be, perhaps Maude would be unsurprised that eighty years after he wrote those words critics continue to dismiss Tolstoy's aesthetic (perhaps for its attack on works they consider beloved) while philosophers continue to ignore it (perhaps due to its unwillingness to put forth the trifecta of truth, beauty, and goodness as the standard of art). Good-faith attempts to understand Tolstoy's arguments in *What Is Art*? are rare. No wonder then that the eminent philosopher of art Monroe Beardsley describes *What Is Art?* as "a work so unorthodox in its main conclusions that that its serious challenges have generally been shrugged off."[21]

Observing that Tolstoy was over-praised by his followers and over-criticized by critics, Tsanoff advocates,

> Distrusting labels and pre-judgment, we should pursue in his works his own struggle with the problems of life. If his solution of those problems should strike us as too bold, we would find the actual decisions which he made in his own life bolder; and if they puzzle us who shall say that Tolstoy is entirely to blame? 'When a book and a head strike against each other, and a dull sound ensues, is the trouble always with the book?'[22]

In the past twenty years, scholars began to re-examine—or in some sense, examine for the first time—both the argument of *What Is Art?* and the impact its historical reputation had on the perception of its argument.[23] This (re)evaluation is resulting in a realization that despite the presence of premises with which one may disagree, Tolstoy's argument does make sense; it is not logically invalid or "nonsense." Emerson contributed toward the re-evaluation by neutrally exegeting what Tolstoy actually posited, and by 2004 Trivedi was cautiously suggesting that the "concept of artist-audience communication

---

[21]Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1975), 308.

[22]Radoslav Andrea Tsanoff, *Autobiographies of Ten Religious Leaders; Alternatives in Christian Experience* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1968), 202-3.

[23]To be clear, the field of literature has not suddenly become supportive of Tolstoy's aesthetic ideas, but among Tolstoy scholars a great deal of positive research is occurring. The vanguard of Tolstoyan research is the *Tolstoy Studies Journal*.

similar to what Tolstoy had in mind can be fleshed out so as to *avoid* the problems that Tolstoy ran into, while reclaiming the insights in his view."[24] If Trivedi's aim sounds like those here, it is because the goals are indeed similar (even though the rehabilitations of Tolstoy differ).[25]

The upcoming overview of *What Is Art?* makes use of what Gary Morson, a professor of Slavic studies who has contributed a great deal to Tolstoyan studies, calls "impersonation." Intuited by many good teachers even if not previously named, Morson's process entails teaching thinkers' ideas from those own thinkers' perspectives while suspending one's own judgment. In an article on education, Morson says, "I teach Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy not from my point of view, but from theirs, as I understand it."[26] In a separate article Morson writes, "If one reads not so as to score debating points but so as to find something of value, then one may look for a different and more compelling formulation of Tolstoy's idea."[27] So if Tolstoy's theory of art is not first seen

---

[24]Saam Trivedi, "Artist-Audience Communication: Tolstoy Reclaimed," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 2 (2004): 38.

[25]Trivedi differs from the argument presented here in his embracing of reader-response hermeneutics and eschewing of authorial intention. Yet holding the idea that a reader determines meaning undermines the very foundation on which Trivedi—as well as other post-modern "death of author" writers—build their argument. It seems much more probable that readers collectively function as the judges of how well an author communicated his message, similar to how an audience determines the quality of an artwork.

[26]Gary Saul Morson, "The Worlds of Others," *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 49, no. 2 (2011): 9.

[27]Gary Saul Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions: Reflections on the Silbajoris Thesis," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 4 (1991): 138. Concerning the hyper-critical posture found in professional scholarship, Morson complains on p. 139,

> Universities typically teach a self-consciously professional style of reading, which is designed to be 'up-to-date' and striking. Critics make such style a standard for judging each other's work. The best readers I know are not professional critics; and the best critics I know are those who were first superb unprofessional readers and make their experience as common readers a standard for their own work. They measure their formal interpretations against their experience as unprofessional common readers. When their interpretation seems forced in comparison to that experience, they abandon or refine it, however well it may answer to currently fashionable professional norms. Above all, they respect the work of literature and their own sensitivity, which they continue to refine.

for what it is, it cannot be fairly dismantled or tweaked,[28] just like a doctor who prescribes medicine before making a diagnosis is a bad doctor.

Tolstoy's Discussion of Beauty

Reading Tolstoy's diaries and perusing his earlier work reveals that Tolstoy had been thinking about the nature of art long before sitting down to write *What Is Art?* Bloom summarizes the work Tolstoy put into the book:

> Before this treatise, the product of fifteen years of reflection and study, he had written other articles on similar topics ("About the Thing Called Art," "Science and Art," and "What is and What Is Not Art"), and a later article, "About Shakespeare and Drama" (1904), re-examined some of his points. Nevertheless, *What Is Art?* is the distillation of Tolstoy's thought on art.[29]

Tolstoy claimed to have read dozens of books on aesthetics (his familiarity with the arguments of recently-published works makes it likely true), and undoubtedly Tolstoy was performing that research in the years leading up to writing *What Is Art?*

Tolstoy begins *What Is Art?* with an extended account of aesthetics' recent fascination with beauty. Tolstoy remarks he is only interested in aesthetic thought from the past 150 years for two reasons.[30] Tolstoy's first reason is that the ancient Greeks' conception of beauty was different from ours, and his second is that the Greeks' ideas on beauty were not good anyway. Instead, Tolstoy says that the modern study of aesthetics began with Baumgartner.

Baumgartner's primary idea, according to Tolstoy, is that aesthetics is the study of beauty. Tolstoy spends only a little space on Baumgartner's idea, because

---

[28]The next chapter addresses many concerns with Tolstoy's theory, while the present chapter addresses only simple misinterpretations of what Tolstoy wrote.

[29]Harold Bloom, *The Art of the Critic: Literary Theory and Criticism from the Greeks to the Present* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), 267.

[30]In a letter to one of his daughters, Tolstoy wrote, "It's necessary to read the history of aesthetics to see how much has been said about it that is clever and true, but vague." Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy's Letters*, trans. R. F. Christian, (New York: Scribner, 1978), 2:393.

Tolstoy's primary interest is running through a list of the beliefs of recent thinkers on the nature of art.[31] Tolstoy offers little analysis on any of them, instead being content to list what he takes to be their central idea on art. He then categorizes the thinkers according to what, if anything, they believe beauty is rooted in (such as whether its existence springs from itself or something else) and broadly according to whether they believe beauty is objective or subjective.

The purpose of Tolstoy's categorization of beauty is for the reader to grow weary of the speculation on how beauty can be the purpose of art. The reader sees that Tolstoy's history drips with irony as it becomes clear that none of the thinkers agree on what beauty is. Literary critic Marion Montgomery observes that Tolstoy uses his literary artistry to convince readers of his argument about art.[32] Emerson concurs, writing, "In the opening chapters of *What Is Art?*, Tolstoy becomes quite defensive in his insistence, by every possible scholarly hook and crook, that beauty can be no criterion for art."[33] In spite of the less-than-adequate space given by *What Is Art?* to individual ideas of beauty, Tolstoy's overall point is clearly made: many philosophers believe that art is the realization of beauty, but they do not agree on what beauty is.

Tolstoy sees that the complexity of beauty makes it a poor standard on which to base art, but that is not the only reason Tolstoy believes beauty to be an inadequate foundation for art. "Tolstoy believed it to be a trivialization of art to equate it with beauty, since the value of art lies in "the purpose it may serve in the life of man."'[34]

---

[31]No one seems to have created a list of the thinkers on beauty whose theories Tolstoy recounts, so the appendix to this dissertation presents the list.

[32]Marion Montgomery, *Romancing Reality: Homo Viator and the Scandal Called Beauty* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 32.

[33]Caryl Emerson, "Prosaics in *Anna Karenina*: Pro and Con," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 8 (1995): 161.

[34]Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers, 1899), 120, quoted in David Best, *Feeling and Reason in the Arts* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 170.

Referencing the idea that equating art with beauty trivializes art, Best insists, "There is an important truth in Tolstoy's contention that it trivializes the arts to equate them with beauty, and to value them in terms of the pleasure they may give rather than the purposes they may serve in the life of man."[35] Unless one is willing to state that unbeautiful artwork is not actually art, one is confronted by a great deal of artworks that certainly are art but cannot be art because of their beauty. "Beauty," Emerson writes," is quite simply a beast."[36]

Gershkovich summarizes Tolstoy's argument thus far as declaring that a sufficient definition of beauty has not been identified, and thus beauty should not be a standard for art. Tolstoy nonetheless insists that an aesthetic standard should and does still exist.[37] So Tolstoy addresses—and rejects—modern foundations of art that purport to produce such an aesthetic standard, including Darwin's explanation. Tolstoy complains that Darwin does not actually offer an explanation of art but rather an explanation *for the origin* of art.[38]

Rader and Jessup offer helpful background information on the thinker whose theory of art is most similar to Tolstoy's: "One of the first aestheticians to characterize art in terms of subjectivity was Eugene Veron whose book *L'Esthetique* (published in 1878) greatly influenced Leo Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* Veron defined art as the expression of the

---

[35]Best, *Feeling and Reason*, 186.

[36]Emerson, "Prosaics," 161.

[37]Tatyana Gershkovich, "Infecting, Simulating, Judging: Tolstoy's Search for an Aesthetic Standard," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 1 (2013): 116.

[38]Tolstoy is on to something here, as evolutionary explanations of *many* phenomena tend not to explain them. Instead, they explain their origin which is always that they arose because of genetic mutation leading to increased chances of reproduction which ultimately led to increased chances of gene survival. One evolutionary explanation of why humans associate the color red with danger claims red berries were likely poisonous so people who ate them died without reproducing while people who did not eat them survived and reproduced. The point here is not to question why other red food (such as strawberries, watermelons, and pomegranates) were excluded but how this meshes with evolutionary explanations of why people are *attracted* to the color red (for example, of a red dress). No Christian academic responds to every question of a phenomenon with the answer "because God made it," but underneath jargon the evolutionary answer is often "because evolution drove it that way."

emotional life of the artist."[39] Tolstoy rejects Veron's idea that art is simply expressive of the creator's emotion, arguing that a man expressing his emotion through means does not necessarily affect others with his expression. Veron's idea is like a fisherman's net that accidentally catches dolphins and trash; it captures too much. One's theory of art needs to account for all that is art while having an identifying means for all that is not art, and Tolstoy finds Veron's theory helpful but insufficient.

The Infection Theory of Art

Tolstoy titled his book *What Is Art?* because he wanted to answer that question in a direct way, unlike the dozens of theories he has looked at, including those of Kant and Hegel. At last Tolstoy offers his definition of art: *art is anything causing the audience to share an emotion which the artwork's creator intended them to feel*. Bloom allows himself a moment of wonder at Tolstoy's definition:

> With this simple statement, and after clearing the air by discussing and dismissing as ineffectual more than sixty preceding theories of aesthetics, Tolstoy accomplishes the great task of stating things as they are and putting art back at its true source. One feels at his definition the same pleasure, surprise, and recognition as at a phrase, harmony, or painting.[40]

Startling in his simplicity, Tolstoy defines art neither by its form, its content, nor a higher teleology. Instead, Tolstoy places definitional focus on sharing the artist's emotion with an audience.[41]

Indeed, some translations of Tolstoy use the word "infect" to describe an artwork's effect on the audience, and this word choice has led to arguments about the

---

[39]Melvin Rader and Bertram Emil Jessup, *Art and Human Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 129.

[40]Bloom, *Art of the Critic*, 268.

[41]As any definition of art would, Tolstoy's definition of art likely raises questions about messaging, form, censorship, and immoral emotions. This chapter covers how Tolstoy addresses some of those issues, and the rest are addressed in the next chapter.

appropriateness of "infection" in aesthetics.[42] Slavic studies professor Jacob Emery argues at length that Tolstoy's entire corpus views infection positively due to its vaccine-like ability to prevent worse illness.[43] Emery's argument does not persuade, in large part because Tolstoy does not reference what, exactly, art vaccinates against.

More likely Tolstoy decided to use an evocative word like "infect" instead of more neutral words like "communicate," "share," or "transmit." Jahn makes the point that in choosing the word "infection," Tolstoy may have been "guided by a desire to provide an easily remembered parallel to the term denoting the other half of the process of communication, expression."[44] Jahn does not pretend his point is certain, but it gives one freedom to translate the word more similarly to "impression," the word Jahn suggests Tolstoy would have used if he had written in English.[45]

In discussing Tolstoy's analogy of art's emotions being infectious though, Emerson contends that the perspective is literally embodied, that Tolstoy insists on art having mental or even physiological effects.[46] Emerson's perspective is helpful because even though Tolstoy does not believe that everything which creates mental or physiological effects is art, an object must infect its audience with the artist's feeling(s) in

---

[42]Aesthetic philosopher Milton Nahm interjects, "Tolstoy intends to attribute more than mere 'infectiousness' to the experience of art." Milton Nahm, *Aesthetic Experience and Its Presuppositions* (New York: Harper, 1946), 366. Nahm goes on to quote Tolstoy himself at length about the joyous experience of sharing emotions with others. The communion generated by art is explored in the section following the next one.

[43]Jacob Emery, "Art Is Inoculation: The Infectious Imagination of Leo Tolstoy," *The Russian Review* 70, no. 4 (2011): 627-33.

[44]Gary Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory of Leo Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, no. 1 (1975): 65.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Donna Tussing Orwin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 238. Tolstoy is, by far, most concerned that art transfers emotions to audiences. Chap. 7 goes on to discuss how audiences sometimes are affected by an artwork so much that they not only feel but wish to *act* in imitation of the artwork. From people imitating Goethe's Young Werther to J. D. Salinger's Holden Caufield and on to those attending cosplay events in the present, some wish not only to feel art, but to imitate it. Chap. 7 examines in detail the varying reactions to art.

order to be art. The sharing of emotion is not automatic; although the reception of emotion may be easy and rapid, the creation of "every successful work of art must be painstakingly fine-tuned, bit by bit."[47] Being infected by art is easy; creating infectious art is difficult work.

Even though the creation of art is difficult, Tolstoy's theory of art opens the creation of art to substantially more people than other theories. Jahn offers a helpful delineation of Tolstoy's actual premises as follows: (1) Art is communicative (including both artist and audience), (2) What art communicates is feeling, and (3) Therefore, art is broad enough to include far more than other definitions consider to be art.[48] The third premise enables Tolstoy's aesthetic to encompass artforms from around the world. Philosophy professors Konstantin Antonov and Alexey Chernyak note that "many things and events used and produced by people in their everyday life can be emotionally infectious, and, hence, may be considered pieces of art (songs, jokes, decorations etc.)."[49] Antonov and Chernyak understand something important about art here. Tolstoy's aesthetic throws the doors of art open to everyone who has any interest and skill in creating it. That accessibility—or even democratization—of art creation is refreshing and enervating.

Tolstoy's aesthetic also frees art to be pursued in ways that go beyond high culture/low culture bifurcations. In fact, a good amount of academic writing has surfaced in the last twenty years or so, arguing that the very idea of "high vs. low" cultural art is itself a myth, one that promotes the cultural output of some over others.[50] If it turns out

---

[47]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 239.

[48] Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory," 60.

[49]Konstantin Antonov and Alexey Chernyak, "Art and Morality: Tolstoy vs. Leontiev," 99, accessed October 26, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Konstantin_Antonov/publication/306061706_Art_and_Morality_Tolstoy_vs_Leontiev/links/57af11a108ae15c76cb7f566.pdf.

[50]Of particular help are contributions by William Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Shut* (Grand

that “fine art” versus plain “art” is a false distinction,[51] the unacknowledged standards of the high/low myth can be shown as weak when compared to Tolstoy’s robust standard of art.

For Tolstoy ties the standard of art—what makes art qualitatively good or bad—to his definition of art. Beardsley explains the standard clearly, writing, "Tolstoy proposes one quantitative criterion: '*The stronger the infection the better the art*, as art'—and he means here the intensity of the feeling."[52] According to Tolstoy’s aesthetic then, an artwork is considered better the more powerfully it causes its audience to feel the emotions which gripped the artist.[53] Tolstoy’s standard is quantifiable and easily applied to individual artworks. The more an artwork causes the audience to feel the artist’s emotions at the level the artist intended, the better that artwork is.

Tolstoy scholar Wojciech Chojna cautions that Tolstoy does *not* claim that artworks are simply expressions of emotion nor that they simply express emotion. Rather, "art is indeed concerned with transmission of feelings by means of signs, but that is not to say that a particular work of art is a sign standing for a particular feeling. A work of art through the whole system of signs transmits the whole conscious experience that the artist had."[54] The audience can experience emotions intended by the artist that are different, perhaps even the opposite, of the emotions currently being expressed by an

---

Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), and Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

[51]“High vs low” or “fine vs popular” art distinctions may be reconceptualized using the spectrum presented in the next chapter. (The spectrum speaks to the creators’ intentionality for their object.) It offers a helpful way to distinguish between objects that are incorrectly categorized by “high/low” or “fine/popular” distinctions.

[52]Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (1899), 133, quoted in Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 312.

[53]For now, the obvious question of what to do about artwork that infects one with unwanted feelings must be bracketed. The section on art’s relationship to emotion addresses unwanted feelings further.

[54]Wojciech Chojna, review of *Tolstoy’s What Is Art?* by Terry Diffey, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 3 (1988): 435.

artwork. It is easy enough to think of plays where the audience is (A) saddened by characters' happiness, knowing the happiness is ill-founded, (B) gladdened by characters' rage, as when bad guys get their comeuppance, (C) humored by characters' sadness, as when the "comic relief" gloomily comes out and misunderstands a situation, and many other combinations besides. Rader and Jessup note that the emotion communicated by the artist is not necessarily the emotion received by the audience member,[55] nor did Tolstoy expect it to be.

Joyce Cary adds, incredibly intuitively, that Tolstoy is saying artists attempt not to communicate an impression but the feeling of an impression they experienced. Tolstoy, according to Cary, wrestled with the struggle most artists experience: attempting to give form to the emotion one wishes to convey.[56] In this regard Emerson concedes that "the communication of like emotions is a rigid requirement [of Tolstoy's aesthetic], yes, but every organism is infected in its own way."[57] In other words, Tolstoy would judge an artwork as bad if the emotion it elicited was not at all what the artist intended, although people will necessarily respond with a variety of speeds, understandings, and reactions even to a good artwork. Emerson gives additional detail, reporting, "As long as artistic infection occurs on the spot, Tolstoy will admit some variation in its degree, intensity, and moral force."[58]

So, Anne Sheppard is oversimplifying or even distorting Tolstoy's perspective on art when she speculates,

---

[55]Rader and Jessup, *Art and Human Values*, 135-36.

[56]Joyce Cary, *Art and Reality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 41, quoted in *A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology*, ed. Melvin Rader,.3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), 108.

[57]Caryl Emerson, Andrew Wachtel, and Gary Jahn, "Roundtable Discussion of *Tolstoy's Art and Thought 1847-1880* by Donna Tussing-Orwin," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 6 (1993): 158.

[58]Emerson, "Prosaics," 162. Emerson does not state where Tolstoy claims that emotional transmission must be immediate, and I have not found it.

> Whereas Plato would say that reading about a self-indulgent character, or seeing a self-indulgent character portrayed on stage, will make me into a self-indulgent person, Tolstoy would say that the writer who depicts a self-indulgent character is given to self-indulgence and through his work infects the reader with his own feelings.[59]

Hughes agrees with Sheppard, adding that a notable distinction exists here between Tolstoy and David Hume. Hume believes the emotions experienced by the audience will be different from the ones expressed by the actors while Tolstoy believes they will be the same, according to Hughes.[60] Sheppard and Hughes are wrong: Tolstoy and Hume are in agreement. To think Tolstoy views artworks simply as expressions of emotion is to oversimplify Tolstoy's views to the point of distortion. If Tolstoy (who wrote plays) thought audiences would share the emotion of the character currently speaking, the audience would have a schizophrenic experience of hearing and agreeing with numerous contradictory voices. Instead, an artwork's array of emotion toward a subject must be evaluated in total by the overall impression the artwork leaves. How well that overall, emotional impression matches what the artist intended is precisely Tolstoy's first criteria of art.

Tolstoy does consider it necessary that artists first feel the emotions they are trying to communicate to the audience through their art, and Tolstoy is likely correct. For when an artist attempts to get an audience to feel something the artist did not feel, critics call it cynical, manipulative, or even hypocritical.[61] However, emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Wales Robert Sharpe answers that in certain

---

[59]Anne D. R. Sheppard, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 13.

[60]Richard I. G. Hughes, "Tolstoy, Stanislavski, and the Art of Acting," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (1993): 45. Of course, if Hughes is right and Tolstoy really did disagree with Hume on the audience feeling different emotions than those actually expressed, Tolstoy is wrong, as the main text above shows using three examples. Yet it is doubtful that Tolstoy and Hume disagree, as Tolstoy created artworks after *What Is Art?* that contain characters expressing emotions that he certainly did not wish his readers to feel.

[61]Joseph McBride's scathing critique of Frank Capra is a well-researched history of a man known for making feel-good movies yet being all the while an intractable hypocrite similar to the villains in his movies. Joseph McBride, *The Catastrophe of Success* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

circumstances it is not wrong for the artist not to have felt the emotion the artwork is attempting to evoke.[62] For example, when an artist creates an artwork that reflects a feeling she wishes she felt toward her subject but does not currently feel, this circumstance ought not make the artwork suspect.[63] On the other hand, when the artwork expresses an emotion toward a subject that the artist does not actually agree with, one may rightly call the artwork hypocritical.

This is not to say that all artists are explicitly aware of what they do, nor that they share the same purposes. Nahm asserts, "The artist's purpose is not necessarily the purpose of art."[64] In fact, it is helpful at this point to see what an artist is to Tolstoy. Nahm's reading of Tolstoy is that an artist "is essentially an individual who feels and who objectifies his feeling by means of his skill in a craft"[65] in order that others may share in it. While all people experience feeling, artists create objects that cause their feelings to arise in others, and the sole difference between artists and non-artists lies in their giftedness in the ability to create those objects.

Rader and Jessup reiterate that for Tolstoy art must be intentionally created in order to be art.[66] The necessity of human creation gives the lie to "found art," although certainly not to art made from "found objects." Marcel Duchamp, depending on one's perspective, either challenged or affirmed this idea with his readymades, although Duchamp's present audience of art elites certainly believe in found art. The infusion of meaning into an otherwise untouched object is foreign to Tolstoy. Art must be created in order to be art for what makes it art, by definition, is the communication of emotion from

---

[62]Robert A. Sharpe. *Contemporary Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 112.

[63]Additionally, Tolstoy does not address the impact of time on the artist's emotions either. The next chapter addresses this glaring deficiency.

[64]Nahm, *Aesthetic Experience*, 86.

[65]Ibid., 366.

[66]Rader and Jessup, *Art and Human Values*, 137.

the artist to the audience.

Underlying Tolstoy's primary criterion of art as infection, Emerson detects three criteria of success. The artwork is said to have succeeded if (1) the artist is sincere, (2) the artwork's emotion is "particular," and (3) whether the artwork is clear.[67] The first criterion has been touched on already, where it was noted that insincerity in intended emotion is hypocritical. Concerning the second criterion, what Tolstoy does *not* mean must be carefully delineated.

Tolstoy is not limiting an artwork to having one emotion only. Indeed, perhaps the stimulus of the creation of art is that descriptive language alone is not enough, in any language, to communicate emotions to others. When an artwork creates an emotion in its audience that they intuitively understand, then the artwork is successful. As an example of art which does not convey any particular emotion, Tolstoy brings up Beethoven's later pieces; these later pieces are not successful in conveying feelings compared to the earlier works, in Tolstoy's opinion.

An artwork's clarity distinguishes how precisely and strongly the artist felt the emotion(s) which they wanted to share in the artwork. When the artwork is not clear about what emotion it intends to share, the audience is substantially less likely to feel what the artist intended. Tolstoy is not, however, recommending that an artist needs to tell, in advance, what emotion the audience will feel. Doing so signals arrogance (and often lack of talent) on the part of the artist to Tolstoy. Tolstoy's sub-criteria of particularity, clarity, and sincerity are related to each other, and certainly it is common to experience artworks which are not particularly moving because the artist was not clearly, sincerely, or particularly moved either.

When an artwork does not meet Tolstoy's criteria of success, Emerson states

---

[67]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 239.

that Tolstoy would call it either bad art or "counterfeit art."[68] Morson laments that "most commentators have missed" the difference in Tolstoy between bad art and counterfeit art,[69] an assessment of art historians that is regrettably true. According to a Tolstoyan view, bad art either conveys emotion poorly or conveys an immoral emotion. Counterfeit art is a third category separate from bad art, for Tolstoy.

In fact, counterfeit art is not actually art at all. By way of analogy, Tolstoy compares counterfeit art to art in the same way normal vision compares to what Tolstoy calls "Daltonism." Bernard Dukore explains Daltonism is "color blindness, from the physicist John Dalton (1766-1844)."[70] Morson helpfully offers an example of what Tolstoy would consider "counterfeit art," namely, "paint-by-numbers" pictures.[71] These pictures do not attempt to transfer emotion, and any emotion transferred is strictly copied from the original creator. Generally speaking the English word used for these is "crafts."

Crafts are not art because they are not trying to be. Crafts are normally created solely as "something to do." The craft's value to someone else resides solely in its provenance, even if the provenance is "my child created this in Sunday School." The craft's value to its creator lies solely in the utility gained from practicing with the material. "That is why works that infect with immoral feelings are genuine, but bad, art: whereas those that do not infect at all are, regardless of the moral propositions they may contain, not art at all."[72] If a film, then, is simply trying to communicate a message, say of the necessity of salvation or the right to euthanasia, it hardly even feels like art; it seems propagandistic in the worst senses and hardly inspires any emotion apart from

---

[68]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 239.

[69]Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions," 124.

[70]Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), 915.

[71]Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions," 135.

[72]Ibid., 131.

varying degrees of (dis)agreement with its message.[73]

Jacques Barzun evocatively makes a related point using a series of questions:

> Has anyone ever turned Calvinist from even the most enthralled reading of *Paradise Lost*? Who thinks of Tolstoy's theory of history when remembering *War and Peace*? We are back at lesson one about the nature of art, which is that its contents defy literal expression. No one can say what, if any, points of doctrine he learned from Strindberg or Shaw or Brecht—all of them great propagandists—any more than he can state what good he has derived from the non-hortatory: Rembrandt or Gluck or Mary Wigman. The generality holds for literature as well, which is not more explicit for all its use of words. The knowledge emergent from a novel is not a set of statements attractively gilded by art like a pill.[74]

Tolstoy and Barzun thus explain why art that attempts to teach a moral rarely feels like art at all. Likewise, people who suppress their artistic instincts due to a desire to communicate a message generally create counterfeit art because the messaging changes the medium of the artwork from its original genre into didacticism.

When an artwork finds itself in the counterfeit or bad categories, the artwork has failed. Emerson goes on to extract from *What Is Art?* four reasons an artwork may have failed. The four reasons are "borrowing," imitating," using special effects," and "diverting." For Tolstoy, an artist that engages in any of these is likely creating counterfeit art because the artist's creations will not be sharing his own feelings with an audience.

First, artists may have "borrowed," either borrowing emotion they did not feel, a form they did not understand, or a style they have not mastered.[75] The emotionally communicative aspects of a creation determine whether it is art or "pseudo-art," a term

---

[73]It would be misguided to draw a connection from counterfeit art to kitsch, for the connection would not only be facile, but false. Likewise, it would be inadequate and off-base to propose even that the criteria Tolstoy employs for counterfeit art are like kitsch, for they are not. Drawing a connecting line between Tolstoy's counterfeit art and many art critics' understanding of kitsch is simply a dead end, for they share little in common. To prevent further misunderstandings of the Tolstoyan term "counterfeit art" and the word "kitsch," the term "counterfeit art" will not be used here.

[74]Jacques Barzun, *The Use and Abuse of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 95.

[75]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 239.

that Tolstoy does not use but that Beardsley uses to describe works in this category. According to Beardsley, "pseudo art occurs. . . . when the artist pretends to feel what he does not feel."[76] Similarly, artists working in a medium they have not learned are likely to share either no feelings at all or the feelings of an artwork they have encountered in that genre.

Second, the artist may have "imitated," using an excess of detail to overshadow the lack of meaningful content.[77] Tolstoy is thinking here of writers who recount details they have noticed in hopes that their descriptions make their writings into art; insofar as their writings do not convey emotion they felt toward a subject, Tolstoy believes their writing is counterfeit art. In short, using realism as a substitute for sharing one's feeling is what Tolstoy calls "imitating."

Third, the artist may utilize "special or striking effects," whereby actual emotion is replaced with simple physiological stimulus.[78] This stimulus is present in horror films that simply shock through rapid movement. Now known as "jump scares," these portray actions that are not inherently frightening, such as a friend touching one's elbow. Jump scares have become ubiquitous in horror films, but they are not actually scary; instead they simply attempt to activate the body's startle response.

Likewise, the artform most associated with "special effects" is the one employing hundreds of technicians to implement them: the movies. The action movies of Michael Bay are known for attempting to overwhelm the viewer with explosions with plots as threadbare as gas station toilet paper. Likewise, dozens of films with budgets totaling billions of dollars rely on tempting audiences to gaze at computer graphics, a far

---

[76]Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 311. Beardsley's definition of pseudo-art sounds vaguely similar to one definition of kitsch offered in chap. 5.

[77]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 240.

[78]Ibid.

cry away from sharing the filmmakers' feelings.

Emerson believes that plots themselves can be a form of "striking effects," as when audiences are called upon to ponder outlandish situations instead of real-world scenarios. These stories attempt to replace emotional engagement with the unusual or fantastical. Yet the unusual or even fantastical do not necessarily stir emotion.

Fourth, Emerson disentangles Tolstoy's most complex reason an artwork may fail: when it causes the audience to think! According to Emerson, Tolstoy does not think that people should have to think while enjoying art. It sounds outlandish upon first encountering the idea that one should not think when engaging in art (and Tolstoy's thinking here is partially dismantled in the next chapter), but after laying aside one's initial astonishment, one can understand that Tolstoy wishes people *only* to feel while enjoying art. Tolstoy is convinced that when artists attempt to outsmart, puzzle, or even play to their audiences' existing knowledge, the artists have chosen these routes over emotional engagement. Tolstoy is highly suspicious of the need for art appreciation because he believes that if an artwork requires prior knowledge, it is excluding any audience who does not have that knowledge. Tolstoy is suspicious both of clever art and art "in a tradition" because he worries those categories substitute a sense of smugness rather than identifiable emotion from the artworks themselves. Emerson wryly observes that "this animus against 'ideas' in art" was "preached with great stubbornness by the indefinable autodidact."[79]

Tolstoy's definition of art is directly related to his primary standard for judging an artwork's quality. When art poorly communicates the artist's emotion with an audience, Tolstoy calls it bad art, and when an object does not share the artist's emotion at all he calls it counterfeit art. Having followed Emerson's exegesis of the three reasons

[79]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 241.

which make an artwork successful and the four reasons which make something not art at all but counterfeit art instead, Tolstoy's second—and truly secondary—standard of art will be examined.

Morality in Art

This section delineates how Tolstoy views the relationship of ethics to aesthetics. Melvin Rader of the University of Washington lists Tolstoy at the first of thinkers who insist that aesthetics is intricately tied up with ethics.[80] For Tolstoy does not only say that art is the expression of emotion with the intention of getting another person to feel the same emotion. Rader reminds that art's emotional expressiveness constitutes the core of Eugene Veron's aesthetics, but to Veron's aesthetics *Tolstoy has added judgment of the appropriateness of the emotion shared.*[81] Any judgment of the emotion expressed is necessarily a moral judgment. So Veron defines art solely as a means of expression and while Tolstoy approves of that as far as it goes, he insists a good definition of art must go further to include reception of an artwork and the morality of the emotion shared. It is necessary then to answer the question of what moral standard Tolstoy decided ought to apply to art and how it ought to be applied.

On this point Beardsley comments, "We can't judge a work good merely because it evokes feelings any more than we can judge a fire good without knowing what is burning. . . . and such a standard is ultimately religious."[82] It was for the sake of understanding Tolstoy's moral standard that his religious environment was investigated in chapter 2. For Beardsley declares that the moral standard Tolstoy holds art to is the same standard he held himself to, namely "the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood

---

[80]Melvin Rader, ed., *A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), xxx.

[81]Ibid., 32.

[82]Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 312.

of God." Beardsley recalls something Tolstoy wrote that is formative for the ethical system of *What Is Art?*, "'In every age and in every human society there exists a religious sense, common to that whole society, of what is good and what is bad, and it is this religious conception that decides the value of the feelings transmitted by art.'"[83]

When Tolstoy himself uses the word "religious," he invariably means something more akin to "moral."[84] Flaccus makes a valid and valuable observation about Tolstoy's religious beliefs: "Stripped of all church ceremonial and theology, Christianity is for Tolstoy nothing but a very simple but immeasurably strong combination of the ideas: sonship in God and brotherhood of men."[85] While Jahn argues that when Tolstoy means something akin to a religious worldview when he uses the word *religion*,[86] Jahn gives Tolstoy's word choice more meaning than Tolstoy does. Jahn likewise insists that Tolstoy means more than the "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man" when referring to "religious perception,"[87] yet if Tolstoy meant more, he certainly meant no less. Tolstoy equates Christian religion as virtually synonymous to "the highest currently conceivable ethics." Without the knowledge of what Tolstoy means by "religious," readers will mistake him to be saying that art should be judged by religious standards; that would be a significant misunderstanding. He is definitely not saying that moral authority resides in the leaders of a country's predominant religion, as his experience with the Russian Orthodox Church shows.

---

[83]Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (1899), 177-78, quoted in Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 313. Of course, Tolstoy was unaware of the connotations "BOMFOG" would come to have, although later readers may find it difficult to read of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God without an inward grimace at the phrase's connotations.

[84]Reading the previous Tolstoy quote with "moral" substituted for "religious" gets closer to Tolstoy's meaning.

[85]Louis W. Flaccus, *Artists and Thinkers* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), 157.

[86]Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory," 63-64.

[87]Ibid., 63.

The second chapter shows how Tolstoy viewed Christianity as the most moral religion of his time, although Tolstoy's Christianity was highly unorthodox. For Tolstoy, Jesus is no more than an ethics teacher. That is why Tolstoy wants to "keep the door open" for later developments in moral thinking, in case someone or some society develops more clearly moral teaching than that of Jesus.

Indicating that she had already thought very deeply about Tolstoy's aesthetic before writing again on it in the *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy* published in 2002, Emerson first shared her analysis of Tolstoy's art criteria in an article entitled "Prosaics in *Anna Karenina*: Pro and Con" published in 1995. Emerson's understanding of Tolstoy's criteria for judging art remains the best in the field. She writes, "Tolstoy judges an artwork along two separate axes, *true/counterfeit* and *moral/immoral*."[88] Emerson describes success on the first axis as being "if one person evokes in another person the feelings that he or she has lived through, and if that second person is, in consequence, infected by those same feelings."[89] Emerson then concludes that if art is the transference of emotions, one must have a criterion for the appropriateness of those emotions, leading to the second axis of morality.

Flaccus admirably summarizes Tolstoy's two criteria for art, writing "the excellence of any work of art depends, first, on whether or not it conveys feelings effectively, and second, on the worth of the feelings conveyed."[90] The outworking of Tolstoy's morality is that only certain feelings should be stirred while other feelings should not be stirred. If those other feelings are stirred up in an audience by the artwork,

---

[88]Emerson, "Prosaics," 161. Italics in original. In her subsequent contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, Emerson updates her matrix to "true versus counterfeit and good versus bad." Orwin, *Cambridge Companion*, 239. Emerson's recognition of Tolstoy's matrix inspired the one presented in chap. 7.

[89]Emerson, "Prosaics," 161.

[90]Flaccus, *Artists and Thinkers*, 155.

the artwork is bad art. Tolstoy lists the following feelings as ones that should not be stirred: sexual lust, pride, boredom,[91] dejection, effeminacy,[92] patriotism, militarism, and denominationally unique art.[93] Bakhtin harshly reproves Tolstoy for setting Jesus' teachings as Tolstoy's moral criterion, but it is clear from this discussion that the person judging which emotions are morally superior is actually Tolstoy, not Jesus.[94]

Tolstoy has a reason for what emotions should and should not be shared. Tolstoy demands that for an artwork to be morally good, the emotions it shares must be both "accessible" and "universal."[95] Tolstoy's reasoning, mentioned already, is that the highest moral standard is the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man, and in Tolstoy's thought any art which does not unify men around the globe must necessarily be excluding men. Due to his firm enactment of a moral standard of universality, Tolstoy rejects a great deal of art that strikes him as exclusive. Tolstoy's subsequent rejection of that art is what caused the critics to turn on him so ferociously.[96]

Gershkovich is not so interested in Tolstoy's actual standard of art as to the fact that he did, in fact, have one. She recognizes a similarity between Tolstoy's standard of art and Kant's, insofar as both "recognize the profound connection between the aesthetic and the ethical without reducing one to the other. But each seeks to preserve the autonomy of aesthetic judgment precisely so that it may inform moral judgment."[97] So

---

[91]Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 61.

[92]Ibid., 125.

[93]Ibid., 129.

[94]It should be noted as well that Bakhtin was writing under the censor and may have held personal beliefs at odds with his published writing. Mark Knight and Thomas M. Woodman, *Biblical Religion and the Novel, 1700-2000* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 25-38.

[95]Emerson, "Prosaics," 161.

[96]Tolstoy's standard of art-based communion is discussed in the next section while Tolstoy's rejection of great art is examined in the next chapter.

[97]Gershkovich, "Infecting, Simulating, Judging," 117.

Tolstoy shares Kant's relational idea that ethics judges the artist's output although the output it not primarily ethical.

Perhaps many art critics adapt a tone of defiance toward even the possibility of a moral criterion applying to art, for if so they would be beholden to it. Certainly, it is much easier to judge an artwork on its structure and execution without attending to potentially uncomfortable morality. Anne Sheppard explains how the relationship of morality to art radically shifted in the 1800's. Since then, it has been

> common to assume that art has at least some degree of autonomy, that it exists in a sphere of its own and is to be judged in the first instance by values and standards peculiar to it. We already imply this by making a distinction between the aesthetic and the moral, even if we go on to trace connections between art and morality. In the ancient world no such assumption was made. On the contrary, it was taken for granted that poets were teachers and that art had moral effects on its audience.[98]

This divorce of aesthetics and ethics lies underneath most criticisms of the idea that art has a moral component. Often, their separate spheres are simply presumed. That an artwork is primarily a conveyor of emotion and that the emotion has some moral component is as unrecognized (or simply misrepresented) as the possibility that the head and tail could be part of the same animal (or coin). So, when one author writes that Tolstoy "insisted that a work had to possess some positive didactic or moral value in order to qualify as a work of art,"[99] the research here reveals that not to be the case. It is more accurate to insist that the artwork shares a feeling which entails a moral stance.

Divorcing ethics from art certainly makes the work of artists and art critics easier and less weighty. Rather than attending to the morality of the feelings conveyed, artists and art critics can simply focus on the craftsmanship of the artwork. However, believing that ethics can be divorced from art creates an enormous problem for artists and appreciators of their art. For when they create or evaluate an artwork with ethical

---

[98]Sheppard, *Aesthetics*, 138.

[99]Ralph Alexander Smith, *Aesthetic Concepts and Education* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 31.

oughtness to it, they wish to deny the form of godliness while having its power, so to speak. At the Oscars directors deny their artworks espouse vulgarity, objectify women into sex objects, and debase men into objects of gore, yet they promptly accept rewards for movies selected because they espouse a moral message which the industry approves. In fact, many artists testify their art is often spurred by moral considerations, such as the environmental art of George Sabra, the anti-AIDS/pro-homosexual art of Robert Mapplethorpe, or the anti-war art of Banksy.

Because art infects people with emotions and emotions relate to people's actions, art has a complicated relationship to agency.[100] And certainly morality is inherently tied to art if art has any ability to spur action in its audience. Scholars generally agree that a spectrum of art-to-agency exists, ranging from the Tolstoyan "extreme" that art can spur people to do immoral things to the other "extreme" that art does not affect people's actions at all. In particular the idea that art can cause people to do immoral things has a long history in philosophy.

Sheppard is probably correct about where Tolstoy fell on the spectrum of art and art-caused action. Shepherd asserts,

> Both Plato and Tolstoy think that the kind of art we are exposed to can affect the kind of people we become. . . . They do not suppose that reading one violent book or watching one violent play will make me go out and perform a violent act. What they do think is that the continuous reading of violent books or prolonged exposure to violent plays will make me become the kind of person who is liable to commit violent acts. (I have referred to plays rather than films here to avoid anachronism but their views would of course apply to films in exactly the same way.)[101]

While Plato is more comfortable with society banning all art, Tolstoy wishes for artists themselves to consider the moral nature of their work. Sheppard mentions that it would be anachronistic to mention the artform of film, but Tolstoy saw the advent of film and

---

[100]The relationship between emotions and actions is explored in the next chapter, and a model of emotions, volition, and action is proposed in the chapter after that.

[101]Sheppard, *Aesthetics*, 139.

actually went to the movies.

In fact, Tolstoy's daughter Alexandra recounts her father's feelings after coming away from watching a movie she called "incredibly stupid. As we came out of the theater, Father said, 'What a powerful medium this could be in schools, to learn geography, the life of nations, but . . . they make it so trivial, like everything else.'"[102] Alexandra Tolstoy's story presents a clear case of Tolstoy encountering an artwork and wishing it had been more morally and emotionally effective.[103]

To build an aesthetics from a man's private journaling would be not only misguided but unfair. Yet reading Tolstoy's musings in his journal brings greater appreciation for his aesthetics, with his comments being trenchant and humble.[104] Tolstoy summarizes his understanding of the relationship of aesthetics to ethics when he writes, "The aesthetic is the expression of the ethical."[105] Tolstoy seems to mean that artworks are reflective of the artist's internal life, similarly to how Jesus says the "mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart" (Luke 6:45). To Tolstoy, both what the artist feels and feels to be right is shown by the artist's art.

Communion in Art

Tolstoy is concerned not only that an artwork transfers a feeling but that the feeling subsequently be appreciated for its having been *shared*. English professor Leland

---

[102]Alexandra Tolstoy, *Tolstoy: A Life of My Father*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 480. Over 100 years later, the sentiment still rings true.

[103]Emerson objects that Tolstoy "disapproved in principle of mixed-media art forms, which in his view could only muffle, and thus contaminate, the 'infectious' impulse of pure music." Caryl Emerson, "Leo Tolstoy and the Rights of Music Under Stalin," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 14 (2002): 2. Given his daughter's firsthand experience of Tolstoy attending the cinema, Emerson is likely incorrect in saying that Tolstoy would be against "mixed-media art forms."

[104]Tolstoy's private thoughts are often hilarious, as well. Tolstoy's public writing is often so deeply ironic that readers miss it; the irony present in his private writing is lighter and closer to the surface.

[105]Leo Tolstoy, *The Journal of Leo Tolstoi*, trans. and ed. Rose Strunsky (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1917), 94.

Ryken says this sharing occurs in a literary context when "in the process of reading what others have said about 'our' author, we are also reminded that literature is a social institution—a shared possession of kindred spirits."[106] This communion occurs in other artforms besides literature of course (e.g., people smiling at each other after a concert, standing side-by-side in front of a museum's painting, or even reading reviews after watching a movie). Artworks individually attempt to share feelings, and art in general offers a secondary feeling of communion; this secondary feeling of communion is important to Tolstoy.

Ross holds that Tolstoy's "theory of art is important for two major reasons. One is that he offers a theory deeply pervaded by the Russian impulse toward unification and communication."[107] The other reason is that Tolstoy "offers the strongest account available of a view of art that is held by many people—that art succeeds when it arouses and transmits emotion, when it brings people together and enriches their common humanity."[108] Clearly these two reasons are related.

Philosophy professor Milton Nahm is quick to interject that "Tolstoy intends to attribute more than mere 'infectiousness' to the experience" of art.[109] Nahm helpfully explains that

> aestheticians have discovered the value of the experience of profoundly moving art to lie either in the experience itself or the consequences. Thus, the play-theorists in aesthetic stress the valuable consequences of the experience while theorists of other schools—and Tolstoy is an instance—judge the 'communion' itself to be of first importance.[110]

---

[106]Leland Ryken, *Realms of Gold: The Classics in Christian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 226.

[107]Stephen David Ross, *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 179.

[108]Ibid.

[109]Nahm, *Aesthetic Experience*, 366.

[110]Ibid., 75.

However, it is not clear that Tolstoy would judge the communion of art as being more or even equally important as the feelings it communicates, although he certainly attributes far more importance to the communal aspect of art than other art theoreticians.

Tolstoy draws a distinction between the secondary experience of communion in art and the secondary feelings sometimes transferred by individual artworks. To make that distinction clear, Antonov and Chernyak point to the ability of artworks to create a secondary emotion, such as nostalgia, by utilizing a particular style. For Tolstoy, when an artwork references another artwork or uses a certain style just for style's sake, the resultant emotions are "only recollections of some previous infection."[111] So pleasure at catching a reference or "longing for the good ol' days" are secondary emotions that artworks can infect an audience with, but these lesser emotions are not engendered through the artworks themselves. Tolstoy distinguishes between these less authentic, secondary emotions and the truly authentic emotion stirred from sharing art with other people.

Nahm offers an explanation for the communal feeling shared by people from an artwork, arguing that the symbols used in it remind people of past success.[112] Nahm's thinking is that

> the refreshment afforded even by defective forms of art deepens the conviction that aesthetic experience enables the scientist, the moralist, the theologian, and the "common man" to face the inexhaustible difficulties of their work with a courage in itself born of the remembrance of past triumphs in the conquest of nature by science, morality, theology, art, and the endless tasks of the "common man" in assuring the stability of culture or society which presupposes his individuality. It is to the scientist, the moralist, the theologian, the artist, and the 'common man' who have gone before that fine art owes its symbols to which we, in turn, owe aesthetic experience.[113]

Here Nahm has over-complicated the origin of communion, eisegeting a mechanism of

---

[111]Antonov and Chernyak, "Art and Morality," 98.

[112]Nahm, *Aesthetic Experience*, 484.

[113]Ibid., 485.

process into Tolstoy's idea of communion that is not present.[114] Instead, Tolstoy likely means that the communion shared is a result of experiencing the feeling which the artwork engendered, not with a more broad realization that artworks sometimes play off symbols understood both by the audience and by previous audiences. For Tolstoy, even an artwork that is never seen by anyone else could stir a feeling of communion, given that if others were to see the art, their reactions would be (individualized, yes but) broadly similar.

Although Tolstoy has not stated it explicitly, the foregoing discussion shows he holds a conviction that human nature is universal. To use more modern language, Tolstoy is an essentialist. His conception of humanity is that people are generally the same. So, based on his view of human nature, Tolstoy anticipates artworks communicating the same feelings to everyone.

It is clear then that Tolstoy "sees a vital conjuncture between aesthetic excellence and popular accessibility,"[115] yet it is not just a connection *but a stipulation*. Tolstoy demands that good art be mentally accessible to all moral people. If an artwork requires prior knowledge of an artform's history, Tolstoy deems it bad. If art cannot be understood or felt by most people, it is bad. Tolstoy believes that people with perverted morality may not feel the emotions good art shares; depraved and desensitized critics may instead gravitate toward feelings shared by morally wrong art. Tolstoy then quips that morally damaged people's sense of ethics should not be relied upon to make judgments for other people.

Tolstoy's argument suffers greatly because he does not make his premises clear. It will be helpful, then, to list them: (1) After experiencing an artwork, people

---

[114]Certainly, Nahm may be correct and even if not, Nahm is touching on a great theme in aesthetics, that remembrance is a large part of art appreciation.

[115]Daniel Murphy, *Christianity and Modern European Literature* (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1997), 83.

share a sense of communion with each other, (2) This communion is a valuable by-product of art, and (3) Therefore, any artwork addressed only to a particular group of people should be rejected because of its unwillingness to allow universal communion. When these premises are listed, it becomes apparent that Tolstoy has created a stipulation out of what typically occurs in art.[116]

Beardsley acknowledges,

> Tolstoy is himself uncommunicative about the exact nature of this stipulation; he seems to be saying part of the time that a work cannot be wholly private in its appeal, restricted to a tight group, without failing to be art altogether; at other times, he seems to be saying that the work is art if it can affect someone, but not good art unless it can affect most people, or all people.[117]

Beardsley has accurately identified Tolstoy's ambiguity: it is not clear whether Tolstoy thinks art addressed to a group is bad art or whether it is not art at all. Beardsley goes on to write that Tolstoy "objects to the plea that some works of art 'are very good but very difficult to understand.' This 'is the same as saying of some kind of food that it is very good but that most people can't eat it.'"[118] Tolstoy's analogy of art to food is clever, and he uses it to highlight the large swathes of artwork he rejects.

Indeed, Beardsley rightly declares, "The most astonishing parts of *What Is Art?* are those chapters (10-15) in which Tolstoy launches a broad attack against most of the works of music, painting, literature, and drama, that have been regarded as the highest productions of Western artistic genius."[119] It has already been shown that Tolstoy rejects these artworks for their lack of universal "infection." Renowned philosopher Morris Weitz states what the vast majority of critics miss in these chapters, that "Tolstoy [is]

---

[116]Perhaps because he does not clearly state his argument, it seems to have escaped Tolstoy that he committed the is-ought fallacy. Neither have critics noticed it. Instead they attack his argument for the artworks he rejects.

[117]Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 311-12.

[118]Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (1899), 87, quoted in Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 312.

[119]Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 311.

reveal[ing] some of the moral implications of his theory for the criticism and evaluation of art, and especially of music."[120] The critics are perhaps not wrong in defending these artworks against Tolstoy, but they miss why Tolstoy rejects them.

Nobokov shares a legend about Tolstoy opening a book in the middle and reading without glancing at the title. He grows more and more intrigued in what he is reading, only to glance at the cover and see it is a work he has now repudiated.[121] In contradistinction to this legend though, it is worth remembering that Tolstoy wrote the novel *Resurrection* after *What Is Art?* came out, indicating that "even a big novel like *Resurrection*" could be permitted under Tolstoy's aesthetic as long as "it instilled emotions that would impel people to carry out . . . moral imperatives."[122]

Dukore puts it simply: "To Tolstoy, the value of art is its value to humanity."[123] So if humanity in general cannot feel something from an artwork, Tolstoy is likely to consider that attempt at art to have failed. He writes in his diary, "It is wrong to say of a work of art, 'You don't yet understand it.' If I don't understand it, that means the work of art is poor, because its task is in making understandable that which is not understandable."[124] Emerson, whose exegesis of Tolstoy in general is excellent, misses the mark here on Tolstoy's evaluation of good art. She states that Tolstoy breaks good art down into being either universally appreciable or ethically instructive.[125] Rather, Tolstoy is saying that good art is universally appreciable because it is ethical, that these

---

[120]Morris Weitz, *Problems in Aesthetics: An Introductory Book of Readings* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 612.

[121]Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1981), 140-41.

[122]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 99.

[123]Dukore, *Dramatic Theory*, 911.

[124]Tolstoy, *The Journal*, 88. Tolstoy seems to mean a kind of understanding beyond-descriptive language, an emotional awareness that could not be understood otherwise.

[125]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 241.

are two sides of the same coin, as it were.

Need for Artwork to be New

Tolstoy has one last stipulation for art, that it be "new." Tolstoy scholar Gary Morson offers a helpful analysis of what Tolstoy intended when discussing the importance of art being new. It cannot be, Morson argues, that Tolstoy simply means entirely new genres of art because that would seem to entail the avant-garde, and Tolstoy's dislike for the difficult-to-understand has just been mentioned. Morson comments, "One usually thinks of originality in avant-garde terms, which imply some daring method or form that is not accessible to ordinary people."[126] Morson also retorts that an artist's sincerity may not be as important as Tolstoy thought—in fact, it may not be important at all because "original ideas may be patently insincere, and sincere utterances are, more often than not, vapid."[127] Thankfully, however, Morson does not dismiss Tolstoy's insistence on originality and sincerity.

Tolstoy is instead insisting, says Morson, that "the prosaically new is always around us."[128] In other words, new experiences and new feelings toward objects occur regularly for people who are sensitive to them, and these experiential feelings are the stuff of art. "The new is neither grand nor dramatic, but [it is] scarcely noticeable without the right kind of attention," says Morson. "Real artists cultivate that sort of attention; they train themselves to notice the small."[129] Just as a good preacher carefully parses the text or a surgeon carefully separates organs or a philosopher carefully distinguishes between two similar but different nuances, the artist notices something new

---

[126]Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions," 136.

[127]Ibid.

[128]Ibid., 137.

[129]Ibid.

and communicates his emotional experience of that newness in his art. "This sort of responsiveness to one's own experience is what Tolstoy means by sincerity," Morson explains, and he is entirely correct.[130] Unlike Tolstoy's other points, Tolstoy's insistence on new artworks sharing what their artist-creators actually felt has not been controversial. "In short," remarks Morson," the combination of originality, sincerity, and accessibility appears paradoxical only if we look for the new in the wrong place. For Tolstoy, it is the ordinary that is truly extraordinary."[131]

The Effect of Art on Artists, Critics, Distributors, and the Public

The literary critic Marion Montgomery relates that *What Is Art?* Tolstoy "gives us a sensually palpable account of his experience of a rehearsal of a very poor opera." [132] Although Tolstoy does not discuss multi-authored art at length, he does have notoriously harsh words for this opera he witnessed. As both an artist and an enthusiastic observer of art, Tolstoy writes with prescience on what he sees as wrong with many large-scale art productions.[133] Flaccus does an excellent job of describing Tolstoy's impressions of artworks (such as opera) which require the talent of many people. In words that may as well have been describing the American movie industry, Flaccus writes

---

[130]Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions," 136. Morson may be offering a dig at the history of modern art when he writes on the same page that newness for Tolstoy "is not a new adaptation of a received artistic model, which anyone might fabricate," calling to mind the increasing abstraction then deconstruction then vulgarity of art that emerged in the West throughout the twentieth century. Painting went from multi-colored to tri-toned to two-toned to a single color to an unpainted canvas to nothing at all.

[131]Ibid., 138.

[132]Montgomery, *Romancing Reality*, 31. What Montgomery has developed here is a sober philosophical treatise on the real existence of beauty, critiquing Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* for its supposed "move toward Manicheanism" (32) and over-reliance on Hegel (76). Engaging Montgomery's argument is far beyond the scope here, but three reasons have contributed to the book eluding philosophers' response: (1) Because the book's title is unindicative of the serious philosophy contained therein, (2) because the book's cover itself is over-colorful (people certainly judge books by covers), and (3) because Montgomery's reputation as a poet and professor of literature prevents attention outside his own discipline. An article responding to Montgomery's argument would be most welcome.

[133]Again, Tolstoy does not discuss the nature of multi-authored artworks, so he avoids questions such as "Must all the people contributing to an artwork already have the same feeling they wish to infect?" or "Is it ok for some of the people contributing to an artwork not to have the shared emotion at all?" Because Tolstoy neglects these kinds of questions, the next chapter addresses them directly.

> It is selfish, exclusive, and costly. It exacts the toll of work from the many and yields pleasure and profit to the few. In its complex forms, grand opera, for instance, it is accessible to few, intelligible to fewer still, and costly out of all proportion to its value. . . .This wastefulness of modern art is tragic because the drudges of art, the printer, the stagehand, the musician, caught in a deadening routine, get nothing of the glamour of art, and because there is such a favoring of soft-living artists at the expense of really useful material.[134]

Tolstoy's impressions (and their ability to describe the American film industry) will be drawn upon in just a moment after bringing in Slavic professor Richard Hare's overview of the art world that existed around the time *What Is Art?* was written.

Hare's comments in some ways prefigure Tom Wolfe's thoughts in *The Painted Word*. First, Hare articulates that art schools at the time of Tolstoy were often "akin to that business-like religious training produced by seminaries for training priests. In these academies the most talented pupils were rarely the most gifted or sensitive, but calculating careerists rose to the top."[135] Second, Hare observes that Tolstoy realized that artists were making artworks 'steadily emptier, more meaningless to the vast majority of people," and as Hare asserts, meaningless even to the artists themselves.[136] What Tolstoy saw in the art leading up to when he wrote in 1897 and what Hare saw in the art leading up to when he wrote in 1957 troubled both of them, but the art of both those times seems substantially more meaningful than art that came after such as Pop Art, Harmony Korine's films, or John Cage's (in)famous *4' 33"*.

Having discussed the art schools and the artists they were producing, Hare writes of Tolstoy's evaluation of the art critics and broader public:

> Tolstoy considered that the jaded modern palate was ready to be tickled by any kind of fashionable snobbery, provided that it looked new and startling. Worse still, most practitioners of contemporary art had turned into an organized money-making profession, advertised by critics who were paid to keep it going.[137]

---

[134]Flaccus, *Artists*, 152-53.

[135]Hare, "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose," 185.

[136]Ibid., 184.

[137]Ibid., 185.

Thus, Tolstoy's criticism has come full circle, with the similarities to Hollywood's big-budget movies being nearly one-to-one. Sometimes it is even difficult to find critics to praise movies, forcing advertisers to invent critics[138] or trawl through social media to pull quotes from non-professional film-goers. Hare recalls that Tolstoy hoped but did not believe that "sooner or later it would dawn upon the long-suffering public that they were being doped, debauched, and swindled by their educators and entertainers."[139] In fact, Tolstoy ends his book pleading with people to rethink the direction of their culture.

The main points in *What Is Art?* have now been examined. Jahn concludes that Tolstoy's aesthetic argument is "neither unreasonably narrow nor arbitrary" and that Tolstoy's premises are "unified, consistent, and logical."[140] Malcolm Muggeridge describes *What Is Art?* for Tolstoy as "the theory of what was already his practice,"[141] and Tolstoy's rejection of famous artworks was at least consistent with his principles. Jahn argues that Tolstoy's theory was rejected in part because of Tolstoy's rejection of famous artworks[142] and even more because of Tolstoy's stringent morality.[143] That this analysis is correct should be obvious from the preceding discussion.

Philosophical Influences on Tolstoy's Aesthetic

Emerson offers an insight to understanding Tolstoy's worldview, namely that Tolstoy was enamored with the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[144] Tolstoy claims to

---

[138]"Sony to Pay Over $1.5M Over Fake Movie Critic" (August 3, 2005), accessed May 28, 2018, http://www.foxnews.com/story/2005/08/03/sony-to-pay-15m-over-fake-movie-critic.html.

[139]Hare, "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose," 188.

[140]Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory," 64. Jahn should not be taken as saying that Tolstoy's aesthetic is correct but that it is internally consistent. Examining problems with Tolstoy's aesthetic constitutes the main portion of the next chapter.

[141]Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Third Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 161.

[142]Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory," 60.

[143]Ibid., 64.

[144]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 246. Indeed, Tolstoy is reputed to have worn a locket with Rousseau's portrait in it for a period of his life, but the only source for the claim I have

have read all twenty volumes of Rousseau's writing. "I worshipped him," Tolstoy simply remarks.[145] Tolstoy scholar Thomas Barran argues that Tolstoy's treatise on art is essentially a Rousseauian politics, replete with a (violated) social contract. "The old man whom Nekhlyudov meets at the end of the novel *Resurrection*," Barran remarks, "reproduces exactly Rousseau's account of the origins of civil society."[146] Barran explains that Tolstoy's aesthetic is utopian, similarly to Rousseau's philosophy of politics. Both are utopian in that neither is predicated on humans acting as they currently do but as they should. However, although Rousseau's thinking may have influenced Tolstoy's *life* the most, scholars have noticed traces of David Hume's thinking on Tolstoy's ideas on art.

Traces of David Hume's philosophy of education and theory of morality are present in Tolstoy's aesthetic, so it is helpful to look at Hume's philosophy of education first. Philosopher of education Dorit Barchana-Lorand remarks, "In every subject taught at school, students learn, at least inadvertently, the hierarchy of value or importance of some aspects of the field of knowledge" except, Barchana-Lorand points out, in art where many people take art's value to be entirely subjective.[147] Barchana-Lorand goes on to argue that theories of art are almost always concerned with what pleases while Tolstoy's is a notable exception.[148] Barchana-Lorand comments that Hume values the cultivation

---

uncovered is Thomas Barran, "Rousseau's Political Vision and Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*" *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 5 (1992): 3.

[145]Barran, "Rousseau's Political Vision," 3. Barran remarks that he knows of two potential sources for this quote, yet I have been unable to find them.

[146]Ibid., 8. In *Resurrection* the mysterious old man, perhaps a stand-in or even cameo of Tolstoy himself, is being questioned in prison, and in response to a query about the law, he exclaims, "The law!" The old man goes on to say, "First he has robbed everybody, the whole earth, has taken away the riches of all the people, has turned it to his own uses, has beaten all such as went out against him, and then he wrote a law not to rob and kill. He ought to have written the law before." Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, trans. Leo Wiener (New York: The Heritage Press, 1963), 397.

[147]Dorit Barchana-Lorand, "Educating Sentiment: Hume's Contribution to the Philosophy of the Curriculum Regarding the Teaching of Art," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 49, no. 1 (2015): 108.

[148]Ibid., 109.

of artistic taste as the ability to detect and evaluate different executions of skill in an art form.[149] Tolstoy would not disagree, but his emphasis would be different. He would counsel not that taste needs to be cultivated by the audience as much as skill needs to be learned by the artist.

Hughes elucidates a similarity between Tolstoy's idea of communion through art and Hume's theory of morality based on sympathetic reasoning. Hughes describes Hume looking to plays for evidence of his theory of morality.[150] As the audience looks around the theatre they see other people being impacted by the performance, and their emotions are "inflamed with all the variety of passions, which actuate the several personages of the drama," according to Hume, relating a scenario which Hughes states would "describe[s] an ideal Tolstoyan theatre."[151]

Both Tolstoy and Hume's theories about the communication of emotion have been critiqued due to humanity's supposed inability to verify that the emotions communicated by the artwork are the same emotions felt by the artist. Wertz flatly asserts that these critiques of Tolstoy and Hume share one thing in common: they argue in a circle.

> "The argument . . . is that we cannot have the same, identical feeling, so Tolstoy's definition and Hume's propensity describe an impossibility, because they refer to mental states that are essentially private and unsharable. The argument begs the question and harbors Cartesian assumptions about the nature of feelings, and these [assumptions] should not go unquestioned."[152]

So thankfully, Tolstoy's aesthetic avoids the critique that audiences cannot know what artists intend to share.

---

[149]Barchana-Lorand, "Educating Sentiment," 118-23.

[150]Hughes, "Tolstoy, Stanislavski," 44.

[151]David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Briggs and P. H. Nidditch, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1975), 222, quoted in Hughes, "Tolstoy, Stanislavski," 44.

[152]Spencer K. Wertz, "Human Nature and Art: From Descartes and Hume to Tolstoy," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 32, no. 3 (1998): 76.

According to Wertz, Tolstoy is not clear whether the shared feelings of art are identical or analogical. Wertz maintains, "This important distinction escaped Tolstoy, since he was not a philosopher formally trained in the Western intellectual tradition, although he had some acquaintance with Descartes, Hume, and others in that tradition."[153] Wertz goes on to explain that Tolstoy intimates that artistic communication is direct, the content shared straight from one to another, while Hume believes that it is indirect (i.e., interpreted). One wishes Wertz was to point out a passage where Tolstoy actually says he believes it is direct, because Wertz's prior selections of passage can be read either way, as Weitz himself concedes. Wertz also admits that Hume's "conversion process [i.e., interpretation] is not without its problems, but it does have the advantage of the artwork's being understood as in need of interpretation for its appreciation,"[154] and Tolstoy's dislike of any art that requires training to be understood is certainly relevant. Fortunately, Wertz assures these problems should be bracketed since "both thinkers make it clear that what they are talking about are socially constituted feelings—not private inner feelings of an individualistic nature, but ones that come about through intersubjectivity (love, friendship, respect, esteem, and so on)."[155] Wertz concludes that Tolstoy mentions neither Hume nor Descartes in *What Is Art?* to the detriment of Tolstoy and his argument.

Emerson ably situates *What Is Art?* in the field of aesthetics, writing of Tolstoy that although

> his ideas do challenge mainstream Western aesthetics, they are not wholly outside it. A sober analysis of the art-as-infection thesis reveals that Tolstoy is not against

---

[153]Wertz, "Human Nature," 77.

[154]Ibid.

[155]Ibid. In his article, Wertz does not mention Wittgenstein's arguments about language, although he can be excused for the omission since the article concerns philosophers prior to Tolstoy, not philosophers after. Notwithstanding Wittgenstein's unabashed adoration of Tolstoy, it is unfortunate that applying Wertz's defense of Humean/Tolstoyan, shared emotions to Wittgenstein's private language argumentation rests outside the scope of work here.

> differentiation, not against individualized response, not opposed to artists perfecting their form, and not in denial against the darkness of human nature (true art can be evil while being authentic). Tolstoy's views on art have been undervalued in part because they have been misclassified. No one would consider his treatise a descriptive aesthetics of the artistic product. But it should also not be reduced entirely to an ethics. Tolstoy's aesthetics is closer to a psychology. What interests him are the psychological effects of producing and receiving art.[156]

As Emerson hints above, many have bashed *What Is Art?* for not being a descriptive aesthetics. Likewise, others have attempted to reduce Tolstoy's aesthetics down to an ethics, even as Emerson suggests. These misconceptions—and the problems of Tolstoy's aesthetic—provide the subject matter of the next chapter.

[156]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 248-49.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARD A NEO-TOLSTOYAN AESTHETIC

The previous chapter showed the mockery heaped on Tolstoy for releasing *What Is Art?* but eventually philosophers began discussing the book's actual flaws in addition to the snide remarks and *ad hominem* attacks. Some philosophers considered the book's flaws to be killers of Tolstoy's arguments. If those problems are in fact killers—and a couple of them are—then these fatal errors make it impossible to hold an uncritical, Tolstoyan aesthetic. Other problems with Tolstoy's argument do not destroy it and can simply be addressed. Philosophers, after all, have been known to smuggle unspoken assumptions into their critiques, and many of their problems with *What Is Art?* can be resolved.[1]

The solutions presented in this chapter, while in line with the latest Tolstoy scholarship, also modify Tolstoy's argument enough that they warrant being called "neo-Tolstoyan." Hare foretells the conclusions of more recent re-evaluations of *What Is Art?* when he writes that Tolstoy's

> arguments, and the examples he produced to illustrate them, are tedious and at times preposterous, [but] his purely descriptive passages are often precise and full of wisdom. Unfortunately, the habitual absurdities and overstatements…have blinded people to the valuable, wholly topical, but neglected truth which it contains.[2]

Hare is correct in these judgments, and readers' patience with the last chapter's

---

[1]Additional problems from outside the literature will also be presented in this chapter. Perhaps these difficulties are not as significant as those presented by previous scholars, or possibly the problems are so obvious that no one has seen the need to state them. Either way, modifications to Tolstoy's argument can resolve (or at least relieve) the pressure from these additional objections as well.

[2]Richard Hare, "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose the Disease of 'Modern' Art?" *The Slavonic and East European Review* 36, no. 86 (1957): 182.

delineation of occasionally outlandish ideas is greatly appreciated.

Morality as a Criterion of Art

Tolstoy offers his aesthetic from a liberal, non-orthodox Christian perspective, and subsequently *What Is Art?* suffers from gaps and problems in its understanding of moral authority. Due to these gaps and problems, the Tolstoyan aesthetic will be tweaked, trimmed, and revised to form a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic significantly strengthened by insights[3] from the Bible. The first step in creating this biblically grounded, neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic is identifying which biblical doctrine grounds art.

Any artwork attempting to display the world as it is possesses inherent moral value. Art is a secondary result of Creation, and thus both a theology and morality of art are rooted in the doctrine of Creation. A theology of art is properly grounded in the doctrine of Creation for three reasons.

First, God himself announces his creation to be "good." Everything humans were intended to do, from procreating to working to exploring, fell (and falls) under the mandate of God's authoritative proclamation designating it all as good. Insofar as the creation of art is part of human nature, creating art is morally good. Therefore, Christians should be on the alert to avoid thinking of art as "neutral." Because God sanctioned human activity, art—like work—is fundamentally good morally and only secondarily corruptible (or actually corrupted). Trying to base art in the doctrine of Incarnation or Redemption certainly accounts for humanity's fallen-ness as evidenced in certain artworks, but frankly, the immorality of those artworks is better explained *by referencing the doctrine of the Fall itself*. Art would have existed without the Fall.

The second reason art falls under the doctrine of Creation is related to the first,

[3]These insights cannot help being filtered through my own perspective as an art-friendly, theologically conservative Christian of the Southern Baptist denomination.

although different. Even if humanity had never suffered the Fall they still would have been creative, "little c" creators created in the image of their Creator. Art is therefore rooted in the doctrine of Creation because it reflects humanity's desire to commune with one another by sharing emotions through the things they create. By defining art, with Tolstoy, as anything created to share one's emotion with another, it acknowledges the inherent community implied by Genesis.

The third reason to ground art in the doctrine of Creation is because only the doctrine of Creation adequately explains the inherent "pre-createdness" of artworks. Because God created out of nothing, humanity creates from something; humanity always creates from pre-created material. The doctrine of Creation explains both the familiarity and newness of artworks perfectly well, with familiarity arising from the use of pre-existing resources and newness arising from human creativity. A professor once shared an analogy relating the Christian doctrine of art to Taco Bell, and the analogy is the best kind: both humorous and accurate. Taco Bell rarely introduces new food for sale. Instead, the most recent entrees on the menu are always combinations of other foods they already served. Likewise, human artists use the things God already created to produce things that are new only in their overall composition.[4]

---

[4]Tolstoy's definition of art is very human-centered. He does not account for the possibility of animal-created art, for example, although it is likely he would assert animals do not create things to infect others with emotion. Whether that is true, and whether animals take action to cause other animals or humans to feel a certain way is sadly beyond the scope here. Avenues for neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic research here would include consulting animal sciences to see if it is possible to determine whether animals consciously want others to feel a certain way (such as scared, enamored, or subservient) or whether they only intend to inspire a response (such as a rival fleeing the territory, a mate consenting to intercourse, or a packmate carrying out one's whims) or whether any tangible difference between animal emotion and animal action can be evidenced.

An alternative—and very intriguing—area of study for neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic research would be evidence for literal artwork created by God himself. Defining art as "anything intended to cause another person to share one's feelings" but enlarging the definition to account for God wishing to share feelings with his creation, researchers could scour Scripture for examples where the Bible states that certain things were created explicitly in order for people to feel a certain way. Careful scholarship would address both the analogical nature of humanity's feelings and the fact that God's feelings are inspired by himself, not the artworks in question (i.e., God might wish humanity to feel awe at power through stars, but any feeling God experiences toward an artwork would be a reflection of an attribute he already possesses). Clearly, these ideas for further research need to be "percolated" on carefully, responsibly, and respectfully in order to bring them to fruition.

For all his talk of Christianity, Tolstoy grounds the moral criterion for his system of aesthetics not in the Bible but in certain emotions being off-limits.[5] That certain emotions ought to be off-limits to art is not a well-founded idea, but it is shared by Friedrich Nietzsche, according to humanities professor Alina Wyman. She addresses, as an example of an emotion not worth sharing, how "Nietzsche describes pity as . . . infecting the sympathizer's consciousness with the sufferer's emotional state."[6] Fortunately, Wyman identifies the problem with Nietzsche's assessment of pity, replying, "True, active fellow-feeling respects the sovereignty of the other's suffering and thus prevents rather than spreads emotional infection."[7] Tolstoy and Nietzsche share in common the idea that certain emotions are always morally bad.

However, one is permitted to question why particular feelings are always wrong. Anne Sheppard senses the problem here as well, writing, "A good deal of the trouble comes from the fact that Tolstoy lays down in advance which feelings are worthy to be conveyed by art."[8] Perhaps without having realized it, Tolstoy has set himself up as the arbiter of legitimate emotion.

A Christian, on the other hand, looks to God's revelation both for the authority and content of what feelings are morally appropriate. Rather than determining in advance what emotions are moral, the Christian learns from reading the whole of Scripture that she has freedom to experience the gamut of emotions. For the Bible affirms people feeling emotions ranging from contentment (Ps 131) and depression (Ps 42) to anger (John 2:13-17). Even extreme emotions such as jealousy (God himself in Deuteronomy

---

[5]The previous chapter's footnotes 91-93 show referencing for eight emotions Tolstoy proscribes.

[6]Alina Wyman, "Discourse and Intercourse in The Kreutzer Sonata: A Schelerian Perspective," *Christianity & Literature* 64, no. 2 (2015): 151.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Anne D. R. Sheppard, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20-21.

6:15) and fervent erotic passion (the entire book of Song of Solomon) are celebrated in the Bible. The Bible never states that any feeling is itself sinful.

Instead, Scripture shows that what determines the morality of an emotion is its appropriateness to the situation. Put differently, feelings' ethical worth derives from their relationship to events. A few examples from the Bible make this moral grounding clear. Blazing sexual desire is not off-limits in the Bible but rather encouraged in the God-given context where it is best and most safely enjoyed: marriage. On the other hand, indulging in erotic feeling toward anyone other than one's spouse is immoral, according to Jesus in Matthew 5. In the same chapter Jesus also says that being angry enough with one's brother to shout invective at him causes one to be guilty enough to go to Hell. Jesus' own emotions in the Bible are instructive not solely because they reflect his humanity but because of how they often surprise those around him while modeling perfectly how to honor God with feelings. Reading the Bible shows that emotional reactions are morally nuanced, insofar as one's feelings can range from justified to unjustified to evil.[9]

Emerson writes as follows:

> Tolstoy is disinterested and ungenerous to obscure, transitory, hybrid, contradictory or unidentifiable emotions. Feelings that are part bliss, part baseness, part plain old dark and nameless flow do not invite lucid description. There is no place in his later theories of art for those lingering and depressing feelings that can cause genuine insecurity, terror and anxiety in us, as opposed to the straightforward impulses of hope, joy, anger, disappointment, lust, banal jealousy-feelings that can be more readily focused and discharged.[10]

A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic need not confine itself solely to feelings toward other people, and it need not confine itself to simple, easily defined emotions either. Whereas Tolstoy limits emotions only to those which he approves of, all feelings can be shared in art in the

---

[9]Likewise, jealousy becomes immoral when centered on another's possessions and erotic passion becomes immoral when directed toward someone other than one's spouse. When an emotion, such as greed, is self-defined as having an object, the Bible judges that emotion based on the appropriateness of the feeling to its subject.

[10]Caryl Emerson, "Prosaics in *Anna Karenina*: Pro and Con," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 8 (1995): 162-63.

context of biblical guidance.

As revelation of God's own thought, the Bible offers readers the opportunity to adopt God's viewpoint and feelings toward events and people. Through understanding the Bible, one not only learns what feelings are appropriate for certain situations but also how God feels toward those situations. In the Bible, however, Christians are not left alone to learn the morality of feelings and to emulate Jesus' emotional reactions; God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to assist believers even in their emotions. Johannes Kepler purportedly originated the phrase "thinking God's thoughts after him" in the study of science, and the Bible teaches Christians to feel God's emotions after him.

An instructive lesson in the training of emotions toward God-emulation comes through reading the final chapter of the book of Jonah. After he has been sitting outside the city of Nineveh to watch for its (postponed) judgment, Jonah reacts to his plant cover shriveling with such anger that he wishes to die. God personally reprimands Jonah for being more concerned about a plant withering than for the massive loss of life that would occur if Nineveh were to be destroyed. The story ends without Jonah replying, leaving the audience wondering both how Jonah subsequently felt and, more importantly, how they should feel. This story is itself a work of art, suggesting how to feel (compassionate) both about people and other living beings. God's revelation, in conjunction with and never in contradiction to his Spirit, guides people toward how to feel toward the manifold situations they encounter.

God's revelation also forms the basis of this view of human nature. Wertz recognizes that unlike some other theories of art, Tolstoy's is grounded in a view of human nature.[11] The neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic presented here shares continuity with Tolstoy because it is grounded in a view of human nature as well, but it differs because

---

[11]Spencer K Wertz, "Human Nature and Art: From Descartes and Hume to Tolstoy," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 32, no. 3 (1998): 75.

its view of human nature is grounded in Scripture. Its view of human nature takes into account humanity's Creation, Fall, and Redemption. A Christian view of art is not just linked, therefore, to Christian doctrine but rooted in it. So, Christian theologians should help artists stay synchronized to sound doctrine. Wertz affirms a Tolstoyan aesthetic viewing the arts as having

> a central role to play in education, especially moral education, at all levels and stages of human development. The arts mold us as persons who are sensitive to others because the arts allow us to enter worlds other than our own and learn to appreciate others on their own grounds.[12]

A Christian can view the shared experience of art not just as an encounter with a different worldview but the absorption of God's natural revelation.

In contradiction to this entire discussion, one may wonder legitimately about whether the broad swathe of items considered artworks under a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic actually have anything to do with ethics. One might reasonably think, along with Antonov and Chernyak, that "most abstract or decorative art displays no essential connection with morality, and realistic art, which purports only to reflect reality with maximal accuracy, does not need to care about moral effects of its works."[13] Yet art supposedly being amoral does not satisfy Antonov and Chernyak. "On the contrary," they continue," the very choice of a subject of the realistic representation may be and often is morally motivated."[14] Yet the moral purpose of the artist is not the only thing in question; the morality of the artwork itself is under consideration. Chernyak and Antonov state, "Sometimes artworks that are recognized as intentionally avoiding moralizing . . . are called pure art, but this classification presupposes that art is not

---

[12]Wertz, "Human Nature and Art," 79.

[13]Konstantin Antonov and Alexey Chernyak, "Art and Morality: Tolstoy vs. Leontiev," 97, accessed October 26, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Konstantin_Antonov/publication/306061706_Art_and_Morality_Tolstoy_vs_Leontiev/links/57af11a108ae15c76cb7f566.pdf.

[14]Ibid.

determined by any non-aesthetic value, moral in particular."[15] Kudos go to Chernyak and Antonov for noticing the circularity inherent in the idea that "moral-free" art is "pure art."

A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic recognizes that any artwork accurately displaying the world possesses moral value. So, Tolstoy is correct to see that morality not only has a place in aesthetics but that its place is as a criterion. His failure lies in mis-calibrating the moral criterion.

Many of the world's philosophers have held that art has a moral component. However, some have suggested that ethics should play no part in aesthetics, a tempting move if one does not believe that God made his creation good. Gary Jahn is one of those who has attempted to rescue Tolstoy's theory of art from its detractors by divorcing its purely aesthetic components from its moral components. Jahn describes this divorce as necessary because "moral evaluation is incompatible with a theory of art in that it provides a method of judgment which is not wholly appropriate to the thing judged."[16] Yet Jahn immediately goes on to do something very interesting. He avers that even if moral judgments can be made about art, Tolstoy's morality must be excluded. One should note the speed with which Jahn moves from saying morality plays no part in evaluating art to saying that a specific morality can play no part at all. Jahn's conversation-shifting here causes one to wonder what kind of counter-evidence (and what brand of morality) would be required to show that morality can or should play a role in art.

Shephard presents an additional problem with the removal of ethics from art evaluation. "If we removed the moral element in Tolstoy's theory we would be left with

---

[15]Antonov and Chernyak, "Art and Morality," 97.

[16]Gary Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory of Leo Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, no. 1 (1975): 60.

the claim that successful infection of a wide audience is the test of good art. Rock music would score impressively high on this test, a good deal higher than the works of Bach."[17] The unstated premise in Sheppard's argument is that since Bach is better than rock, it must be wrong to divorce ethics from aesthetics. While Sheppard's conclusion is correct, her premises are not the best way to arrive at it.

Three counter-responses can be made to Shephard's challenge: (1) Popularity and the ability to convey emotion are two separate things, (2) Rock is indeed better than Bach, and (3) Tolstoy did not speak enough about emotions fading over time. Favoring the first point, the very fact that a great deal of pop music can be blared non-stop over the loudspeakers of a mall without consumers breaking into dance, tears, thoughtful expressions, or any other apparent sign of emotional response speaks poorly of that music according to a Tolstoyan aesthetic. The immediate popularity of any artwork often reflects people's desire to be "in the know" rather than an indication that the artwork is good. In fact, fads in music, fashion, painting, and other artforms are typically looked upon with embarrassment later. Whatever their relationship to each other may be—if one exists at all—popularity and quality are certainly different things.

Responding to the second point would be accepting a comparison of genre to artist, a piece of bait that should not be bitten. One could tighten Sheppard's comparison by making it between the baroque composer Bach and a rock song-writer, but even this new comparison brings to the surface the fact that Sheppard is still comparing popularity between a musician born in seventeenth-century Germany and one born several centuries later in the United States. Plus, Sheppard has chosen Bach, one of the world's most skilled musicians, as the reference. Virtually every artform requires extensive practice, training, and talent to evoke emotion in others. So, talent, training, and practice are

[17]Sheppard, *Aesthetics*, 21.

normally necessary but not sufficient conditions for the creation of art. (One may rarely be able to create excellent art without training and practice, but that is, again, rare.) As a matter of description alone, most artists are unable to create good artworks without great amounts of training and practice. Compared to Bach's genius, most musicians will come up short. Also, Bach's genius has resulted in centuries of popularity. Thus, popularity has again been confused for the ability to evoke emotion.

The third counter-response relates to the experience of emotion over time. Tolstoy admittedly does not explore the length of time it takes for a piece of art to work emotionally on its audience, nor does he discuss the intensity of emotions over time. While feelings normally fade over time, sometimes one encounters an artwork that initially has little significance, but over coming days it continues to "stick in one's head" (e.g., Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura,* whose coldness does not initially excite but leaves a lasting impressing). Other times, one may experience a spectacle of artwork that initially overwhelms, but as one begins chewing on it one realizes unsatisfactory components that reduce the emotional effects of the artwork (e.g., blockbuster movies whose special effects temporarily mask their plot holes). So, a tentative response could be that an artwork should be judged on its long-term, emotional impact. By this criterion, an artwork which one could return to throughout one's life would be better than an artwork whose impact lasts only a short while. If true, perhaps it would explain why "oldies" is a generally positive term, suggesting that old artworks that are still enjoyable are the best of their time. If this criterion is accurate, it may also reveal that the popular phrase "stood the test of time" has a grain of truth to it, although it does not specify how much time must pass for the "test" to be complete. A combination of careful thought and empirical research would assist in determining the importance and criteria of musical impact over time.

A final note on a difficult, moral aspect of neo-Tolstoyan theory for music: It is

very difficult to argue that instrumental music stirs emotion in an audience due to it referencing something else. It is far more likely that the instrumental music itself stirs emotion. Yet if art in general stirs emotions toward subjects and an artwork's morality is judged by the emotion it expresses toward a subject, instrumental music seems to be an exception to this theory.

Perhaps it is not an exception, however, if it is remembered that art is inherently good and that instrumental music's morality is judged by its context. For played music is always played *in a context*. Jesus references this contextual morality in Matthew 11:17 when he says, "We played wedding songs, and you didn't dance so we played funeral songs, and you didn't mourn." Playing certain songs in rag-time disrespects those songs' intended emotions of seriousness, just like playing silly music at a funeral would disrespect the dead. So, in summary instrumental music is difficult for a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic to explain, but art's inherent morality and music's contextuality may offer hints toward an explanation.

Tolstoy's Insistence on Universally Understood Artworks

Flaccus is generally unsympathetic to Tolstoy's theory of art, heaping it with adjectives like "erratic,"[18] "peculiarly earnest,"[19] and "beyond a doubt disappointing."[20] In his displeasure with Tolstoy, Flaccus inaccurately portrays Tolstoy's criticism of art as stemming from a "message . . . from the masses" about "the only rational life [being] a life of faith, work, self-denial, humility, kindliness, and charity."[21] However, Flaccus misunderstands Tolstoy's starting point in art. Rebutting Flaccus' idea is simple, insofar

[18]Louis W. Flaccus, *Artists and Thinkers* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), 141.

[19]Ibid., 143.

[20]Ibid., 157.

[21]Ibid., 151.

as Tolstoy does not base the value of an artwork on "faith, work, self-denial" or the other things Flaccus mentions. (It is further puzzling that Flaccus seems to denigrate those virtues.)

Tolstoy's criteria of art have already been delineated. Tolstoy judges an artwork "by its capacity to communicate itself to universal humanity: not only to some aesthetic coterie but to all men and women however simple and humble,"[22] as Tsanoff reports. So, Flaccus' critique can be sharpened considerably by homing in on Tolstoy's insistence on the need for art to be universally felt. Tolstoy's theory has a real problem in the requirement for universal appreciation.

In fact, perhaps the biggest problem with Tolstoy's aesthetic is his view that people can naturally understand and appreciate other cultures' art. Tolstoy's English translator Aylmer Maude confirms it true that Tolstoy's "constant and conscious desire throughout the last thirty years of his life was that all men should be united in such a clear view of truth that all discord, strife, and enmity among them would end."[23] This post-millenarian hope manifests itself in Tolstoy's desire for art to be unifying. Yet Tolstoy has a frankly anemic understanding of enculturation. Tolstoy insists that an artwork must be universally understood in order to be judged as good. Given that Tolstoy was himself a well-travelled polyglot, it is surprising to discover that he believed an individual artwork—much less a broader genre or an entire artform itself—could be universally felt. While Tolstoy's insistence on the universality of art is winsomely naïve, people's common experience of disliking (or at least not understanding) other cultures' artworks seem more universal than the insistence that good art must be universal.

---

[22]Radoslav Andrea Tsanoff, *Autobiographies of Ten Religious Leaders: Alternatives in Christian Experience* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1968), 224.

[23]Leo Tolstoy, *Recollections & Essays*, trans. and ed. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1937), ix. Tolstoy's political anarchism is thus utopian, in that it hopes laws will no longer be needed due to citizens' righteous living.

Bloom senses the same problem with the need for an artwork to be universal. He admits "that rugged Tolstoyan principle is certainly supported by this moment [when Pierre realizes he loves Natasha in *War and Peace*], but we cannot forget that Lear and Gloucester conversing, one mad and the other blind, is not accessible and comprehensible to everyone, and touches the limits of art as even Tolstoy does not."[24] What Bloom has realized is that if one can present even a single exception to a universal rule, the rule is disproven. Thus, when Tolstoy mandates that art must be universal and Bloom presents an instance of art that is not universal, Tolstoy's mandate is shown to be incorrect.

Philosophy professor Wojciech Chojna takes a different tack about what is wrong with Tolstoy's insistence on universal artwork.

> For Tolstoy no interpretation is needed because feelings are transmitted clearly and directly, and all the perceiver has to do is to receive them. However, if we recollect that the feelings are conveyed by the means of signs then we need some kind of account of how feelings are transcribed and then deciphered. Tolstoy never offers such an account.[25]

While Tolstoy has been lauded both as a predecessor to semiotics and as someone who would have detested semiotics if he had heard of it, Chojna is correct that Tolstoy offers no explanation for how emotions are transmitted. Yet it is highly probable that each artform's unique genres require cultural familiarity to understand and appreciate. Therefore, the expectation that Tolstoy's aesthetic must explain how art transmits emotions is far too demanding because even the different genres of individual artforms likely transmit emotions in different ways.

Gershkovich presents another problem with Tolstoy's theory of art, but like Chojna's this difficulty can be addressed. Gershkovich's explanation of the problem she

---

[24]Harold Bloom, ed., *Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988). Professor of Russian Kathleen Parthe has uncovered drawbacks with Bloom's book, but the problems revolve around missing footnotes and apparatus, not content. Kathleen Parthe, review of *Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace*, by Harold Bloom, *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 2 (1989): 78-80.

[25]Wojciech Chojna, review of *Tolstoy's What Is Art?*, by Terry Diffey, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 3 (1988): 436.

sees is quoted here in full:

> In order to argue that the ‘'infectiousness’' of an artwork can be judged objectively, Tolstoy must posit a universal human nature, making the case that if we apprehend a work of art intuitively, purging our response of cogitation, we will all experience the very same feeling: the feeling the artist experienced and wished to express. The feeling produced by the artwork is therefore something that can be universally shared, and one can thus make a normative claim that others ought to share one’s own feeling about the artwork.[26]

A Christian view of humanity recognizes that humanity does indeed share a 'universal human nature,' because the biblical doctrine of Creation entails all people descending from Adam and created in God’s image. That humans share a common nature is not an untenable idea, even in a surrounding milieu of existentialism. Believing in a shared human nature does not force one to think that people are monolithic in their tastes, thoughts, or actions. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that humans share the same inclinations and tendencies. Additionally, Tolstoy may or may not be advocating a normative response to individual artworks as Gershkovich maintains, but insofar as people of different cultures develop different appreciations, their different responses to artforms and artworks are to be expected.

Whereas Bloom shows an exception that disproves Tolstoy’s rule and Chojna and Gershkovich bring up problems that are answerable, philosopher David Best gets to the heart of what is wrong with the mandate that all artworks be universally understandable.

> Tolstoy's confused insistence that true art should communicate itself easily to all mankind would disqualify his own works, and if it makes sense at all, would reduce the arts to banality. That no great work of art can be easily understood by all is an inevitable consequence of there being so much to be learned in and through the arts.[27]

One simply cannot understand an artform without knowledge of its broad mechanics, one

---

[26]Tatyana Gershkovich, “Infecting, Simulating, Judging: Tolstoy’s Search for an Aesthetic Standard,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 1 (2013): 120.

[27]David Best, *Feeling and Reason in the Arts* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 118.

will not understand a genre without cultural clues, and one will likely get befuddled by an individual artwork without understanding how it fits within its artform and genre's conventions. For example, a Westerner will find Kabuki theater and Afghan music quite impenetrable without prior knowledge.

Twenty-first-century ethnodoxological thought realizes that people learn to feel and understand some of the artforms of the culture(s) they grow up in through the taste and instruction of their parents, peers, and teachers.[28] However, people typically do not appreciate artforms from outside their own culture.[29] By way of illustration, one does not expect most North Americans to be aware of the African art of mask-making. Further, awareness of an artform's existence does not equate to an understanding of the artform's goals, procedures, or complexities. To illustrate with the African mask-making example, just because a North American knows that mask-making is an artform in parts of Africa does not give her the ability to understand how the masks are made nor what the multivalent purposes of the masks may be, much less the ability to gauge the quality of the craftsmanship used on the mask.[30] Finally, understanding an artform certainly

---

[28]Even in one's own culture, one cannot appreciate a parody well without being exposed to the artwork behind it. It was suggested to me that Weird Al Yankovic's music video for *Bob* could be appreciated for its palindromic lyrics but that its overarching humor would be missed by a viewer who had never seen Bob Dylan's video for *Subterranean Homesick Blues*.

[29]See Robin Harris's excellent chapter on music entitled "The Great Misconception: Why Music is Not a Universal Language," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church,* ed. James Krabill (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013), 82-89. This anthology constitutes a wonderful introduction to the burgeoning field of ethnodoxology.

[30]On the other hand, Pablo Picasso's "African period" is well known for his reference to African masks, including his famous artwork *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, a painting that engendered controversy and according to art historian Denise Murell, influenced modern art for the rest of the 1900's. Denise Murell, "African Influences in Modern Art," Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/aima/hd_aima.htm. A painter as influential as Picasso utilizing other cultures' arts would seem to put a dent in the idea that people do not intuitively understand other cultures' arts. Yet Murell recounts African artworks not actually being displayed in Europe as art but rather as cultural artefacts, and the artists who incorporated their features, including Matisse and Picasso, "knew nothing of the original meaning and function of the West and Central African sculptures they encountered." Murell goes on to admit that despite their lack of understanding, "they instantly recognized the spiritual aspect of the composition and adapted these qualities to their own efforts to move beyond the naturalism that had defined Western art since the Renaissance."

does not equate to appreciating it because knowledge and enjoyment are separate, non-coextensive categories.

So, simple exposure to artforms is not enough to appreciate them. All people are enculturated, and while their enculturation allows them to understand and appreciate some of the art they have been exposed to, other cultures' artforms often remain obtuse to them. Barchana-Lorand gives an amazing and definitive representation of the need for some acquaintance with an artform before being exposed to it:

> Imagine you are sitting in your first concert. You are aware that this is a musical performance, to be appreciated by listening to sound. The concert begins terribly, you think. What awful noise these musicians are making, especially the violinists! Would it not help to understand that before the concert begins, it is customary for the players to tune their instruments? To claim that the concert was good (or bad) you need to learn what to attend to, what consists of part of the concert. Your pleasure in the concert does not derive only from what you 'naturally' hear (e.g., a person coughing behind you), but also from what you 'artificially' learn to attend to or ignore. Likewise, when you look at a painting, the pleasure you derive depends not only on the visual image consisting in shapes and colours, but requires understanding of genre: a painting from Picasso's 'blue period' and one of his cubist paintings require different cognitive considerations. As one grows familiar with art, one learns to make more subtle and minute distinctions.[31]

Explanation of art, such as an art appreciation class or the instruction of an artist speaking in idiom the learner can understand, can cause one to understand and even be moved by artforms one was not previously familiar with, but without explanation, encountering another culture's artworks may feel as incomprehensible as a foreign language.

"The very existence of ethnomusicology," Higgins writes, "presupposes some broad conception of *music* that is applicable across cultural boundaries."[32] Higgins offers an important insight there, insofar as music is found in virtually every culture. Its existence around the globe, however, does not prescribe one's understanding of a different culture's music. In fact, Higgins' remark should be supplemented with the

---

[31]Dorit Barchana-Lorand, "Educating Sentiment: Hume's Contribution to the Philosophy of the Curriculum Regarding the Teaching of Art," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 49, no. 1 (2015): 118.

[32]Kathleen Higgins, *The Music Between Us: Is Music a Universal Language?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 23. Italics in original.

knowledge that if artforms did not require guidance to understand, there would be no need for ethnomusicology and ethnodoxology![33]

Music, and art more broadly, can be found throughout human cultures and throughout history, yet to prescribe, as Tolstoy does, that artworks should therefore be everywhere understood commits the fallacy of division. The fallacy of division occurs when one believes that just because something is true of the whole means it must be true of the parts as well. Put simply, just because art emotionally impacts people everywhere does not mean an individual artwork must be capable of impacting people everywhere. Tolstoy's claim here is analogically as impossible as commanding that all food should be everywhere enjoyed, that all language should be everywhere understood, or that all preferences should be everywhere the same. In fact, personal preference is nowhere addressed by Tolstoy, and his penchant for elevating his own preferences to universals is lamentable.

Further, Tolstoy does not speak of an artwork's popularity but instead the communion enjoyed by those who have experienced it. Yet three counter-examples suggest that Tolstoy may have confused popularity with communion: first, people flock to see some movies just because others are seeing them, second, people typically listen to "Top 40 Pop" songs only in the years others are listening to those same songs, and third, novels are judged by their "bestseller" status. These examples speak to a powerful desire to engage in the popular with others, yet this communion is tied very little to the artworks themselves as evidenced by people's lack of interest in the artworks once "their time has passed."

---

[33]Wycliffe Bible Translators in particular have used utilized ethnomusicology in their missions work. Felix Muchimba, *Liberating the African Soul* (Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2007), 122. For an early look at ethnomusicology in missions, see Russell Morse, "Ethnomusicology: A New Frontier," *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1975): 32. More recently, the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (I.C.E.) has been producing excellent research.

In fact, it is unclear that Tolstoy himself has correctly understood the communal aspects of art. Perhaps in a museum one is aware of many others having enjoyed the artwork one is enjoying, but one can conceive of a never widely seen artwork that nonetheless powerfully and morally evokes emotions—this artwork is no less art simply because of its less-viewed status. A sense of communion with others may be a possible effect of engaging an artwork, but it is not convincing to demand that communion be a necessary condition of an individual artwork.

Therefore, Tolstoy's claim that art should be universally appreciable simply does not obtain. Even the most capable polyglots and the most well-travelled art critics find themselves befuddled by artforms they have not previously encountered. In fact, history is replete with cosmopolitan art collectors neither understanding nor appreciating new art when they first encounter it; often the "old guard" dismisses newer genres simply because it does not understand them (as Tolstoy himself did).

Nonetheless, Tolstoy's desire for artworks to be understood and enjoyed everywhere is appealing, as he insists that all people have the capacity to appreciate art and deserve to be able to enjoy art. When situated in the constellation of Tolstoy's beliefs about the universal brotherhood of man, the appeal of communion through art is made even more understandable. Ultimately, however, Tolstoy commits the logical fallacy of division by asserting that since art is universal, an individual artwork must be universal as well.[34]

Tolstoy's Rejection of His Own Art

Gershkovich introduces a third set of problems for Tolstoy, stating,

> Tolstoy is no destroyer of aesthetics. But his quest for an objective aesthetic standard is not without casualties. His desire to distinguish aesthetic experience

[34]Mark Coppenger has wondered in conversation with me if Tolstoy may be reasoning in a circle as well, thinking art must be universal because it appeals to all people.

> from pleasure and his attempt to expunge all concepts and calculations from his account of aesthetic perception leads Tolstoy to some rather questionable and self-contradictory conclusions.[35]

Perhaps the most famous of these self-contradictory conclusions is Tolstoy's rejection of his own earlier art (his novels). In a section about universal music, Tolstoy offhandedly includes an endnote wherein he disavows virtually all his fiction. The relegation of his renunciation to an endnote[36] causes one to suspect either that Tolstoy did not anticipate his comment creating an uproar or simply no longer cared for his earlier works.

Yet Tolstoy's claim that many of his artworks do not meet his standards of good art has been widely—nearly universally—criticized, and this criticism has been subsequently used more than any other to dismiss Tolstoy's aesthetic. The critics' concern does not constitute an illogical line of thinking, since when the premises of an argument lead to a false conclusion, then at least one of the premises must be false. Some of Tolstoy's works, such as *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, are certainly great art, and therefore, Tolstoy's conclusion that most of his own artworks were bad art indicates that Tolstoy's argument suffers at least one mistaken premise.[37] So teasing out that problem and subsequently either excising or correcting it is important.

Tolstoy rejected his earlier art for two known reasons (and a third one speculated below). The main reason is because Tolstoy believed his earlier works were not universally approachable. Of course, that is a shocking claim considering "numerous Tolstoy scholars . . . have testified to the success with which Tolstoy achieved his ideals of artistic excellence and popular accessibility."[38] The principle of universality is rooted

---

[35]Gershkovich, "Infecting, Simulating, Judging," 136.

[36]Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 198.

[37]Few critics take into account Tolstoy's bravery, as renouncing one's earlier works is typically looked upon as a sign of humility and wisdom. Tolstoy is not lauded with the same attribute of courage given, say, to scholars who concede their earlier thinking was wrong.

[38]Daniel Murphy, *Christianity and Modern European Literature* (Portland, OR: Four Courts

for Tolstoy in emotional situations that all people can relate to, and Tsanoff explains what Tolstoy made of it.

> Tolstoy applied this principal in a radical and negative rejudgment of traditionally proclaimed literary and artistic masterpieces, and of his own works also; discarding *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* and saving only stories . . . communicating the very slightest feelings common to all men [or] . . . transmitting feelings of love of God and our fellowmen.[39]

Tolstoy supposedly rejected his great novels due to fear that everyday people could not understand their stories about the upper class, but given how widely appreciated Tolstoy's novels were in his own lifetime, one has good reason to suspect that Tolstoy's criterion of universal comprehensibility was not the sole motivation for his disavowal of them.

Although Tolstoy rejects these works of art because of their exclusivity, Malcolm Muggeridge offers additional insight into why Tolstoy rejected them. Muggeridge recounts that "in *War and Peace* he explored power, the appetite of the will, and in *Anna Karenina* carnality, the appetite of the flesh; two passions whose destructive consequences he had experienced himself." [40] Since Tolstoy had been wrapped up in both power and illicit relationships, Muggeridge contends that Tolstoy "was not being hypocritical when he insisted that he looked back on the books with distaste. . . . At the same time, he was perfectly well aware that merely to have contented himself with writing a moral treatise on the devastations of power on the collectivity, and of carnality on the individual, would not have served his purpose."[41] Artists inevitably view their artworks differently from audiences because artists remember the contexts of creation. Tolstoy's memories likely interfered with his ability to judge his own art. Indeed, it seems that their moral components (or perhaps more accurately, his self-understanding of

---

Press, 1997), 83.

[39]Tsanoff, *Autobiographies*, 224-25.

[40]Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Third Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 161.

[41]Ibid., 161-62.

his moral stature at the time of writing them) sparked his renunciation of them as well.

Art critics decided that any aesthetic which abrogated the most lauded works of one of the century's most heralded novelists must be so defective as to be beyond redemption, and they summarily dismissed Tolstoy's aesthetic without further examination. The dismissal of Tolstoy's aesthetic continued throughout most of the twentieth century. Yet Tolstoy's repudiation of his novels constitutes an action consistent with his aesthetic, and therefore even if he is wrong in this area, Tolstoy cannot be accused of being inconsistent. It is helpful to hear Tolstoy's reasoning in his own words. In response to a solicitation for an autobiography, Tolstoy expressed his keenness to create one that detailed his many faults, flaws, and weaknesses, writing "I think that such an autobiography, even though very defective, would be more profitable to men than all that artistic prattle with which the twelve volumes of my works are filled, and to which men of our time attribute an undeserved significance."[42] Tolstoy further describes his own writing of the prior, autobiographical story *Childhood* as being done "in such an insincere literary style" due to "being under the influence of two writers who at that time strongly impressed me: Sterne (*Sentimental Journey*) and Topfer (*Bibliotheque de Mon Oncle*)."[43] In these explanations, Tolstoy hints at the moral reasons (e.g., sugar-coating, imitation, insincerity) for why he is uncomfortable with most of his earlier art.

Tolstoy may have renounced so much of his art for a third reason, as well. English professor Gwendolyn Blume has produced research indicating that when Tolstoy was initially introduced to English audiences, the elite preferred to read Tolstoy in French, thereby maintaining their sense of superiority over the masses who were learning

---

[42]Leo Tolstoy, *Leo Tolstoy, His Life and Work: Autobiographical Memoirs, Letters, and Biographical Material,* ed. P. Biriukov (New York: C. Scribner, 1906), xxv.

[43]Ibid., xxvi. Laurence Stern was popular for his books' meandering narrative structures, and Rodolphe Toppfer, known as the father of comic books, wrote *Library of My Uncle* from the viewpoint of a boy experiencing his first infatuation.

to read—but only in English.[44] Whether Tolstoy knew of the situation in England is unknown, but one can be certain that this use of his artworks disgusted him if he did know. The maintenance of class divisions and the arrogance which contributed to those divisions appalled him, and if Tolstoy knew his books were being used for that purpose, it almost certainly contributed toward his renunciation.

Tolstoy's Rejection of Well-Regarded Artworks

Tolstoy not only rejected a great deal of his own art but also a great deal of the world's most celebrated art. Jahn wonders "how, given such an apparently generous aesthetic basis, he managed to arrive at such narrowly sectarian and often absurd conclusions."[45] Beardsley echoes this thought, adding not only that Tolstoy's own writings did not meet his standards, but neither did those of other famous artists. Beardsley explains, "If Shakespeare and Beethoven do not hold up on his theory of art, this in itself seems the best possible *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory. But Tolstoy's arguments must be met, if they can be met, on more basic grounds, and we must try to be as clear as we can about what he actually claims."[46] Tolstoy rejected these great artworks for the same reasons he rejected his own artworks, primarily for their seeming lack of universality and secondarily for their questionable morality.

Tolstoy's complaints are overblown, but William Scott makes the interesting point that certain literary artworks do not transcend their native language well. "Keats

---

[44]Gwendolyn J. Blume, "The Reader-Brand: Tolstoy in England at the Turn of the Century," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53, no. 3 (2011): 322. Blume posits not only that authors create expectations in their writing of the readers but that publishers themselves create a "reader brand" which describes the supposedly ideal reader and subsequently helps readers determine what books they should purchase. Publishers then, create "aspirational reader-brands" which may not reflect the actual readers but rather the way readers wish to view themselves (321).

[45]Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory," 64.

[46]Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1975), 311.

and Tennyson and Rossetti, in a great part, are indigenous," according to Scott.[47] When a writing is more enjoyable for its style than its content, people who do not read the language it was written in will likely get far less out of its translation. When the appeal of the story, descriptions, and dialogue are based in meaningful content, the resulting translation will be closer to the author's original intention than if the translator is trying to match linguistic oddities in the source language to counterparts in the target language.

Emerson explains Tolstoy's dislike of Shakespeare in detail. This explanation is particularly helpful because Shakespeare's name is so equated with master playwriting that to accuse him of overblown poetry must seem an unconscionable attempt simply to besmirch. Yet Tolstoy did not just dislike Shakespeare for the well-known wordplay. Tolstoy abhorred Shakespeare's penchant for making his characters wax poetic even in the throes of murder or other highly immoral situations. "In certain situations, eloquence cannot go on," writes Emerson. "Words cannot be allowed to 'pretty up' a deed and make it seductive, stunning, adorned with glittering turns of phrase."[48] Conservative Americans speak disapprovingly of "glorifying violence," and it seems clear that if Tolstoy heard this sentiment, he would agree with it.

Tolstoy's proclamations that many famous artworks were actually bad has, in a few cases, been met with subsequent agreement. Hare admits that "While Tolstoy's hatred of Wagner was derided at the time, he is not so far removed from the contemporary view, which has long since taken Wagner down from his high nineteenth-century pedestal."[49] The frustrating thing about Tolstoy here is that he admits his taste may have become corrupt over time, but he also seems to conflate the matter of whether

---

[47]William Thompson Scott, *Chesterton and Other Essays* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1912), 127.

[48]Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy on Stage: The Power of Darkness at La Mama, March 4-7, 2010," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 22 (2010): 120.

[49]Hare, "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose," 186.

an artwork moved him with whether it would move anyone else. This conflation resulted in incidences that frankly should have embarrassed him.

Because of his fame, Tolstoy once got to listen to Tchaikovsky's music performed while sitting next to Tchaikovsky himself, and "Tolstoy deeply gratified the composer . . . by dissolving into tears."[50] Emerson shares a fascinating and insightful tidbit from Tchaikovsky's diary, where Tchaikovsky recounts talking with Tolstoy and the surprise Tchaikovsky felt when Tolstoy unashamedly disregarded Beethoven's music. "This is a trait not usually inherent in great men," Tchaikovsky writes. "To bring down to the level of one's one *lack of understanding* a genius acknowledged by everyone is a quality of *limited people*."[51] Many scholars have shared Tchaikovsky's puzzlement at Tolstoy's being a great artist yet dismissing amazing artwork solely due to his lack of understanding it.

Emerson suggests Tolstoy's view of art may ultimately be more dangerous to artists than Plato's, for "Plato's mandate to exile the 'intoxicated poets' from the ideal Republic . . . was merely a political act undertaken in defense of civic virtue. Tolstoy, much more radically, would constrain and exile the arts as practiced in his day to defend natural virtue."[52] Emerson sees that Plato is concerned with art's effect on society while Tolstoy focuses first on art's effect on an individual. Contra Emerson however, Tolstoy never advocates government control. Rather, he wishes for artists to think carefully about their own work before creating it. Once one understands Tolstoy's fierce thoughts about the morality, universality, and unreality of art, his renunciation of so many

---

[50]Caryl Emerson, "Leo Tolstoy and the Rights of Music Under Stalin," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 14 (2002): 10.

[51]Ibid., 13. Italics in original.

[52]Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics: A Harmony and Translation of the Five Senses," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 12 (2000): 13. Tolstoy worked under the state censor and commonly saw his works published in foreign languages years before they were published in Russia. Tolstoy did not advocate for state censorship, instead urging artists themselves to pursue moral art.

artworks becomes understandable. Insofar as he did not want to tempt other people to sin and believed that his art did tempt others to sin, his previous creation of that art did not preclude his dismissal of it.

Tolstoy's Ideal Audience and a Neo-Tolstoyan Ideal Audience

The difference in the audience's role between a Tolstoyan perspective and reader-response hermeneutics is critically important. Reader-response hermeneutics tasks the reader with creating a text's meaning, whereas the traditional model of reading tasks the reader with understanding what the text means. Katherine Thomson, a philosopher of film at Oberlin College, announces that "a controversial feature of Tolstoy's theory . . . is the role given to the audience in determining the status and value of artworks."[53] Unlike reader-response hermeneutics, the audience to Tolstoy is not determining what the artwork means; rather, they are judging its value. Demanding the audience determine an artwork's purpose, as in reader-response hermeneutics, gives the audience a task it cannot sustain. Furthermore, it gives authorly power to those who will use it to misappropriate others' creations. So, examining the role people should play in responding to an artwork is an important part of any aesthetic.

To accomplish the task of identifying an audience's role, the notion of an ideal audience proves helpful. For Tolstoy, an artwork's ideal audience is determined by what they do. They dissect the emotion placed by the artist in her artwork, judge the success of that attempt to convey emotion, and determine whether the artwork's emotion toward its subject is moral. Tolstoy's thinking here offers an excellent start, but additional nuance is needed because an ideal audience is not just determined by what they do but by who they are. In developing a conception of who they are, it helps to think first about

---

[53]Katherine Thomson, review of *Tolstoy on Aesthetics: What Is Art?*, by Howard O. Mounce, *Mind* 112, no. 445 (2003): 163.

what an ideal audience is not.

One can imagine going to hear Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* but being sick and not appreciating it near so much as if one were healthy. Likewise, one could imagine that a person who felt out of sorts due to an argument with a loved one would not be in the right frame of mind to appreciate much art. So, Tolstoy is wrong about an ideal audience: the ideal audience is neither a universal peasant nor an amalgamation of the least-educated people. Instead, the ideal audience for one genre will be different from another genre. In fact, individual artworks themselves may have an ideal audience existing in a one-to-one ratio with their actual audience if the artists specifically created the artworks for people they know.

An ideal audience must have a sufficient amount of prior knowledge in a genre to know its precedents, conventions, usage of symbols, and signals of craftsmanship. Of course, no one is pretending an audience cannot appreciate or be moved by an artwork if the audience is less-than-ideal. Rather, the concept of an ideal audience exists solely to clarify what is needed to *judge an artwork's success*.

The ideal audience for any genre need not be complicated or elitist. An example of an ideal audience for an American sitcom should not be more complex than the audience having watched enough previous sitcoms to know what to expect. Conversely, a person who exclusively watches sports and war documentaries would not be part of an ideal audience to judge that sitcom, even if he were an American. That person might immensely enjoy the sitcom or immensely dislike it, either of which is fine, but because he is not familiar with the genre, he will not know how the sitcom is breaking with traditions of sitcoms, referencing other sitcoms, or using sitcoms' conventions. Because sports and war documentaries are created in vastly different environments than a sitcom, he will not be able to judge with certainty whether the sitcom is well-made.

In sum, the neo-Tolstoyan ideal audience can be conceived of as culture-

specific people acquainted enough with the genre that encompasses the artwork in question to be able to properly experience and judge the artwork's evocation of emotion and the moral quality of that emotion. The difference here, between a neo-Tolstoyan view and Tolstoy's view, lies solely in whether people have an inherent ability to understand a genre without previous exposure to it. Still, both Tolstoyan and neo-Tolstoyan aesthetics retain the similarity of insisting the audience's role is to decipher, not determine, an artwork's emotional meaning and then judge its success in communicating that emotion.

Art, Agency, and Censorship

Emerson alleges that Tolstoy does not draw a correlation between art and play (like many scholars do) but between art and work.[54] In this context Emerson sees Tolstoy complaining, "Art schools and lessons not only squander money but cripple children physically and morally."[55] Tolstoy does not just believe art education damages people's artistry, Emerson shows, but that it damages people's very characters.[56] So, art can be immoral not just for the feelings it conveys but also for evil actions it spurs people to take, if art can be shown to be responsible for those actions. How responsible art is for those actions is, of course, highly debated, and Tolstoy fell on the side of the spectrum that insists on art's ability to motivate people to action.

Philosopher professor Melvin Rader explains that "Tolstoy took the extreme stand he did partly because he appreciated so vividly the power of art to mold human character."[57] Rader's explanation of what underlay Tolstoy's position is certainly correct.

---

[54]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 246.

[55]Ibid., 247.

[56]Ibid. Tolstoy here sounds like the art critics who decry the effects of kitsch.

[57]Melvin Rader, ed., *A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), 32.

Those who wish for anyone—in Tolstoy's case, the artist—to regulate their artworks are not those who feel art is not powerful. Rather, art censors believe in its power the most. Tolstoy was not so extreme as to call for state censorship or association-based censorship, but he believed art emotionally moves people (by definition) and that people are likely to indulge in the activities to which art encourages them.

The other, far side of this spectrum replies that art has very little power to effect action. Some pundits looking at school shootings in twenty-first-century America, insist there is no connection between school shootings and the violence portrayed in movies and simulated in video games. Echoing an argument made by present-day film producers and the distributors of violent video games, Sheppard announces, "the effects of art are neither so certain nor so direct" as to lay blame for violence on art.[58] She goes on to note that the responses to violent artworks vary immensely, ranging from temptation to act violently to repulsion to catharsis to being "left unmoved, neither attracted nor repelled."[59] That people have different responses to artworks is a point worth granting. Sheppard's argument is not finished however, admitting that Tolstoy's view "would still be persuasive if it could be shown that certain works had morally corrupting or improving effects not on everybody but on most people" or even some people.[60] Yet Sheppard then argues that a long-term study exposing people to violent artworks then tracking their violent impulses and actions would be "the only satisfactory way" to determine the life impact of violent artworks.[61] She goes on to declare, "It is just as difficult to assess whether good art has a morally improving effect" before concluding,

---

[58]Sheppard, *Aesthetics*, 139.

[59]Ibid., 140.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid. Sheppard admits, of course, that such a study would be highly immoral.

"We cannot make simple generalizations about the moral effects of art."[62]

Tolstoy would find this view of art anemic. The judgement of an artwork's morality should not be based solely on its real-world effects but its moral proclivities, just like one would judge a speech encouraging people to kill police regardless of whether the people who heard the speech afterward went out to kill law enforcement officers or not. Films need not glorify school shootings in order to facilitate school shootings; infecting children with positive feelings toward violence may be enough to cause some kids to enact violence themselves.

Taking a middle-ground approach on "how the subject matter of literature influences a reader," Leland Ryken looks back to the sixteenth century and Sir Philip Sidney, the celebrated English poet of that time.[63] Ryken approves of how Sidney illustrates the evocativeness of art with a chess piece called a "bishop" but that "he were a very partial champion of truth that would say we lied for giving a piece of wood the reverend title of bishop."[64] Ryken approves of Sydney's quote as an example of how works of art "infect the fancy with unworthy objects."[65] Ryken seems sympathetic to the idea that art is powerful—even very powerful—but not capable of literally taking agency away from people. Ryken is correct here. Art enthralls metaphorically not literally.

Sheppard adds one more relevant point, namely, that art-caused, worldview changes in "mature adults [are] reduced by the fact that their characters are largely

---

[62]Sheppard, *Aesthetics*, 141. Philosophers will accurately see the argument about art's effects on people as being reflective of the age-old dispute between Plato and Aristotle on art's proper place in a society. While Tolstoy is far more sympathetic to Plato's concerns about art, Tolstoy resists Plato's state-sponsored censorship as a solution, likely due in part to his experience of Russia suppressing his publishing (*What Is Art?* itself was published abroad before Tolstoy's own country approved it).

[63]Leland Ryken, *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 160.

[64]Philip Sidney, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. by Robert Kimbrough. 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 137.

[65]Sidney, *Selected Prose*, 138, quoted in Ryken, *Windows*, 160.

formed. It has a far more powerful influence on children and adolescents whose moral characters are still developing,"[66] and that statement is surely true. Far more than adults, children soak up the emotions, attitudes, and messages of art as how they should feel, so wise parents protect their children from art that is immoral, frightening, sexual, or otherwise inappropriate for them to process.

Yet a good deal of immoral music and film is aimed at children in the twenty-first century West, and teenagers are easily able to bypass safeguards intended to keep those artworks out of the reach of younger children. Novelist Stephen King weighs in, referring to one of his novels as "a possible accelerant" for school shooters, saying "You don't leave a can of gasoline where a boy with firebug tendencies can lay hands on it," and King voluntarily quit selling the book after four school shooters had been known to read it.[67] Likewise, the murderers at Columbine "were completely soaked in violence: in movies like *Reservoir Dogs,* in gory video games that they tailored to their imaginations,"[68] and they wondered whether Quentin Tarantino or Steven Spielberg would make a film about their lives.[69] In none of these five school shootings were the murderers zombified or hypnotized by art to murder students and teachers. By their own behavior or admission, however, they were not only infected by feelings of glory toward violence but decided to replicate that violence to feel glory themselves. Given the ease of access to immoral art and how deeply children respond to it, it is reasonable for parents to desire and act in such a way that their children will not be exposed.

---

[66]Sheppard, *Aesthetics*, 152.

[67]Tyler McCarthy, "Why Stephen King's School Shooter Book 'Rage' is Out of Print, and a Copy Costs $500" (May 14, 2018), accessed May 15, 2018, http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2018/05/14/why-stephen-kings-school-shooter-book-rage-is-out-print-and-copy-costs-500.html.

[68]Nancy Gibbs and Timothy Roche, "The Columbine Tapes," *Time,* (December 12, 1999), 3, accessed June 19, 2018, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,35870-3,00.html.

[69]Gibbs and Roche, "The Columbine Tapes," 1.

So, Hare is correct in responding that "art, whether for good or evil, exerts a far stronger formative influence on human minds and characters than any number of prosaic facts, and therefore motivates human conduct far more profoundly than is either known or admitted."[70] Advertisers understand the power of art to spur emotion, and their enormous spending to place brands in artworks shows their belief here literally to pay. Tolstoy's conclusions still hold: art can and should be judged for the emotion it attempts to stir toward a subject, but art cannot force people to act.

Additional Objections to Tolstoy's Aesthetic

Emerson thinks that accusations against Tolstoy's aesthetic broadly rest in two categories, sometimes resulting from a misunderstanding the reader has[71] and other times springing from a misunderstanding Tolstoy himself has, and in both cases his over-forceful writing exacerbates the misunderstandings. To be clear, Tolstoy adequately addresses some of these objections, but others require the development of a neo-Tolstoyan response. The first serious objections were brought by philosophers C.E.M. Joad and Robert Sharpe.

The Objections of C. E. M. Joad and Robert Sharpe

Joad, in the controversial style for which he was known in his time, writes of Tolstoy's aesthetics, "It is not possible to refute extreme positions of this type by logical argument, any more than it is possible to disprove the somewhat similar hypothesis of the solipsist in metaphysics."[72] However, Joad subsequently backs away from *ad hominem* and levels his primary critique at Tolstoy. His critique is that Tolstoy's reduction of

---

[70]Hare, "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose," 181.

[71]Orwin, *Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, 245. Emerson also proposes that "Tolstoy would not be surprised by these objections," a remark both respectful and accurate (245).

[72]C. E. M. Joad, *Matter, Life, and Value.* London: Oxford University Press, 1929, 268.

beauty from an objective value to subjectivity denies the meaning of beauty itself. Joad's argument deserves more space than can be allotted here, but an initial response is that Tolstoy is not concerned with beauty at all because he grounds art in the sharing of emotion. Plus, the alternative Joad proposes is a grounding of beauty in Plato's Forms,[73] a solution many will find unsatisfactory not least because Joad claims that only a perfect mind could understand beauty.[74]

Sharpe boldly contends that "the criticisms I shall make can easily be generalized so as to provide a case against any form of Expressionism; amongst philosophers of art the theory is very much passé."[75] It is not clear that being passé is enough reason to reject a theory.

However, Sharpe does proceed to offer three criticisms.[76] Sharpe's three criticisms are that (1) artists are often dead so they cannot be asked what they felt, (2)

---

[73]Joad, *Life, Matter, and Value*, 275-280.

[74]In his last years of life, Joad became convinced that the Bible's view of the world described humanity and its plight better than any other religion, and he became a Christian, having been particularly influenced by C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*. Joad wrote his final book, *The Recovery of Belief* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1952) to lay out both the circumstances which had prevented him from becoming a Christian and the reasons he converted. *The Recovery of Belief* finds a much-chastened Joad, who still resonates with Platonic thought, yet writes with far more humility than before. While Joad believes that some lesser feelings, such as a dislike of beetroot, are still ultimately incommunicable (98-99), he now claims that a more important feeling, such as the "feeling associated with religion," is communicable because "that to which it relates is in principle both comprehensible and explicable, even if we can never wholly comprehend or adequately explain it" (102). So, Joad has not abandoned his beliefs in a Platonic explanation of the world, but he has softened considerably and views defending belief in God as more important than holding a particular philosophical view.

[75]Robert Sharpe, *Contemporary Aesthetics: A Philosophical Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 99. Like Sharpe, some authors have labelled Tolstoy's aesthetic to be a theory of "expressionism." This designation muddies the waters by confusing the artist's attempt to express herself with her intention to cause another person to feel the same way she does, and Tolstoy himself maintains that art "is not the expression of man's emotions by external signs." Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (1899), 43. Additionally, since Expressionism refers to the genre of painting, the term's already-existent usage ought to take precedence.

[76]Technically, Sharpe also offers a fourth criticism: that Tolstoy confuses sensations (such as nausea) with emotions (such as jealousy). Robert Sharpe, *Contemporary Aesthetics: A Philosophical Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 98-99. Tolstoy, in fact, delineates the difference, attesting that the blast of a single note on a powerful organ might bring a bystander to tears but that eliciting a physiological response does not make something art. Instead, the reaction must be emotional, not physiological. Because Sharpe states that Tolstoy believes the opposite of what Tolstoy states, the fourth criticism will not be addressed further.

"the Expressionist thesis that art is particularly expressive of the mental state of its creator cannot serve as a criterion of art," and (3) artists often do not feel the emotions they are attempting to communicate in their artworks.[77] The previous chapter presented Wertz's defense of Hume's theory of communication and how Wertz shows the first criticism above to be founded on a circular argument. So, no additional elaboration on Wertz's response is needed for Sharpe's first objection, and instead Sharpe's second criticism can be addressed.

Sharpe, however, does not offer additional—indeed, any—reason to believe his second objection, and it is frustrating to be told what to believe without consideration of why. However, humanities professor Alan Goldman voices the same criticism as Sharpe, thinking Tolstoy is claiming that the expression of an emotion causes others witnessing that emotion to feel it too. Goldman believes Tolstoy envisions art as, for example, an actor's crying causing the audience to feel sad. Goldman then rebuts that idea.[78] Yet seeing an actor cry may also cause the audience to feel contempt, disdain, awkwardness, rage, or even amusement, depending on what the actor is crying about. So, when Goldman announces, "Music is an expression by the composer of his emotion (what Tolstoy's theory held to be literally true),"[79] Goldman may be right about some music, but he is wrong about what Tolstoy meant.

Tolstoy is certainly not saying that artwork expresses artists' mental state, nor is he even saying that artwork is intended to express artists' emotional state (this latter concept essentially being Veron's theory). Rather, Tolstoy stresses that art is created to cause the audience to share an emotion. Artists create powerful emotion not by

---

[77]Sharpe, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 112.

[78]Alan Goldman, "Emotions in Music (A Postscript)," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 1 (1995): 66.

[79]Ibid.

telegraphing a feeling to the audience in advance but by creating an artwork that places the audience in a position to experience the feeling naturally. If Tolstoy is not clear here, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic should still stipulate that an artwork need not be a symbol, sign, or expression of the intended emotion.

While Tolstoy is clear that an artwork causes the audience to feel the intended emotion, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic further insists that the artwork's subject or content does not necessarily match the intended emotion. One could certainly imagine an on-the-nose artwork such as a massive, lavender, color field painting with the title "CALM," and looking at the artwork itself would likely make one feel calm. That artwork would be an example of art causing the audience to feel the emotion depicted, *a la* Goldman's conception of Tolstoy. Yet art is capable of far more varied emotional transmission that that. One can recall Picasso's *Guernica* whose depictions of frightened, hurting people do not make the viewer feel frightened or hurt but instead sympathetic. The movie *Brazil* creates a feeling of oppressed injustice through depicting an uncaring bureaucracy, and in both *Brazil* and *Guernica* the artists are not intending the audience to feel the emotions depicted (uncaring and hurting, respectively) but instead to catch the feelings of oppression and injustice.

Although the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin never directly addresses Tolstoy's aesthetics, Emerson offers the provocative suggestion that Bakhtin shared a variant of Sharpe and Goldman's objections. According to Emerson, Bakhtin may have believed the audience "should strive not to duplicate another's emotions but, rather, to assume an attitude toward them, to respond to them in a different and supplementary way."[80] An important implication of Bakhtin's belief must be shared here: Resisting an artwork's intended effect still *requires recognition of the artwork's intent*. Thus, the

---

[80]Caryl Emerson, "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 100, no. 1 (1985): 73.

initial purpose of the artwork remains, regardless of one's mental or emotional struggles with it afterwards.[81]

Sharpe, Goldman, and Bakhtin's misunderstanding here offers the opportunity to emphasize that a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic provides for artworks that are *not* literal expressions of the emotion they infect the audience with; rather, artworks are capable of intentionally sharing an emotion separate from the one expressed "on the surface." A quick story makes this kind of emotional conveyance clear: A bumbling protagonist stumbles through the desert into a gang of bad guys, all of whom begin to run away despite outnumbering the hero. When it turns out that a lion is walking behind the protagonist, the audience feels neither the bad guys' fear nor the protagonist's pride at scaring the bad guys but instead humor—exactly what the story intends. This story provides an example of the overall emotion being separate from any feeling portrayed by the characters.

To put the same concept differently, an artwork's total effect is what the artist intends for the audience to take from it. An artist may express one emotion in part of an artwork solely as buildup to the artwork's total effect. For example, music scholar Scott Burnham writes that when critics first encountered Beethoven's *Heroic Symphony*, they "could not hope to interpret the details of the ongoing temporal flow of a piece without knowledge of the whole, without a perspective that closes off the work as a whole. Repeated hearings became necessary, and critic-analysts increasingly tried to survey and judge works from the standpoint of the whole."[82] Audiences seem, almost intuitively, to know that they are not supposed to identify with every aspect of an artwork but rather

---

[81]Emerson's writing suggests Bakhtin has an attitudinal position toward Tolstoy that may not be explicitly contrarian but is at least reflective of the ambivalence he felt toward Tolstoy as a moralist and author. Emerson thinks Bakhtin may have adopted the very stance toward Tolstoy's theory of art that he felt toward Tolstoy as a person.

[82]Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

with the emotions that the artist is guiding them toward. So, audiences generally know not to exult just because the villain is exulting, not to swoon when a love interest is being swept off her feet by the wrong guy, and not to be afraid just because the comic relief is frightened. An artwork's emotional effect is not necessarily the emotion getting expressed in any one aspect of the piece but rather in the totality of the artwork.[83] While some artworks indeed express only one emotion, other artworks display numerous feelings intended to catch the audience in a more nuanced, emotional array.[84]

Sharpe's third accusation, that artists may not feel the emotion(s) they are attempting to communicate in their artworks, deserves to be addressed carefully. Artists act somewhat hypocritically when they intentionally create artworks to produce feelings that they as artists never felt toward the content.[85] Fortunately, hypocrites do not prove to be a problem for the theory. Indeed, the problem with hypocrites lies with their hypocrisy, not with a theory of art. A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic is thus able to sidestep the problem of hypocrites as easily as most theories do. Yet Sharpe's accusation certainly applies to more than hypocrites, and therefore it must be addressed, even in its most complicated permutations.

Sharpe is particularly aware of the time-delimited nature of emotions. In other words, emotions cannot be felt indefinitely; they wax, wane, and sometimes disappear. (In fact, it can be frustrating to resolve not to forget a feeling only to realize some time

---

[83]Perhaps the worst problem of Derrida's project of deconstruction is not that it neglects the original artist/author's purposed effect but that it disrespects the artist/author by elevating an aspect of the work not intended to be the focus.

[84]Evelyn Waugh's novel *Labels* (London: Duckworth, 1974) remains a humorous example of the total emotional effect of an artwork with lines like "I do not think I shall ever forget the sight of Etna at sunset; the mountains almost invisible in a blur of pastel grey, glowing on the top and then repeating its shape, as though reflected, in a wisp of smoke, with the whole horizon behind radiant with pink light, fading gently into a grey pastel sky. Nothing I have ever seen in Art or Nature was quite so revolting" (169).

[85]Of course, when people attempt to make their living from creating art, they often encounter financial situations that test their character, whether a painter is offered a commission for a disagreeable concept or an actor is offered a part in a play which they oppose.

later that one not only quit feeling the emotion but does not remember when the emotion stopped!) So, for Tolstoy to insist that artists feel the emotions yet to say nothing about how long those emotions must be felt creates a question. Fortunately, other scholars besides Sharpe have noted some answers, and the suggestions of Antonov and Chernyak are particularly helpful:

> Of course, an artist who creates during a considerable period of time cannot always be in a certain emotional state. In order to make the creation infectious, the artist must periodically recreate the feeling which she tries to express in [the artwork], but, in time, feelings may fade and become mere recollections of feelings after all.[86]

These are reasonable points, and there is no need to prescribe a particular length of time for an artist to feel an emotion. Antonov and Chernyak further relate that "Tolstoy himself rewrote many times his 'War and Peace' in attempts to reach a maximal expressivity,"[87] so although Tolstoy does not expound at all on time limitations, one need not assume an unreasonable length of time that the emotion must have been felt on the artist's part. In fact, one need not demand that the artist feel that emotion while working on an artwork at all, so long as the emotion was felt at some time. Work is hard, and what counts is the emotion intended to be caught from the artwork itself upon its completion, not some insistence that artists be caught up in an emotion throughout its creation.

One can imagine an accusation that artists cannot feel an emotion arising from an artwork that itself does not yet exist.[88] (For example, the designers of the Eiffel Tower did not experience in advance the emotions that arise from seeing the Eiffel Tower itself.) An obvious response to this accusation is that of course no artist can experience an

---

[86]Konstantin Antonov and Alexey Chernyak, "Art and Morality: Tolstoy vs. Leontiev," 97, accessed October 26, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Konstantin_Antonov/publication/306061706_Art_and_Morality_Tolstoy_vs_Leontiev/links/57af11a108ae15c76cb7f566.pdf.

[87]Ibid., 98.

[88]I do not recall encountering this accusation in the literature, but it seems likely to have arisen eventually and hence its conclusion here.

artwork that has not been created yet, and if that is the point intended by the imaginary critic's attack, it should hardly count as a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic's fault.

Yet a better and more nuanced response is that artists intend for audiences to experience an emotion that the artists already experienced as a result of *different* sets of circumstances. The original emotion may have arisen due to external circumstances (such as witnessing an injustice which caused anger) or internal circumstances (such as a musician's "hearing a song in his head"), but either way the artwork is the artist's attempt to communicate that original emotion to an audience. So, in good art the emotion shared through the artwork is qualitatively the same, even if the resulting artwork is a different manifestation from what sparked the original emotion in the artist.

Artworks often evoke emotions in their creators different from their audiences, and that situation is not only to be expected but perfectly fine. An artist who spent a great deal of time creating an artwork—or an artist who has played a song they wrote many times—almost inevitably feels additional emotions toward the piece than an audience does, for the artist remembers the varying conditions of creation and/or performance. An easy but real example comes to mind from film-makers who mortgaged their homes to create a film; while the audience attends to the emotional impact of the film, the film-makers forever remember the struggle, stress, and labor involved in creating it. The variance in response between an audience and an artist to that artist's creations should not be viewed as a problem for any art theory.

The most difficult aspect of Sharpe's accusation concerns multi-authored art. Tolstoy does not consider the complexities surrounding multi-authored art[89] despite his having attended operas using multitudes of workers. With the rise of art in the twentieth

[89]Or if he does, the text is so vague as to cause one to think that Tolstoy does not consider them worth addressing. Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers 1899), 7-11.

century that required hundreds or even thousands of collaborators, a full-orbed, neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic should be able to address the difficulty of whether and how an artwork created by thousands of people can share its artists' emotions. In the context of multi-authored artworks then, Sharpe's question is very fair in asking whether all the people creating it share its emotion.

The only reasonable response must be "No, certain artworks have been created with the input of thousands of people, and these artworks neither communicated the feelings of all those people nor did all those people feel in advance the emotions which that artwork intended to convey." On the surface, that answer seems to counter Tolstoy's aesthetic. However, learning which individuals are in charge offers a beneficial step toward explaining whose emotions the artworks in question convey. Likewise, the different roles assumed by those contributing toward the artwork ought to be seen in light of those roles' purpose.

In the case of older blockbuster movies, producers sometimes hired hundreds and even thousands of extras to be in front of the camera. For current blockbuster movies, producers are likely to hire crews comprised of multiple computer graphics companies, each employing hundreds of workers. Whether the cast has thousands or the crew is comprised of thousands, everyone has a role, and often that task is highly specific. While no judgment is intended on their value as human beings, these cast and crew members are used analogously to tools of creation, and frankly, they *are* tools for the artwork's creation. To have hundreds or thousands of people all giving their input on how a single artwork should share emotion would be preposterous. In fact, anyone who has ever been in a band, worked on a movie set, or joined a book project with multiple writers knows that determining whose emotions are shared and how becomes a struggle even with four people. Most multi-authored artworks are created because an individual could not create it on his own, so other people contribute toward the completion of the

primary creators' goals.

The people in charge of the artwork are the people whose emotions will be primarily conveyed, for better or worse, in an artwork. This statement is not returning to oversimplification such as the auteur theory espoused by *Cahiers du Cinema* in its prime when that esteemed journal argued that a film director was the sole shaper of a film. Rather, one must gain a nuanced understanding of which individuals are in charge of an artwork. Even then, when it comes to teasing out who is contributing what emotion and how much authority or power each artist has, determining the reality of these relationships can be difficult for all involved (cf. the many books written about how any Beatles album was created). For example, the feelings conveyed through a play are complex, as both the playwright, director, actors, and more will be communicating emotions, and it is nearly certain that some of the people in those roles will disagree on what emotion should be shared.

On the other hand, not all multi-authored artworks are emotionally complicated. Performing certain artworks requires virtually all the people involved to be under one individual's direct authority and likely even feeling the emotion being shared: in a marching band the show will suffer if even a single member is out of line or not matching the music's mood. In summary, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic describes the real, working conditions of multi-authored art creation as artwork-specific, predicated on power, and ultimately sharing the (often-conflicting) emotions of the people in charge.[90]

Sharpe, despite these three accusations, does not simply dismiss Tolstoy. He admits that Tolstoy "provides a theory which distinguishes works of art from other

[90]When multiple artists are creating a single artwork, it would be inaccurate to predict that conflicting emotions in the final artwork will necessarily result in a failure. While many multi-authored artworks suffer from a weak emotional smorgasbord, other multi-authored artworks are actually stronger for fierce, tug-of-war, emotional contrasts.

human artifacts,"[91] although admittedly, any theory of art should do that. Sharpe more charitably acknowledges "One striking fact about the arts is that we speak of them in quasi-personal terms. We can talk of music as being sad or cheerful, a painting or a poem may be gloomy."[92] Even for Sharpe, the way most people talk about art—by describing it in terms of the way it makes them feel—seems to validate a Tolstoyan aesthetic.

While Sharpe has reprimanded Tolstoy for not addressing artists' feelings over time, Emerson highlights a related problem: that Tolstoy does not spend enough time addressing the audience's emotional reaction to art. In this connection, even what Tolstoy does acknowledge about audience emotions is misguided. Emerson writes that Tolstoy does not allow for emotions being transferred gradually or over time but instead that the audience's embrace of the feeling "must take place instantaneously."[93] Emerson adds, "Tolstoy had no patience with artforms that require for their appreciation prolonged or repeated exposure, arduous training, the mastery of new languages or conventions."[94] It is not the case that the training needed for art appreciation—which Tolstoy definitely rails against—entails that feelings transferred by an artwork must therefore be short-lived as well.

In fact, there is no need for an artwork to communicate its emotions quickly. An artwork has every freedom to share its emotions as slowly or quickly as the artist deems good. Considering not only (A) Tolstoy's mastery of the portrayal of time in his novels, but (B) also the years Tolstoy himself spent writing, and (C) knowing how long it takes to create artworks in many other artforms, it remains an insoluble puzzle as to why

---

[91]Sharpe, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 99.

[92]Ibid.

[93]Emerson, "Prosaics," 162.

[94]Ibid., 161.

Tolstoy did not consider time factors more in *What Is Art?*

The Objections of Richard I. G. Hughes

and Caryl Emerson

Richard Hughes, the scholar mentioned earlier who traces the connection between Tolstoy and Stanislavski, homes in on Tolstoy offering no explanation for what causes a specific artform to arise. Hughes concludes "Tolstoy is not interested in providing an account of art within which everything we think of as a work of art could find a home."[95] In the interest of academic honesty, it must be acknowledged that Emerson also judges Tolstoy's criteria of good art to be both "schematic and thin."[96] She believes that "the problem is Tolstoy's increasing simplification of the problem of expression."[97] Although an interesting essay could be written about Tolstoy's thesis in light of twentieth-century communication theories, where Emerson sees thinness actually lies tautness. It seems fair to the reader, however, to quote Emerson's concern directly:

> Tolstoy takes precise expression more or less for granted. To be sure, he does make some passing reference to technique . . . for example, those "minute degrees" of adjustment required in the execution of art and his conviction that "art begins where the 'wee bit' begins"—but overall, expression simply takes care of itself. Getting there causes Tolstoy no anxiety at all; or rather, if true feeling is there, it will be communicated and will reveal sameness.[98]

There is some truth here—more on that truth shortly—but the overall point of this passage is not entirely fair. For *What Is Art?* is not a how-to guide on the creation of art.

In most film schools, some professors teach theory of cinema reception and appreciation, while other professors teach the production of cinema. Tolstoy's brevity of

---

[95]Richard I. G. Hughes, "Tolstoy, Stanislavski, and the Art of Acting," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (1993): 40.

[96]Emerson, "Prosaics," 161.

[97]Ibid., 160.

[98]Ibid., 162.

discussion on the creation of art is entirely excusable since *What Is Art?* concerns aesthetics, not production. Like the film schools, Tolstoy is discussing theory, not creation. It is enough that Tolstoy implies, as Emerson truthfully observes, both that the creation of artworks is dependent upon technique and that the effectiveness of artworks' emotional transmission is dependent upon how well their details are executed. Emerson attests that for Tolstoy "what matters is not a set of techniques—artists command them, of course, but should not foreground them—but rather a series of effects; what art *is* is judged by what it does and how it acts, both on its creator and on its receiver."[99] Although Emerson does not seem satisfied, the problem is that if Tolstoy needed to offer more detail on what causes artworks to succeed as examples of their artforms, then each artform would need to be examined at length, for each facilitates the communication of emotions in different ways. Yet that is a task far beyond the scope of this argument and certainly beyond the scope of Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* as well. How emotion is communicated across artforms and genres is neither universal nor easily abstracted even from one genre, much less an entire artform.

On the other hand, Gershkovich offers insight into Tolstoy's view of how genre, form, and craft actually do relate to an artwork itself. Art, she says,

> is the recreation of feeling though such formal elements as correspond precisely to a particular mental state. Thus the artifact is by no means irrelevant to Tolstoy's conception of art, but its value depends not on its own attributes (its outward beauty, for example) but rather on how well it evokes the specific mental state that the artist wishes to convey."[100]

Therefore, the artist's emotions toward a subject as expressed by the artwork are the unseen plumb line against which the artwork is compared. Or, perhaps more accurately, the artwork itself is intended to let one feel what the artist felt. The audience, in a neo-

---

[99]Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics: A Harmony and Translation of the Five Senses," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 12 (2000): 9. Italics in original.

[100]Gershkovich, "Infecting, Simulating, Judging," 122.

Tolstoyan aesthetic, judges how well the artwork accomplished its task by judging whether their feelings align with what the artwork guided them to feel. If the artwork encourages them to be amused but they feel perturbed instead, the artwork has failed. If the artwork has not caused the audience to feel much of anything, then the artwork has failed there too. So, artists—often notoriously reticent about what their artworks mean—are not the best people to interview about the meaning of their artworks, especially when their interviewed statements diverge from what the artworks themselves convey. The artwork, not the artist, is the vessel of emotional transmission.

Gershkovich regrets Tolstoy's lack of interacting with Kant and subsequently how Tolstoy's theory suffers. Gershkovich explains that Tolstoy fails in this regard because

> He conflates the empirical claim of laws of taste, which would predict and explain what gives pleasure, with the normative claim of principles of taste, which would justify an aesthetic judgment. It is the normative claim he means to dispute with his argument that judgments based on pleasure are arbitrary because they are founded on social conventions. Ignoring this distinction, however, Tolstoy dismisses the notion of laws of taste,[101]

an insight worth an additional observation. Tolstoy, who is prone to conflating his own taste with normative aesthetics, simultaneously stipulates that taste has no role in creating or judging art; Tolstoy's hypocrisy here is staggering.

Much as he gives little attention to the nature of art creation, Tolstoy also neglects the nature of emotions. Given Tolstoy's reputation as the novelist of emotions, his lapse here is stunning, and a philosopher would be remiss not to see it as a shortcoming. At worst one might even accuse Tolstoy of hypocrisy in rejecting beauty

---

[101]Gershkovich, "Infecting, Simulating, Judging," 118. Gershkovich reiterates that Tolstoy "assumes that since beauty is understood as a kind of pleasure, it must be merely subjective and cannot be the foundation of a normative claim regarding aesthetic merit" (119). Due to his lack of familiarity with Kant, Tolstoy does not realize that "Kant defines beauty as a special kind of pleasure, one that can indeed serve as the foundation for a claim to universal agreement. He thus fails to see a crucial affinity between Kant's attempt to distinguish the Beautiful from the Agreeable and the Good, and his own attempt to characterize aesthetic experience" (119).

for its vagueness—or at least philosophers' inability to agree on its nature—while not examining the nature of emotions at all.

Not being trained in philosophy, Tolstoy misses the significance of examining emotion, and the significance may have missed him in part because emotions seem, on their face, easy to understand.[102] Fortunately, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic can do better than simply defending people's basic awareness of the existence of emotions as an excuse for not examining the nature of emotions. A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic can instead suggest a consideration of the relationship between emotion and art. Unlike Tolstoy who did not have access to neuroscience, a great deal of exciting research and dialogue on the nature of emotion is occurring among neuroscientists, psychologists, and philosophers. A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic can be buttressed by an inter-disciplinary look at the nature of emotion, and such an approach to emotion is suggested in chapter 6.

The Objections of Charles Kaplan and John Fisher

Literary critic Charles Kaplan alleges that that Tolstoy makes one exception for the appreciation of beauty,[103] specifically, beauty in the context of home decoration, an area Tolstoy points out is rarely considered art at all.[104] The decoration of a house by a person skilled in it may contain beautiful objects in beautiful arrangements, but home decoration does not engage one in the study of beauty. Unfortunately, the feeling evoked by home decoration is not captured by any one word, as the feeling appears to be an

---

[102]People seem both aware of the dozens of emotions they might feel and unaware of the dozens of conceptions of beauty offered by philosophers, so comparing beauty to emotions cannot be considered a one-to-one correspondence. This consideration does not excuse Tolstoy's oversight, but it may contribute to understanding how the lapse occurred.

[103]Charles Kaplan, ed., *Criticism: Twenty Major Statements* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1964), 481.

[104]Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (1995), 41. Another word for the feelings evoked by good home decoration may be "homeyness," albeit not including the connotations of "smallness" or "lack of sophistication" that "homey" has. Perhaps good home décor stirs one to pleasant feelings similar to those experienced when enjoying friendliness, hospitality, or comfort.

amalgamation of “satisfaction,” “safety,” and “relaxation.” Good home décor causes those who live there to feel loved, appreciated, and respected while the decorator’s personality shines through as well. An untalented home decorator may place an artwork on the wall because “it is pretty,” but a person talented in turning a house into a home selects and positions objects based on the effect they will create. Regardless of the word one applies to this effect, it is an emotional effect.

Whereas Tolstoy argues that even home decoration can be art, aesthetics professor John Fisher takes virtually the opposite position, retorting that mass art is not art at all. Clearly, this position is more extreme than those who argue for a categorical distinction between “fine art” and “popular art.” Fisher argues that to call "'mass art' art by definition. . . . would be flawed for two reasons: (1) it would beg the question against moderates and elitists, and (2) it would leave the class of mass artworks basically undefined."[105] Fisher's line of thought constitutes a helpful warning, asking if one wishes to place Duchamp's readymade urinal on the same level as Donatello's *David*. Yet Fisher’s claims of question-begging and lack of definition around mass art are unrestrained. Just because two artworks are both art does not mean that they are both equally good. No one actually wishes to equate a Funko Pop! brand figurine with Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* and even if they did, an enormous difference in emotional engagement exists between the two. Yet scholars like Fisher seem willing to disenfranchise the entirety of popular art to protect masterpieces, a cannibalistic iconoclasm of less worthy art. What is needed is an arrangement that protects the integrity of both the masterpieces' quality and popular art’s very existence and power.

A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic offers just such a solution: a spectrum of "artness" based on the object’s purpose. According to this spectrum, things are closer to being

---

[105]John Andrew Fisher, “On Carroll’s Enfranchisement of Mass Art as Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 1 (2004): 60.

pure art the more their purpose is solely to evoke emotion. A plywood table used solely for eating is therefore not art at all, but when a table is hewn from a giant piece of marble and shaped with elegant craftsmanship, it approaches being art for the emotions it inevitably elicits from those who see it. So, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic views an object on a spectrum of purpose, with the object's function being more like art the more it intends to engage the user's emotions. An object is solely an artwork when its sole purpose is to inspire an emotion in the audience, while objects whose primary purpose is something else may have artistic elements if they are tweaked to bring forth an emotion.

Erika Doss, professor of American studies at Notre Dame, cheers the acknowledgement of emotions making a comeback in art theory. Emotions are, she observes, "increasingly recognized as viable sources and subjects of art-historical inquiry."[106] The recognition of emotion is a welcome development, because when objects intentionally engage an audience's emotion, those objects are functioning as art in addition to their primary purpose. Numerous examples of these objects could be given (e.g., early cell phones were technologically utilitarian while the gleaming models available just thirty years later compete to be admired for their looks). It is no wonder then that cottage industries have arisen around evaluating the appearance of phones, cars, furniture, and many other objects previously not considered art. Art critics and art historians have enormous opportunities to bring their knowledge to bear on the artistic objects around them, if only they will deign to look.

---

[106]Erika Doss, "Makes Me Laugh, Makes Me Cry: Feelings and American Art," *American Art* 25, no. 3 (2011): 2.

CHAPTER 5

A CARTOGRAPHY OF KITSCH: DEFINING BOUNDARIES

Introduction

In many circles calling an artwork “kitsch” constitutes a single-word death knell, and once the word has been uttered, art critics have historically been hesitant to defend an artwork further.[1] Ethnography professor Phil Cohen simply reports, "The concept of kitsch has for much of its history been little more than a term of abuse."[2] Cambridge professor Steven Connor grants the renowned book *Five Faces of Modernity* by Matei Calinescu deals with four of its five "faces" of modernity with studied neutrality, but the "chapter on 'Kitsch' . . . barely conceals . . . loathing for the banalities of mass culture and unequivocal belief in its opposite."[3] Creative examples of pejorative kitsch-calling include labelling (and ignoring) painters as “ethno-kitsch,”[4] and “Olympic kitsch.”[5]

---

[1]Judy Attfield shares how dangerous to one's own critical standing in the intellectual community it can be even to attempt defining kitsch. She warns that writing about kitsch "run[s] the risk that might label all my writing as so much kitsch," which is a reference to the famous line attributed to Adorno that “the discourse about kitsch becomes kitsch itself.” Judy Attfield, “Redefining Kitsch: The Politics of Design,” *Home Cultures* 3, no. 3 (2006): 202. One danger of theorizing about kitsch arises in that friends and family may be offended if they like the items labelled kitsch. Another danger arises in that critics are liable to react with disdain to any definition of kitsch not sufficiently harsh for their tastes. Attfield's conclusions in this article are so thoughtful that an email of appreciation seemed appropriate, only to discover she died one week after finalizing it.

[2]Phil Cohen, “A Beautifying Lie? Culture and Kitsch @London2012,” *Soundings*, no. 50 (2012): 89.

[3]Steven Connor, review of *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism,* by Matei Calinescu, *The Modern Language Review* 85, no. 1 (1990): 134.

[4]Peter Anderson, “The World as It Is Made to Seem,” *South African Journal of Science* 106, no. 7/8 (2010): 2.

[5]Cohen, “A Beautifying,” *Soundings*, 88. Perceptive footnote checkers will see the phrase *Olympic kitsch* comes from Cohen, referenced in the second footnote as the man who admits that labelling things “kitsch” is typically intended as a denigration. Cohen’s argues in this article that the Olympics have

The use of “kitsch” as a descriptor has spread to other fields beyond art, signaling that it has potential connotations about lifestyle, preference, and/or education. Without typically explaining why, some in politics use the word "kitsch" to label ideas they wish to critique (such as socialists denouncing capitalism)[6] while in academia scholars may gently chastise one another by suggesting their "well-intentioned didactic efforts [have turned] into academic kitsch."[7] Others remonstrate that even to use the word “kitsch” is racist.[8] Surely, academic progress requires being able to examine ideas, including kitsch itself, without falling into these kinds of histrionics.[9]

One might legitimately wonder why kitsch should be studied at all. Understanding kitsch matters because various definitions have attributed ideas of class, taste, and even morality to it. As a simple example of taste, people enjoying Franz Schubert might be pleased that they are listening to "classical music" only to discover that a great deal of his music has been labelled kitsch. Music scholar Esteban Buch confesses that Schubert was all-but-categorized "as a garden gnome wandering through Vienna's forests" in the writings of "people as different as Rudolf Steglich, Heinrich

---

become not primarily a tournament of worldwide athletic competition but a commercial industry, with the Olympics being sponsored unironically by McDonald's. Olympic bric-a-brac certainly springs up for sale everywhere in Olympic years.

[6]Tariq Ali, “The Blair Kitsch Project,” *Monthly Review* 51, no. 8 (2000): 14.

[7]Wulf Kansteiner, “Of Kitsch, Enlightenment, and Gender Anxiety: Exploring Cultural Memories of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 46, no. 1 (2007): 89.

[8]Alexis L. Boylan, “Stop Using Kitsch as a Weapon: Kitsch and Racism,” *Rethinking Marxism* 22, no. 1 (2010): 42-55.

[9]At the same time, it stings when someone else labels an artwork (or even a genre) one likes as kitsch! My own feelings erupted when reading John Westbrook call the movie *Amelie* a celebration of kitsch. John Westbrook, “Cultivating Kitsch: Cultural Boveism,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 6, no. 2 (2002): 427-30. A certain scene in *Amelie* shows a middle-aged man choke back tears as he is reacquainted with a box of childhood treasures by an anonymous benefactor. That scene moved me to tears the first times I watched it; in fact, getting to see it again was why I rewatched the movie. (To be very fair, Westbrook is likely not calling *Amelie* kitsch but a celebration of kitsch objects. One could analogously argue that certain—not all—Pop Art paintings celebrate commercialism without actually being commercial themselves.) Regardless, it is easy to understand that becoming defensive results from feeling attacked, and a writer ought not attack people’s taste but help them. When discussing kitsch and listing examples of kitsch in particular, theorists should bracket their preferences and choose their examples carefully, and readers should likewise avoid both hurt feelings and their sophisticated cousin: snobbery.

Strobel, Alfred Einstein," and more.[10] The very existence of kitsch, coupled with scholars' arguments about what it is based on (be it cuteness, ugliness,[11] or something else), deserves to be studied.

A substantial subset of kitsch memorabilia is religious, and therefore once kitsch is defined, one should examine the relationship between kitsch and religious ideas. Then, once can answer whether kitsch is parasitical on religious ideas, symbiotic to religious ideas, supportive of religious ideas, or bears another relationship entirely to religion. Religion Scholar Tom Bremer mentions kitschy tourist sites of religion including—and this is not fictional—the "Golgotha Fun Park" in Kentucky.[12] For people wishing to play mini-golf on a course plastered with apparently mass-manufactured statues of Jesus, places like the "Golgotha Fun Park" show that kitsch can be descriptive not just of art but a broader range of things, including locations. So, clearly, what one understands kitsch to be will contribute toward how one evaluates kitsch sites, objects, and ideas.[13]

Assigning Meaning to the Word "Kitsch"

What constitutes kitsch, or identifying the core of a piece that defines it as kitsch, remains murky. No time or space will be spent delving into the etymology of the word "kitsch" because its origins[14] offer little assistance in discovering the anchor of

---

[10]Esteban Buch, "Adorno's 'Schubert': From the Critique of the Garden Gnome to the Defense of Atonalism," *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005): 26.

[11]Other reasonable questions apply to kitsch, such as that represented in the headline by Paul Goldberger, "Landmark Kitsch: Are There Buildings So Ugly That They're Worth Saving?" *The New Yorker*, 1997, 38-41.

[12]Thomas S. Bremer, "A Touristic Angle of Vision: Tourist Studies as a Methodological Approach for the Study of Religions," *Religion Compass* 8, no. 12 (2014): 374.

[13]It is also reasonable to think that what one already believes about kitsch sites and memorabilia will bias one's understanding of kitsch. One must work to temper this bias by bracketing one's feelings toward items suspected to be kitsch. Once one's understanding of kitsch is solidified, one can reappraise kitsch items, not necessarily coldly but rather with knowledge of what causes them to be important.

[14]The word originated in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, being either German or

what ties its semantic range together. Rather, a good understanding of kitsch comes through examining the various meanings thinkers have ascribed to it.

Most descriptions of kitsch are wordy because describing it in only a few words causes scholars to be concerned that they are missing a vital aspect of kitsch. Marxist art historian Timothy "T.J." Clark piles phrases up in his attempt to define the multi-surfaced purposes of kitsch, describing it as "an art and a culture of instant assimilation, of abject reconciliation to the everyday, of avoidance of difficulty, pretence to indifference, equality before the image of capital."[15] What Clark describes sounds interesting, but it does not seem to apply to actual kitsch objects. Getting to the core of kitsch proves difficult when, as this description shows, no actual object is identified.

Attfield acknowledges the problem, commenting that penning a definition of kitsch is substantially more difficult than it initially appears. The situation is not helped by the fact that, as Attfield explains,

> there is a common-sense meaning with which we are all familiar and can recognize without difficulty. However, once the intellectual analytical process is put to work it becomes surprisingly problematic to pin down. This is not helped by art critics like Gillo Dorfles and others who rely on their own common-sense and have explained it away by using the term interchangeably with "bad taste" without

---

Yiddish in root. Yale philosopher Karsten Harries elaborates

> The term Kitsch seems to have originated in the second half of the nineteenth century, perhaps in Munich art circles. There are two theories concerning its derivation. The first relates it to the English word "sketch." When English visitors to the Bavarian capital wanted to take some cheap artistic mementos home with them, they demanded sketches, quickly done pictures, depicting perhaps some icy peak; or a lovely Alpine valley complete with morning sun, milkmaid, and handsome young forester; or some jolly monks, brandishing beer steins and huge white radishes. A second, more plausible theory, relates Kitsch to the obscure German verb *kitschen* which suggests playing with mud, smoothing it out. Anybody familiar with nineteenth century painting can appreciate how well this verb suggests both the color and the texture of much that was produced at that time. Regardless of which version we adopt, it seems likely that the term Kitsch was first applied to certain genre paintings, such as the innumerable works celebrating the life of the mountaineer.

Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 75. No evidence exists that Tolstoy himself was exposed to the word, although Tolstoy occasionally mentions artworks that may fit some definitions of kitsch.

[15]Timothy Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1982): 147.

> actually defining its formal characteristics, assuming that it can be recognized by the cognoscenti.[16]

While it may turn out that kitsch is ultimately a kind of bad art or bad taste, Professor of Russian literature Phillip Bullock summarizes a current given in kitsch theory, namely that "to see kitsch merely as bad art is to miss the point."[17] Scholars do not approach kitsch as being a style of art that is bad. Instead, Bullock says, "A more cogent argument can be made against kitsch on ethical rather than aesthetic grounds, since kitsch offers an account of the world that is not so much artistically deficient as willfully mendacious."[18] What kitsch artworks lack morally (and what further makes them kitsch) is precisely the question these subsequent definitions attempt to answer.[19]

Kitsch as Two Tears

The most popular definition of kitsch in popular literature at the time of this writing—so popular that it is the primary definition in numerous academic articles—belongs to Milan Kundera in his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

> Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.[20]

---

[16]Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch," 205.

[17]Philip Ross Bullock, "Andrei Platonov's *Happy Moscow*: Stalinist Kitsch and Ethical Decadence," *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 1 (2006): 204.

[18]Ibid., 205.

[19]Architecture professor Miriam Gusevich argues that one of the first definitions of and attacks on kitsch was that of Adolf Loos. Loos wrote the famous article entitled "Ornament and Crime" in the early twentieth century, and it quickly became foundational in architecture. Apart from the unapologetic racism it utilizes, the article's content still shocks. Gusevich argues that the article can be read as equating ornament with kitsch. She argues that "Loos condemned . . . kitsch itself as a crime, as violence to the object, transforming it into a fetish, reeking of sadomasochistic perversions and necrophilia." Miriam Gusevich, "Decoration and Decorum, Adolf Loos's Critique of Kitsch," *New German Critique*, no. 43 (1988): 123. To suggest that a grandmother sees any of that in her Precious Moments knickknack is perverse, and Gusevich's attempts to trace attacks on kitsch back to Loos are as oversexualized as Loos' own writing; neither are convincing.

[20]Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 252.

The core of Kundera's definition initially seems to be that kitsch is rooted in self-satisfaction. One is not only pleased with the artwork; one is pleased with one's pleasure at the artwork, pleased that one "gets it." Art critics, cynically perhaps, find self-satisfaction present in tourists when museums sell items that feature famous artwork on them.

However, it is likely that self-satisfaction is not what Kundera meant in his definition. It is more likely that Kundera intended recognition of shared feeling to be the primary attribute of kitsch. Kundera certainly places this communion in a universal scope, applicable when one shares (or thinks one shares) the appreciation of the artwork with all humanity. Philosopher Dennis Dutton echoes Kundera by saying kitsch entails "an enjoyment of the fact of universality. So, when Bambi appears on screen, and everyone sighs, 'Awaaah,' part of the appeal of the event is the recognition that everybody's awaahing at the same time."[21]

Kundera's definition could be narrowed, reducing its scope from all of humanity to say, art critics. With this tweak, one can observe art critics enjoying Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Helikopter-Streichquartett* and think that, since the art critics can neither see the musicians nor hear their music, the critics' enjoyment probably arises from self-satisfaction that they "get it" along with other art critics. A different scope—but the same self-satisfaction—would apply to any art students who "appreciate Pollock" not because Pollock's droppings have any merit themselves but because the students are proud of their ability to "get it."

Clearly, Kundera's definition has been twisted, turning it on its head and applying it adversely to the very people who enjoy lobbing cries of "Kitsch!" as their war cry against philistinism. Kundera seems to mean that people enjoying kitsch artworks are

---

[21]Dennis Dutton, "Tomas Kulka on Kitsch," *Philosophy and Literature* 21 (1997): 208-211, accessed May 15, 2018, http://www.denisdutton.com/kulka_review.htm.

not actually pleased with the artworks but pleased instead at their membership in a community who understands the artworks. The only difference between kitsch and the avant-garde then, is the size in membership of their community. Because Kundera's definition is not clear, one could argue that the difference between kitsch and the avant-garde resides in the subject matter (cute things) or emotion (sweet).

In fact, this tweak clearly reveals that Kundera's definition of kitsch suffers ambiguity about whether kitsch is a genre, a response to an artwork, an emotion, or even a piece that intentionally triggers the response or emotion. The ambiguity subsequently pervades the literature around kitsch that follows Kundera's definition. Because Kundera's definition can be applied to artworks Kundera almost certainly did not intend, it does not focus the semantic range of "kitsch" enough.

All the same, this section is not an attempt to disempower Kundera's definition. Kundera's definition of kitsch has value because it does narrow the semantic range of the word somewhat. Although it is not sufficient by itself, Kundera's definition of kitsch functions helpfully when seen in conjunction with other definitions. Those definitions will be examined next.

Kitsch as Saccharine

A common element in other definitions of kitsch is saccharine sweetness. When an element of sweetness is present that the art critic thinks is not native to the subject,[22] the critic may believe the artwork to be kitsch. William-Adolphe Bouguereau, Norman Rockwell, and Thomas Kinkade are considered nadirs of kitsch in painting for their tendencies to portray their subjects as being more pleasant, innocent, or kind than they are. Like saccharine, kitsch is hyper-sweet and artificial.

Yale philosopher Karsten Harries reveals another fact of this definition.

---

[22]Or possibly that the artist himself did not feel; see footnote 61 on Capra in chap. 3.

"Kitsch, it has been argued, differs from art in its cloying sweetness. The sugary stickiness of Kitsch is opposed to the sense of distance which is said to be characteristic of art."[23] Harries understands this view to claim that kitsch's sweetness destroys a level of separation from reality, present in or somehow invited by an artwork, that keeps it from descending into kitsch.

However, Harries rightly argues that distance is not the opposite of sweetness. Rather, bitterness is the opposite of sweetness, according to Harries, who references Hermann Broch's idea that "there is sweet Kitsch and there is sour Kitsch."[24] In other words, art critics typically do not consider an artwork to be kitsch if it portrays a subject as darker, grittier, or rougher than the subject is in reality. If one were say, a first-semester art appreciation student, one could be excused in thinking that the opposite of kitsch—or perhaps the other side of the kitsch spectrum—would be an artwork that presents the world as being crueler, more hopeless, or less beautiful than it is, and certainly it is easy to think of numerous artworks just like that. Harries looks at art and concludes "The nineteenth century preferred the sweet [kitsch], the twentieth prefers the sour. If we think that in changing sweet into sour we have escaped from Kitsch, we are ourselves victims of an illusion."[25] Harries' words are no doubt painful to accept for people unable to imagine that they secretly like sour kitsch (despite their boisterous condemnations of kitsch).

Roger Scruton disagrees with Harries, contending, "The opposite of kitsch is not sophistication but innocence. Kitsch art is pretending to express something, and you,

---

[23]Ludwig Giesz, *Phenomenologie des Kitsches* (Heidelberg, 1960), 50, quoted in Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 76.

[24]Hermann Broch, *Dichten und Erkennen: Essays* (Zurich, 1955), 295-350, quoted in Harries, *Meaning of Modern Art*, 80.

[25]Harries, *Meaning of Modern Art*, 82.

in accepting it, are pretending to feel."[26] Scruton seems to be saying that people who enjoy kitsch know that it presents the world as a better place than it is, but they close their eyes to reality anyway. Scruton, interestingly, is suggesting not that kitsch is innocent but that it is the opposite of innocence. Therefore, kitsch intentionally elicits a duplicitous response, in Scruton's thinking.

Tom Leddy, professor of the philosophy of art at San Jose State University, "wonders whether [Scruton] isn't making kitsch too complicated. Perhaps there is a kind of kitsch art where a knowing pretension is involved, but normally the enjoyment of kitsch just *is* lack of sophistication, which is, after all, another word for innocence."[27] Scruton is judging other people as willfully denying reality when they enjoy kitsch, but Leddy simply responds that the problem with defining kitsch as feigned innocence is that what may not be innocent enjoyment to an art critic can be to others.[28]

Leddy and Harries' argumentation is more convincing than that of Scruton for it more accurately captures the emotional responses of people who unknowingly enjoy kitsch. When art critics imply that the core of kitsch is an attempt to portray something as sweeter than it is, they ignore the testimony of those who accept the item in question. Furthermore, not everything called kitsch is sweet, as Harries has already demonstrated. So, at the very least, the asymmetric language (or perhaps absence of language) used in referencing gratuitously dark artworks suggests that critics consider their own conceptions of innocence or kindness to be authoritative, and anything too kind or too innocent to them is deemed kitschy.

---

[26]Roger Scruton, "Kitsch and the Modern Predicament," *City Journal*, Winter 1999, accessed November 2, 2017, https://www.city-journal.org/html/kitsch-and-modern-predicament-11726.html.

[27]Thomas Leddy. "Roger Scruton on Kitsch," Aesthetics Today blog, entry posted September 30, 2013, accessed November 2, 2017, http://aestheticstoday.blogspot.com/2013/09/roger-scruton-on-kitsch.html.

[28]Ibid.

Kitsch as Blindness to Evil

Similar but separate to presenting one's subject as being sweeter than reality, Giles Fraser startlingly defines kitsch as the "absence of s---."[29] Despite being a minister in Great Britain, Fraser insists on using "s---" for its very grotesqueness. Specifically, he references the word because he believes it fitting to the death of victims at Buchenwald concentration camp who literally drowned in pits of urine and feces.

Fraser's perspective on kitsch seems influenced by but different from Kundera, who claims that "kitsch is the absolute denial of s---, in both the literal and figurative senses of the word…"[30] Fraser maintains that the lived experience of many people in the world constitutes a daily struggle with overwhelming, negative circumstances and behaviors. That even many of the richest people in world history, Americans, experience seasons of life where they are miserable is testimony not just to life's difficulties but to life's horrors. According to Fraser's definition, kitsch whitewashes or even disavows life's ugliness.

When preachers allow that kitsch to infect their religious thinking, it causes troublesome theology to develop.

> Kitsch loves to use diminutives ('Dear congregation, the Gospel has the answer to all our *little* daily worries ….') or superlatives (life is *absolutely* 'wonderful'), which inevitably leads to *loss of true contextualisation*: reality is simply not like that. For kitsch, faith is either about the 'little Lord Jesus who lays down his sweet head' or the 'phenomenal and glorious manifestation of God's glory.' It only loves the little Lord Jesus because 'no tears He does make' and who becomes the cute and cuddly Christ of kitsch. Or it only embraces the glorious and grand revelations of the great God, revelations that lift us up and above the mundane. In between, in the monotony and sufferings of life, kitsch finds no foothold.[31]

Kitsch's narrow scope trivializes large swathes of existence, over-inflating the minute

---

[29]Giles Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002).

[30]Kundera, *Unbearable*, 248.

[31]Johan Cilliers, "The Unveiling of Life: Liturgy and the Lure of Kitsch," *HTS Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (2010). Italics in original.

and reducing the irreducible. The denial of life's difficulties cheapens the mercy of its Creator.

Fraser's view, that kitsch ignores or denies life's horrors, offers helpful analysis on how some kitsch becomes morally wrong. Yet while his analysis is true, it does not cover all kitsch. In other words, plenty of objects exist that do not fit Fraser's definition yet are certainly still kitsch.

Critics who hold a similar conception of kitsch must also be careful not to over-label items as kitsch simply because they are hopeful. One may recall that the movie *Pollyanna*,[32] with its reputation of looking at life with a sense of irrepressible optimism, may appear to be kitsch but is about an orphan who ends up paralyzed from the waist down. In real life, one may recall that Betsie Ten Boom, while living in the concentration camp where she died, told her sister Corrie that she was grateful for the fleas since they kept the prison guards from entering their living area.[33] So, to find some hope in such an awful situation is unobjectionable Of course, artwork that does not portray any evil, wickedness, or grime is not real-to-life, but one's expectations about what any one artwork can reasonably portray should be tempered.

Kitsch as Camp

Some may confuse or conflate kitsch with camp.[34] The critical difference between kitsch and camp lies in an aficionado of camp knowingly appreciating crudeness, vulgarity, or over-the-top tendencies in taste. Camp constitutes an attitude toward kitsch, namely, taking kitsch ironically but celebratorily, while the intended response to kitsch takes its sentiments sincerely. The difference between kitsch and camp

---

[32]*Pollyanna*, directed by David Swift (Walt Disney Productions, 1960).

[33]Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 198, 209-211.

[34]Attfield names two scholars who make this mistake. Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch," 207.

is therefore, both sincerity and irony. When people know that an artwork they like is kitsch, they likely have a camp attitude toward it, while people who like an artwork without knowing it is kitsch do not have a camp sensibility.[35]

In the context of creating kitsch, anthropologist Maya Nadkami jokes that a "lack of talent makes . . . sincerity burn all the more brightly."[36] When people are not talented in the medium they are creating in, the resulting artworks are unable to produce subtle effects. Their artworks are likely to possess little nuance, delicacy, or capacity to relate to varied audiences. So, to assume that kitsch is "an amusing chamber of visual horrors," describes a camp attitude more than kitsch, for what makes something kitsch is not the artist's lack of talent.[37] The artist's lack of talent contributes to an unvariegated artwork that may be ugly or "on-the-nose," but neither ugliness nor lack of subtlety are the defining characteristics of kitsch.

Instead, Attfield suggests that the purveyors of kitsch are aware of their wares' lack of artistic value, and that is why kitsch shares in camp's over-the-top tendencies, what Attfield refers to as "gold plating."[38] Attfield does not use "gold-plating" in any metaphorical sense! She is rather referring to the literal gold-plating of objects given to suggest a financial value greater than they possess. In other words, kitsch is often marketed for its financial value and being "made-by-hand" rather than its artistic worth.

---

[35]Susan Sontag, who clearly saw the difference between kitsch and camp, is discussed in chap. 6.

[36]Maya Nadkarni, "The Master's Voice: Authenticity, Nostalgia, and the Refusal of Irony in Postsocialist Hungary," *Social Identities* 13, no. 5 (2007): 618.

[37]Chauncey S. Goodrich, review of *Kitsch, the World of Bad Taste*, by Gillo Dorfles, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, no. 4 (1971): 514.

[38]Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch," 207.

Figure 3. Sher-ruff Paws

Rewald offers gold-plating as the reason he opposes attempts to legitimize kitsch, accusing kitsch paintings of being "slick nudes,"[39] "draped silks on lifeless dummies . . . sentimental calendar landscapes,"[40] and "*unnecessary* pictures."[41] By placing kitsch on the same level as great art, Rewald recognizes that "souvenir hunters"

[39]John Rewald, Irene Gordon, and Frances Weitzenhoffer, *Studies in Impressionism* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1986), 210.

[40]Ibid., 213.

[41]Ibid., 211. Italics in original.

leave no greater vocabulary left to distinguish between the two.[42] The advertising copy in the *Sher-ruff Paws* figure bears Rewald's accusation out. *Sher-ruff Paws* is described as "limited-edition," "carefully hand-painted," "hand-numbered with matching Certificate of Authenticity," and that it "will have dog lovers howling with joy" (see figure 3 above). With adjectives like these, *Sher-ruff Paws*' ad copy justifies Rewald's assertion that kitsch leaves no words left to describe better art.

Kitsch According to Kulka's Analytic Philosophy

Philosophy professor Tomas Kulka's book on kitsch offers helpful insights into the pre-history of kitsch. Kulka teaches that

> of all artistic movements it is the Romantic movement that created the most fertile grounds for kitsch. One can hardly deny that Romanticism, with its emphasis on dramatic effects, pathos, and overall sentimentality, displays intrinsic affinities with kitsch. It seems also plausible to claim that since the term *kitsch* is relatively new, there was probably no acute need for its use in earlier times.[43]

Insights like these are common in Kulka's book, which Dennis Dutton describes as the first major work on kitsch from a viewpoint grounded in analytic philosophy.[44] Kulka's primary purpose is objecting to sociologically relativistic definitions of kitsch. He accomplishes his goal by demonstrating that defining kitsch by what the masses like (as opposed to the "art" that elites like), cannot answer the question "Why shouldn't kitsch be regarded as something that simply doesn't fit the *present* social norm rather than something that is intrinsically (aesthetically) deficient?"[45]

In his attempt to discover what kitsch is, Kulka probingly asks similar questions to those posed here (even if the answers presented here are different) including

---

[42]Rewald, Gordon, and Weitzenhoffer, *Studies in Impressionism*, 211-213.

[43]Tomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2002), 15.

[44]Dennis Dutton, "Tomas Kulka on Kitsch," http://www.denisdutton.com/kulka_review.htm.

[45]Kulka, *Kitsch and Art*, 5-6. Italics in original.

"Should the appeal of kitsch be properly regarded as aesthetic?"[46] In answering the question, Kulka asserts that people who enjoy kitsch

> value it not as a means to something external to it, but as an end in itself. They seem to be interested in kitsch pictures for their own sake. The interest and attitude of consumers of kitsch often appears to be even more purely aesthetic in this respect than that of typical consumers of high art. Unlike art lovers, who buy their paintings from respected art dealers, consumers of kitsch are more interested in the pictures themselves than, for example, in the reputation of their creators, or in the social status they might gain by acquiring these pictures. They buy these pictures because they like them, without being concerned about whether they have made a good investment, as more sophisticated buyers of art often are. Judging by all the external, behavioral indications, people who like kitsch derive the same kind of pleasure from its contemplation that others experience in their encounter with so-called serious art.[47]

In summary, Kulka's seems to believe the owners of kitsch appreciate it for its aesthetic appeal.

Dutton strongly disagrees with Kulka's answer, contending that "the social functions of kitsch" override the aesthetic concerns.[48] In other words, people do not look at kitsch to appreciate its form, according to Dutton; kitsch instead encourages people to think about its subject matter in the most ideal circumstance.[49] In fact, many people may think that their kitsch objects are "an aspect of identity,"[50] holding deep value to them as a physical summary of an experience, feeling, or memory they had. Additionally, the advertisements for kitsch—and there are many because kitsch is, after all, bought and sold—assure the purchaser that kitsch objects are an investment, a sign of their good taste or, in Dutton's words, "treasures."[51] Dutton's argumentation is more convincing than Kulka's here, as it seems clear that people appreciate kitsch more for what it means for

---

[46]Kulka, *Kitsch and Art*, 19-20.

[47]Ibid., 20.

[48]Dutton, "Tomas Kulka on Kitsch," http://www.denisdutton.com/kulka_review.htm.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch," 208.

[51]Dutton, "Tomas Kulka on Kitsch," http://www.denisdutton.com/kulka_review.htm.

them than its own quality.

Concerning the related question of what kitsch's aesthetic badness consists of, Kulka replies that the question presupposes kitsch's badness must lie in some aesthetic misjudgment. Yet Kulka refuses to accept the idea that kitsch is synonymous with bad taste at all, no matter whether that taste belongs to the "elites" or "the masses."[52] Kulka's refusal is based on his belief that kitsch does have aesthetic appeal, and hence, believing that "aesthetic worthlessness has aesthetic appeal," is self-contradictory. Moreover, the idea that kitsch is defined by what people with bad taste like forces Kulka to conclude logically that people who like kitsch will also appreciate other bad art, since they, after all, have bad taste. Yet since people who have bad taste do not always like kitsch and people who like kitsch do not always have bad taste, the two groups are clearly not co-extensive, according to Kulka.[53]

Kulka's argument that kitsch's badness does not lie in its aesthetics is interesting, but it does not, however, disprove kitsch being bad. Kitsch may be bad due to another reason. All the same, Kulka's argument that kitsch is not necessarily aesthetically bad opens the possibility that kitsch is, in fact, good art, an idea that has become increasingly popular.

Kitsch as Equivalent to Good Art?

The relative worth of kitsch has been undergoing a re-appraisal in theoretical circles. Canadian professor Andrew Wilson lauds that present thinkers are less likely to decree that kitsch "constitutes an attack on the uplifting, civilizing role art plays within culture….a conspiracy, then, to undermine all that is precious."[54] Instead, they are more

---

[52]Kulka, *Kitsch and Art*, 21.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Wilson, Andrew P., "'Beholding the Man': Viewing (or Is It Marking?) John's Trial Scene Alongside Kitsch Art," *Biblical Interpretation* 24, no. 2 (2016): 249.

likely to believe that "the boundary between kitsch and art becomes blurred, and indeed, the binaries that divide these terms prove to be illusory."[55]

However, Wilson is dramatically exaggerating the overlapping areas between kitsch and non-kitsch, and it leads him to make such proclamations as "the designation of 'great art' . . . proves to be more fluid and equivocal than traditionally thought."[56] The obliteration of aesthetic judgment, if applied to food, would be like saying that because people have different preferences, one cannot attest to certain foods being healthier. In other words, Wilson's argumentation rests on a category mistake. Kulka references the similar error which occurred when many aesthetics scholars gave up attempting even to define art due to the anti-essentialist arguments of the twentieth century.[57]

Essayist Rochelle Gurstein laments academics adopting the position that studying popular art or even kitsch can be as beneficial as studying the world's greatest art. "What is surprising—and dispiriting," Gurstein writes, "is that self-avowed cultural

---

[55]Wilson, "Beholding," 250.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Kulka, *Kitsch and Art*, 23-24. The anti-essentialist arguments are not particularly compelling. As an example of anti-essentialist arguments, Joad argues that even defining an expert in aesthetics is impossible because "the consensus of opinion among experts to which appeal is made is non-existent." C. E. M. Joad, *Matter, Life, and Value* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 270. On the contrary, however, experts in a genre of art typically agree about the master artists, even if they are not moved by all of them. Joad seems to anticipate this objection by arguing that defining an expert by her ability to agree with other experts "is rapidly found to involve us in a vicious circle" (270). Joad attempts to prove this circularity by responding to the question "By what characteristic are we to recognize these experts whose judgment is to be trusted to establish the superiority of [one artwork versus another]?" with the answer "they may be known by the fact of their universal preference for [the one artwork]" (271). If this were the way experts were identified, Joad would be on solid ground, but in reality, experts are identified by their ability to argue with solid evidence for the worth of artworks. As in philosophy, mathematics, and the hard and soft sciences, experts are validated not by agreement with their peers but through the judicious wielding of hard-earned expertise. Joad's argument for circularity remains unconvincing.

Rather than argue a form of anti-essentialism, Weitz writes, in an article that went on to become famous, that defining art has proved notoriously problematic, an idea that Tolstoy initially echoes. Yet whereas Tolstoy attempts to define art, Weitz demurs, arguing that philosophers should stop attempting to define art and instead ask "other questions, the answers to which will provide us with all the understanding of the arts there can be." Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 1 (1956): 27. Weitz lands on a kind of "soft" anti-essentialism, skeptical of any one theory's ability to describe all art but grateful for any theory's insights into particular artworks.

leftists in universities endorse a version of this decidedly *un*leftist position when they justify studying products of the entertainment industry on the grounds that such things are 'popular' and thus merit attention and respect."[58] This willingness to study a variety of artworks and media is likely rooted in post-structuralism. Yet unlike Gurstein, one should view having frank discussions of entertainment and art as opportunities. Just because an artwork does not constitute an all-time great should not preclude its discussion. One need not accept the choice between annihilating all distinctions among art or declaring that artworks one dislikes are not art at all. Instead, one can analyze an artwork for its own merit, which in a neo-Tolstoyan view is its ability to invoke moral emotions.

Yet the debate about emotions' proper place in art is entirely foregone if one is persuaded by the recent claim that artwork does not actually engage the emotions at all. Known as the Paradox of Fiction, this claim has shaken the literary world over the past four decades. Its effects are beginning to be felt in aesthetic circles as well.

Responding to the Paradox of Fiction

In an interaction with Tolstoy's thought in 1975, Colin Radford radically undercut art's ability to stir emotion—or more accurately, Radford pointed a finger at the irrationality of feeling *any* emotion while engaging art.[59] Following the thought enunciated in his title "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?" Radford contends that people cannot rationally feel emotion toward something they know does not exist. (Later scholars strengthened the claim into an argument in symbolic logic which will be examined below.) In short, if Radford encountered someone crying while

---

[58]Rochelle Gurstein, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," *Raritan.* 22 (2003): 137. Italics in original.

[59]Colin Radford, "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* S49 (1975): S67-80.

watching *Bambi*, he would charge that they were not only wasting their tears but were literally acting irrationally to be weeping over a cartoon character that the person knows does not exist.

Professor of philosophy Anne Sheppard offers one approach of how the Paradox of Fiction refers to Tolstoy—and by extension, all art—when she pronounces

> Tolstoy's talk of infection both over-emphasizes and over-simplifies the irrational aspects of our response to art. I would not deny that we can sometimes be deeply moved and fundamentally affected by the experience of art but not all our experience of art is like this and being moved by art is not the same as being moved by events in real life. Having described our response as an infection, Tolstoy makes no attempt to analyze it further.[60]

Put simply, the Paradox of Fiction occurs when people seem to experience real emotion over fictional characters, behavior that is, is at best, a paradox. In fact, while the Paradox of Fiction denounces emotional response to literature as illogical, some responses to the Paradox of Fiction have countered that emotions are not engaged in art at all. These responses simultaneously acquiesce to the Paradox of Fiction and invalidate the apparent experience of engaging with an artwork, so both these denials of emotion and the Paradox of Fiction need to be addressed.

It was Robert Stecker, professor of philosophy at Central Michigan University, who translated the Paradox of Fiction into logical form. Stecker formulates the Paradox of Fiction thusly:

1. "Sally pities Anna (where Anna is the main character Anna Karenina),
2. To pity someone, one must believe that they exist and are suffering,
3. Sally does not believe that Anna exists."[61]

The structure of the argument is formulated symbolically as follows:

A.

---

[60]Sheppard, *Aesthetics*, 21.

[61]Robert Stecker, "Should We Still Care About the Paradox of Fiction?" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no 3, (July 2011): 295.

If A, then B.

~B.

The unspoken conclusion is "B," which is a contradiction of the third premise. Of course, when a logical argument contains contradictory premises then one can prove anything from it, and the argument is therefore invalid in the technical sense.

Good logic demands that one not believe invalid arguments, and therefore the Paradox of Fiction leaves one in a bind, since each individual premise seems true. So, like cartoon thieves trying to find a vault behind a wall, logicians rapped on each premise in search of hollowness. While logicians were experimenting with throwing out each premise of the Paradox to resolve it, others remembered that sometimes a Paradox can be explained without reference to formal logic. Thus, literary theorists, analytical philosophers, and even evolutionary psychologists all offered responses to the Paradox of Fiction.[62] Both non-logicians' and logicians' attempts to resolve the Paradox will be explored.

Yet particular attention should be paid to a family of explanations whose influence has spread substantially farther than their merits deserve. Although separate in their specifics, this family of ideas shares the denial that emotions are involved *at all* in enjoying art. By denying that emotions are involved in art, one sidesteps the problem of an audience's feelings for non-existent characters. What makes all these ideas troubling is that sweeping the table of emotional involvement in art threatens both Tolstoy's aesthetic and all definitions of kitsch.

The "no to emotions" camp is comprised of solutions that scholars call "quasi-emotions" and "I-emotions," both of which will be addressed here. Because grasping

---

[62]Tilmann Koppe, "Evolutionary Psychology and the Paradox of Fiction," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2009), accessed November 3, 2013, http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-236635034/evolutionary-psychology-and-the-paradox-of-fiction.

these ideas in an actual context is easier than understanding them abstractly, the particular context of the Paradox of Horror will be used. Scholars tweaked the Paradox of Fiction to result in other paradoxes such as the Paradox of Horror, wherein scholars wonder how people can be frightened of something they know is not real.[63] Philosophy Professor Richard Joyce explains how real emotions are uninvolved in art participation, specifically in watching a horror movie: "1) We fear for ourselves only if we believe ourselves to be in danger; we fear for others only if we believe they actually exist and are in danger. 2) When we watch a horror movie, we do not believe ourselves, or anyone actual, to be in danger."[64] So, according to Joyce's view, what one experiences in a high-quality horror film is not actually fear. What one experiences is a "quasi-emotion."

Viewers of a horror film are said to be not as frightened as if the events on the screen were happening in front of them, and this lesser fear is based on a concurrent belief that their awareness of fiction generates quasi-emotions. Research professor Fabian Dorsch argues that "the intensity and determinacy of the feeling usually decreases when we move from a real experience to a represented one"[65] because a quasi-emotion is inherently less impacting than a real emotion. In other words, hearing a lion roar at the zoo is substantially more chilling than hearing the MGM lion growl. The argument for quasi-emotions possesses explanatory power, and philosopher Daniel Shaw has given it a philosophical basis as well.

Shaw argues that the emotional experiences caused from encountering art are different from other emotions felt outside art, such as in horse-racing, bowling, or

---

[63]Zsolt Batori, "Genre Identification and the Case of Horror," *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 2, (2010): 36.

[64]Richard Joyce, "Rational Fear of Monsters," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, (2000): 209.

[65]Fabian Dorsch, "Emotional Imaging and Our Responses to Fiction," *Enrahonar* 46, (2011): 174. Quasi-emotionalists have trouble inadvertently using the opposing side's terminology, as here.

bingo.[66] He offers two reasons, first that if one were to ask people, they would say their emotional responses to art vs. non-art experiences are different. Second, he argues that if the emotions were the exact same, people would not seek out art since other activities are "much easier and come much more naturally than art appreciation."[67] In fact, science may offer tentative experimentation that backs the theory of quasi-emotions as well.

A scientific study showed four photographs to approximately 150 college students and asked them to note their responses, both propositional and emotional. What the students were not aware of was that some of them were told the pictures were "real" while others were told the pictures were fictive. From their research, the authors concluded the following:

> While it does seem that 'real' messages were less cognitively engaging, they were more emotionally engaging. The link between cognitive and emotional enjoyment remains unclear. It is possible that when realistic content is more emotionally powerful, this would preclude cognitive processing of meaning. And conversely, because fictional content is less emotionally engaging, individuals might be able to think more deeply about it. Perhaps this is the advantage of fictional content.[68]

It seems, therefore, that quasi-emotions have a foundation in philosophy and science, and this section has attempted to argue for them as strongly as possible.

Nevertheless, quasi-emotional theory suffers from serious problems. Shaw's two reasons for the existence of quasi-emotions are particularly mired in dubious origins. His first argument for the existence of quasi-emotion supposes that people would report their feelings as being different while watching a competition versus engaging in art. Yet it is not self-evident that the elation of watching one's horse win is qualitatively different from watching a movie about a horse winning, and perhaps the celebration or

---

[66]Daniel Shaw, *A Philosophical Account of the Nature of Art Appreciation* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2000), 44-45.

[67]Ibid., 45.

[68]Andrew Mendelson and Zizi Papacharissi, "How Defined Realness Affects Cognitive & Emotional Responses to Photographs," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14, no. 4, (2007): 241.

disappointment evoked by a well-made movie is sometimes even more impactful than one's own experience of an activity. Shaw's second reason that quasi-emotion must exist is because appreciating art is supposedly more difficult and unnatural than art appreciation. The story-telling arts, however, offer far easier access to a broader range of activity than any person could engage in. From spy intrigue to underwater spelunking and from royal romances to aerial dogfights, the fictional experiences offered by books, plays, and films are substantially more accessible and easy than their "real-life" counterparts.

Likewise, the results of the scientific experiment may point to the opposite conclusion of the one the authors drew. The people in their experiment were likely not as affected by images they believed to be fictional because a true story has inherently more epistemological justification. The point missed by the authors, however, is that *all the pictures were fictional*. In fact, all the pictures were taken from upcoming films. The people who reacted more strongly to what they considered to be pictures of real situations were still responding to feigned pictures (from movies, no less!). It is well known that "when an image is presented as a work of art, the way people look at it is affected by a whole series of learnt assumptions about art."[69] So it is puzzling that the authors neither account for that in the study itself nor address it in their concluding remarks. In reality, the scientists did not control for their own effects on the experiment. More ironically, since the scientists did not use real and staged pictures (through which they could have tried to see if people could tell the difference), the experiment only measured the scientists' own interference.

Indeed, better-founded scientific research indicates that "narrative focus on individual characters actually results in a more profound impact on readers' beliefs than

---

[69]John Berger, "Ways of Seeing," in *Critical Visions in Film Theory* ed. Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj (New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 117.

non-fictional, expository accounts of groups."[70] Media studies professor Frank Hakemulder has performed experimentation comparing readers' levels of empathy after reading a generalized, non-fiction essay in contrast to a fictional novel about one woman. A specialist in the psychology of reading, professor Mary-Catherine Harrison explains the results, "The test subjects who read the novel demonstrated more significant changes in attitude than the essay readers, which Hakemulder attributes to readers' propensity to enter fictional worlds and empathize with individuals."[71] Emotion stirred through fiction can motivate people to take action in the real-world—and certainly the action spurred by art is no less rational than art stirred by non-fiction.

An enormous problem with positing quasi-emotions is that it complicates both one's epistemology and one's ontology. Similar to the need for epicycles in Ptolemy's astronomy, postulating the existence of quasi-emotions multiplies entities unnecessarily, especially if it can be shown that emotions alone adequately account for the Paradox of Fiction. Furthermore, differentiating between quasi-emotions and emotions proves impossible in the thought experiment proposed below. However, scholars have proposed another entity besides quasi-emotions to explain the apparent emotion felt while experiencing art, and this alternative needs to be examined before turning to further problems with this family of ideas.

Whereas quasi-emotions are said to arise from sense perceptions, University of Vermont professor Tyler Doggett and Rutgers professor Andy Egan wonder if a different mechanism is responsible. In a journal article published in 2012, Doggett and Egan postulate the existence of "I-emotions."[72] I-emotions differ from quasi-emotions in that

---

[70]Mary-Catherine Harrison, "The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy," *Narrative* 16, no. 3 (October 2008): 261.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Tyler Doggett and Andy Egan, "How We Feel About Terrible, Non-Existent Mafiosi," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84, no. 2, (March 2012): 277-306.

they originate from the imagination. Like quasi-emotions however, they are equally opposed to real emotions. So, their origination is different, but the ultimate functions of quasi-emotions and I-emotions remain the same.

Since the initial proposal of "I-emotions," Amy Kind has responded that the imagination undoubtedly functions in a far more complex and non-standard manner than previously imagined.[73] Yet the imagination alone is insufficient to generate emotion at all, offering examples of pondering philosophical zombies, imprisonment, and swamp creatures without feeling the slightest dismay, injustice, or wonder (respectively).[74] So, the imagination is capable of conjuring images without stirring emotion. Simultaneously, a story from Fuller Theological Seminary professor Robert Johnson offers difficulties to the theory of Dogget and Egan:

> I remember the impact on me of one scene in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). Inspired by McMurphy, the Jack Nicholson character, the patients want to see the World Series on Television. Nurse Ratched, however, refuses to let them, fearing that a break in their routine will upset them. Nicholson is livid at such patronizing control. Fighting back, he begins to narrate an imaginative World Series game. When Sandy Koufax strikes out Micky Mantle, there is pandemonium. The men on that mental ward feel a new sense of celebration and camaraderie. Simply by the power of his imagination, McMurphy has created a shared community, breaking the bonds of a society that would falsely restrict. As I watched, I too cheered, realizing as I did that I too have the potential to create that which will help others, if I would but seize the day.[75]

Johnson's story presents two interesting problems for the Paradox of Fiction. First, a fictional-story-within-a-fictional-story-within-a-true-story causes one to wonder if Johnson's emotional response would have been different in any way if Nicholson had told a true story instead. Second, the nature of how quasi-emotions or I-emotions transition into real emotions (or at least real-world actions) has not been identified by

---

[73]Amy Kind, "The Heterogeneity of the Imagination" *Erkenntnis* 78, no. 1, (February 2013): 141-59.

[74]Ibid., 154.

[75]Robert Johnson, *Reel Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 66.

scholars, and without a mechanism of change these theories suffer immensely from lack of explanatory power.

The following thought experiment presents compelling problems with the Paradox of Fiction but offers no difficulty to a neo-Tolstoyan view of emotional engagement in art. The ontological differences in the following examples are not the main point under consideration. Instead, the visual differences are of primary importance:

1. seeing a live video of a motorcycle driver making a 60-foot jump over a canyon
2. seeing a recorded video of that same jump
3. seeing a movie with a motorcycle jump at that same location, except a stuntman makes the jump as a character in the movie
4. seeing a movie with a motorcycle jump at that same location but with the harness and wires attached to the motorcycle erased in post-production
5. seeing a movie with a motorcycle jump only apparently at that same location, having actually been filmed against a green screen
6. seeing a movie with a photorealistic CGI character making the jump

In the first three examples, the person making the jump is in real danger. Only in the two penultimate examples is the actor not in any danger, and of course, in the final example there is no human actor. But it takes little imagination to envision each of the scenarios looking the exact same. Epistemologists might be fascinated by the fact that if one watched each video and concluded that a person just made a motorcycle jump, one would have a wide variety of justified/unjustified, true/false beliefs.

Yet of most interest here is the question, "How can the viewer tell whether the scene is 'real' or not, and what non-external factors could alert the viewer to the truth?" For if one expects that the viewer should know whether to feel emotionally connected to a scene based solely on the actuality of the events it portrays, if the viewer were brought into a room with a television and without ceremony shown one of the six sequences listed

above, it is not at all clear how the viewer could tell whether the scene was "real" or not. Thus, it is difficult to argue that a person feels quasi-/I-emotions from what they see onscreen solely if they know it to be fictional, for the ability to tell what is fictional is muted in these examples. Furthermore, if one cannot determine whether one is experiencing real emotions or quasi-emotions without first determining the fictive status of a film, quasi-emotional theory is in deep water. As essayist Elizabeth Picciuto writes, "Given the similarities between emotional responses to nonexistent objects and existent objects, a distinction of kind or concept seems unwarranted."[76] In summary, theories of quasi/I-emotions require epistemic decision-making to occur before one can decide whether the emotion is real, quasi, or "I."

Frankly, whether the story sounds true or is true-sounding but fictional, people's emotional responses are probably the same, and likewise for fictional and fictional-sounding stories. If a person must know the non/fictive status of a story before their apparent emotions are confirmed as being either quasi- or real, then the quasi-emotionalists have placed a burden on the back of epistemology too great to bear. Quasi-/I-emotions both seem to drown in epistemologically complex stories believed to be true but are not (or sound fictional but are, in fact, true). Advocates of Quasi-/I-emotions need to offer an account for emotional response to artworks that are either semi-fictional, truthful within a fiction, or indeterminate; those who believe that people experience real emotion in each epistemic case already have an elegant account.

Intriguingly, the Paradox of Fiction also relates to music insofar as one experiences quasi/I-emotions while listening. Humanities professor Alan Goldman disagrees with the idea that music stirs quasi/I-emotions because no linguistic referent exists in instrumental music. Goldman remarks that emotions in real life do not always

---

[76]Elizabeth Picciuto, "The Experience of Fiction" (PhD. Diss., University of Maryland, 2013), 65.

attach to objects either. Emotions need not even be tied to imagination, Goldman observes, as when people "react directly to progressions of chords in much the same way we react to combinations of colors, without imagining them to be other than they are."[77] The next section examines how perception, emotion, and reason tie together.

The Relationship of Perception, Emotion, and Reason

The relationship between perception, emotion, and reason manifests in three steps. It must be noted that these steps are only logically sequential, not chronologically sequential; the steps detail a process that happens almost instantaneously. Here are the steps:

1. Perception generates emotions without other intermediary psychological links.
2. With training, willpower can rein in emotions.
3. Therefore, simply seeing something automatically generates emotion, unless one is consciously attempting to rein the emotion in.

From these three steps, one would expect that if a man sees a picture of a beautiful woman, he will feel emotion simply from having seen it. If he has prepared himself, he will be able to steel himself against the resulting emotion(s) or perhaps even anticipate the stimulus and prevent his emotion(s). If he is not exercising preventative willpower, however, the emotion simply initiates. In either case, however, there is no roundtrip from the sense perception to reason and on to the emotion—there is no psychological intermediary. To prevent the emotion from arising at the stimulus of perception, willpower must "get ahead" of emotion and have it clamped down even before the stimulus arises.

Take a woman at a kindergarten. She passes an open door to see a worker

---

[77]Alan Goldman, "Emotions in Music (A Postscript)," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 1 (1995): 66.

slamming a child's head repeatedly against the floor. In ordinary parlance, one would say the woman has no choice but to feel horrified, outraged, and protective of the child. In short, the woman's perception led immediately to emotion. The woman did not use her reason to conclude, "That worker is harming a child, which is wrong, and therefore I will feel horrified at the sight, outraged at the stronger worker abusing power, and protective of the child's health." No, the woman instantly feels emotion(s), and reason and willpower catch up. Alternatively, if the woman was told beforehand to prepare to witness something, the woman would be able to clamp down and be at least somewhat less emotionally engaged by what she is about to see (as an ambulance driver learns with time to approach situations with a "closed heart").

Emotion is therefore like a horse underneath a jockey at the starting gate. When the gate opens, the horse leaps forward. The jockey does not have to shout "Haw!" for the horse to run. In fact, only a well-trained jockey could keep the horse from bolting once the gate opens, the jockey here being willpower and/or reason, and the raising of the gate being the input of perception. This view explains how watching a film can be delightful, as one allows one's perception of the film to stimulate emotion.

Of course, the view that perception leads to emotion applies to other artforms besides film. Howard Sklar, a post-doctoral researcher in Finland, argues that the audience feels qualitatively identical emotions about fictional characters as real people because the audience gets acquainted with them in the same, fragmented way that real people become familiar. Sklar reports, "We make do with that fragmentary information in much the same way that we do while reading fiction, by filling in gaps in our knowledge with hunches, ideas, feelings, or impressions based on our experiences with people, our sense of places, and other relatively intuitive factors."[78] My wife suggests

---

[78]Howard Sklar, "Believable Fictions," *The Electronic Journal of the Department of English at the University of Helsinki* 5, (2009), accessed November 22, 2013, http://blogs.helsinki.fi/hes-eng/volumes/volume-5/believable-fictions-on-the-nature-of-emotional-responses-to-fictional-characters-

that fiction has an emotional impact on her due to her 'reading' the observations and experiences onto the lives of people she knows. Too great a level of empathic and relational emotion also causes her to be unwilling to engage fiction which "hits too close to home," such as that involving child endangerment.

This view posits that the audience "jumps back and forth" between the fictive world and reality. Perhaps as quickly as multiple times a second or as slowly as hours, the emotions jump ahead in response to the stimuli while reason (or willpower, if one is not enjoying the artwork) quickly follows to affirm, temper, enflame, or even disengage the emotions. This theory explains how artworks can affect people even in ways they do not wish to be. People often dislike genres such as horror or romance simply because they do not want to feel the emotions likely elicited. Engaging an artwork is like going for a leash walk with an excitable dog, letting it pull when one wishes to go that direction and reigning it in when one does not—but feeling its influence either way.[79]

This idea suggests how a co-worker who dislikes a peer does not laugh at truly funny jokes that peer tells. The coworker has steeled himself in advance, so that he will not allow the person he dislikes to provoke any of his natural emotions. Steeling oneself against one's own emotions normally takes extended practice!

I am unaware of anyone having formulated these thoughts on emotional response to art, but many people's insights coalesce with it. Isenberg argues that

> fictional narratives impact our beliefs and attitudes about both the fictional and the actual worlds and shows that we do in fact accept and act as though fictional statements are true, even when we are aware of their falsity. It further suggests that this acceptance is an automatic pre-reflective response, which induces real responses.[80]

---

howard-sklar/.

[79]Psychologists will be very familiar with the term "valence" as applied to emotions, whereby valence functions as a spectrum used to evaluate an emotion's quality (ranging from "good/pleasant/healthy" emotions to "unpleasant/bad" emotions). Discussion of valence is out of place here because its inclusion would expand the evaluation of emotion from morality into health.

[80]Jillian Isenberg, "Fiction Without Pretense" (PhD Diss., University of British Columbia,

Isenberg clearly believes that one may act after feeling, but the feeling comes prior. James Gribble, a professor in Australia, likewise suggests that emotions properly arise in response to all well-constructed and presented worlds, not just the natural world.[81] Gribble is correct, and further, these emotional responses are not inherently unhealthy or irrational. Nahm was writing before the Paradox of Fiction was discovered as such, but he comparably discusses reactions to art, deciding that

> feeling aroused by art and converted in aesthetic experience does not retain all the characteristics of primitive tropism or reflex action. But aesthetic experience, which is a mood, does retain epistemologically significant aspects of all feeling, most evident in the direct and "unconscious" reactions called tropism or instinct. Among these are 'immediacy' of recognition.[82]

In simpler language, one can feel—truly feel—as a result of encountering an artwork, but those emotions do not force one to act.

Sklar recognizes, "This is not so much a question of the 'suspension of disbelief' as the *generation of temporary belief*."[83] In other words, one's sense perceptions deliver information that causes feeling, and one's reasoning faculties then process those perceptions and their emotions, resulting in aesthetic pleasure. Professor Mark Coppenger suggests something similar occurs in the process of watching a good movie, when "We are aware of all that is happening on the screen except that something is happening on the screen"[84] and therefore "The movie so thoroughly absorbs our

---

2013), 6.

[81]James Gribble, "The Reality of Fictional Emotions," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16, no. 4, (1982), accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3332523?uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103079264091.

[82]Milton C. Nahm, *Aesthetic Experience and Its Presuppositions* (New York: Harper, 1946), 369.

[83]Sklar, "Believable Fictions," accessed November 22, 2013. Italics in original.

[84]Mark Coppenger, "A Christian Perspective on Film," in *The Christian Imagination* ed. Leland Ryken, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 289.

attention that no room is left for technical reflections."[85] Coppenger adds that when an artwork stumbles it yanks the viewer out of the experience and inadvertently reminds the viewer of the artwork's fictionality. In words that would likely resonate with Tolstoy about the promulgation of distorted worldviews, Coppenger observes, "False films are visible. Our guard goes up, and we fall into critical review. We worry about whether other viewers are being duped. We resent the filmmaker's misconstrual and suspect his motives."[86] Coppenger, of course, is not equating fiction with falsity. Rather, he seems to mean that inaccurate portrayals, insensitive mischaracterizations, and the intentional hiding of facts prevent audiences from continuing to identify with an artwork.

The now-ubiquitous phrase "identifying with an artwork" makes sense in the context of a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic. Hughes describes "conditional emotions" as different from imaginary emotions, because even though they are based on someone else's circumstances, the feelings are nonetheless real. Hughes contends that people use conditional feelings very often, such as when "We even say, contrary to logical possibility, 'If I were you…,' by which we standardly mean 'If I, with my own attitudes and patterns of feeling, were in your situation…'"[87] These feelings, although they spring from circumstances arising in one's imagination, may as well spring from another's imagination. The feelings' source in imagination does not mean that the emotions themselves are imaginary, no more than a woodworker's walking stick is imaginary simply because its design sprang from his imagination. Likewise, imagined situations can stir up emotions as much (or more!) than real ones, and for the Christian, fiction is not immoral. The Bible positively recounts Nathan using an imaginary story to provoke

---

[85]Coppenger, "A Christian Perspective on Film," 290.

[86]Ibid., 292.

[87]Richard I. G. Hughes, "Tolstoy, Stanislavski, and the Art of Acting," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (1993): 42.

King David to self-consideration, and Jesus was a master storyteller of fiction intended to burrow deeply into the heart.

Some of the appeal of fiction is likely that it need *not* stir to action. So, seeing a burning building on a cinema screen may cause the audience to thrill. They may take pleasure from the nuance of experiencing a fire without the accompanying need to take the actions required if there were a real building on fire.

Recent neuroscience lends some credence to this theory of how emotion relates to art. The most recent discoveries in neuroaesthetics are shared by neuroscientists Anjan Chatterjee and Oshin Vartanian in an article entitled "Neuroscience of Aesthetics."[88] Chatterjee and Vartanian point to the idea of liberated embodied simulation which they define as being rooted in embodied simulation, the fact that one can vividly imagine the experience and thoughts of other people, experiencing an emotional state similar to them. Fiction "liberates" embodied simulation due to the very fictionality of the artwork. Not only is the audience emotionally engaged though; the audience's real lives are displaced by the artwork, freeing the audience's "stimulative resources . . . to engage more strongly with the stimulus, be it film or literature" or other artforms.[89] Sounding similar to Coppenger's ideas about film temporarily replacing the audience's reality, Chatterjee and Vartanian go on to explain that "rather than serving to suspend belief, aesthetic context can serve to augment the strength of one's interactions with artworks."[90]

---

[88]Anjan Chatterjee and Oshin Vartanian, "Neuroscience of Aesthetics," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1369, no. 1 (2016): 173. First a word on their underlying philosophy however, which is needed since all science is underpinned by philosophical systems (even if the philosophy is unacknowledged). It is refreshing to see science authors being upfront about their Aristotelian understanding of causality, and they acknowledge the limitations of examining brain scans which is a major aspect of neuroaesthetics. Their humility is remarkably important because it acknowledges that neuroaesthetics attempts to map the areas of brain activity that correspond to aesthetic experience, and thus its findings are descriptive rather than prescriptive. Further, it prevents buying into too-high expectations of what neuroaesthetics can contribute to aesthetics more broadly.

[89]Ibid., 183.

[90]Ibid. Chatterjee and Vartanian call Vittorio Gallese the originator of the phrase "liberated embodied simulation."

Chatterjee and Vartanian's central thesis is that "aesthetic experiences are underpinned by a limited set of shared neural systems: the emotion-valuation, sensory-motor, and meaning knowledge systems."[91] If true, art's appeal is rooted in its ability to engage these systems. For example, when people see the actual brushstrokes in paintings, Chatterjee and Vartanian explain that it seems to activate internal processes triggering similar emotions in viewers. They recognize that studies in brain imaging are indicating

> Empathetic responses to paintings engage our emotional circuitry, mirroring the emotions expressed in artwork. [This] view challenges some historical approaches in empirical aesthetics that give the cognitive apparatus a primary driving role in aesthetic experiences. Interestingly, to the extent that artists are consciously or unconsciously aware of viewers' body-induced emotional and felt motoric responses to artworks, this knowledge can in turn be used to produce viscerally engaging art."[92]

Chatterjee and Vartanian thus offer a partial, physiological explanation for what makes a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic accurate. To speak metaphorically, a person reacts emotionally to what the eyes see, and the regulative part of one's psychological self then steps in to re-evaluate, restrain, or refocus one's emotions.

Older, neuroaesthetic research is also helpful, although to a lesser degree.[93] Practitioner of neuroaesthetics V.S. Ramachandran looked at brain scans by having "subjects lie in an fMRI machine and view examples of kitsch . . . as well as fine art."[94] Ramachandran's experimentation led to an interesting, albeit overblown, conclusion: "'The interesting thing about kitsch is that it often looks like art,' explains

---

[91]Chatterjee and Vartanian, "Neuroscience of Aesthetics," 172.

[92]Ibid., 176.

[93]Although the article referenced below over-hypes the research, it is nonetheless helpful because it examines kitsch directly through neuroscience. Jonah Lehrer's "Mysteries of The Artistic Mind: What Makes Art Great?" *Psychology Today*, July/August 2009, contains a quote saying "Attempts to define art are nothing new. But Ramachandran is seeking to define it from the perspective of the brain," (77) a comment certain to elicit unintended chortling among philosophers!

[94]Ibid.

Ramachandran. 'But it's not art, because it doesn't trigger the same intensity of feeling.' He suggests that while kitsch often relies on the same tricks as great art . . . these tricks aren't as well executed."[95] One is warranted to be suspicious that Ramachandran's explanation of aesthetics simply baptizes philosophy as scientism, because the interpretation of MRIs seems inherently subjective. After all, a brain scan does not reveal objective data like, "kitsch is not art." Nonetheless, certain findings are very interesting, such as, "The fusiform gyrus, an area of the brain involved in facial recognition, responds more eagerly to caricatures than real faces"[96] with people purportedly "recogniz[ing] visual parodies of people—like a cartoon portrait of Richard Nixon—faster than an actual photograph."[97] If there is any truth to the idea that kitsch is "easier" than art, perhaps neuroaesthetics can assist in delivering additional, medical evidence. The next chapter turns its attention to the most challenging conception of kitsch which is, in fact, based on the idea that kitsch is easier to digest than art.

[95]Lehrer, "Mysteries," 77.

[96]Ibid., 74.

[97]Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

REASSEMBLING KITSCH

The Most Challenging Conception of Kitsch

Before Kundera's definition of kitsch became ascendant, a predominant view of kitsch declared that any art which affects users too emotionally or too easily is kitsch. Clement Greenberg offers the most famous version of this definition in his article "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Formally, the essay deals at length with the painter Ilya Repin whom Greenberg treats uncharitably. Repin, so disliked by Greenberg, was actually a friend of Tolstoy's and painted Tolstoy many times.[1] Repin serves for Greenberg as a surrogate for kitsch. Greenberg describes Repin, and by extension kitsch, as any work that "predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art. Repin, or kitsch, is synthetic art." Greenberg seems to deride an artwork as kitsch when it grants an emotion to the audience without requiring the audience to work very hard for it; that is to say, the emotion comes too easily for the audience. In summary, kitsch for Greenberg is any artwork which affects the audience too emotionally, quickly, or easily.[2]

In all Western literature, the most famous example of purportedly engaging an audience's emotions too much is Charles Dickens' depiction of Little Nell's death in his

---

[1]Thomas Froncek, *The Horizon Book of the Arts of Russia* (New York: American Heritage, 1970), 209.

[2]Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review*, 1939, 34-49, accessed November 22, 2017, http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html. Greenberg offers additional nuance which is helpful for identifying kitsch (including its mass production, its relationship to capitalism, and its potential status as a side effect of peasant migration to cities), but these nuances are not part of the core identity of kitsch.

novel *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Although the word "kitsch" had not been invented yet, Oscar Wilde perhaps prefigured its meaning when he quipped, "one must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without dissolving into tears…of laughter."[3] When used in that sense, "kitsch" judges a work of art as being too heavy-handed or too manipulative in its attempts to get the audience to feel.

It is only fair for the reader to review the examples of kitsch that Greenberg offers, for one might conceivably agree with Greenberg's theory until one sees his examples. Greenberg contrasts the rhyming, homespun poetry of Edgar Guest, whom Greenberg refers to as "Eddie," with that of T.S. Elliot. Guest's poems normally take the form of on-the-nose advice, from titles ("See It Through," "On Quitting") to actual content:

> Ain't no use as I can see,
> In sittin' underneath a tree,
> An' growlin' that your luck is bad,
> An' that your life is extry sad;
> Your life ain't sadder than your neighbor's,
> Nor any harder are your labors;
> It rains on him the same as you,
> An' he has work he hates to do;
> An' he gits tired an' he gits cross,
> An' he has trouble with the boss;
> You take his whole life, through an' through,
> Why, he's no better off than you.[4]

When Guest's poetry is not offering advice, it tends to toward description of common life events. In a poem entitled "Thanksgiving," Guest describes a happy family reunion:

> Gettin' together to smile an' rejoice,
> An' eatin' an' laughin' with folks of your choice;
> An' kissin' the girls an' declarin' that they,

---

[3]This supposed quote may be a gloss on an earlier phrase that ended by saying "without laughing." Regardless of who first said it or how they said it, Marcia Eaton recognizes the phrase simultaneously shows that "it is appropriate even for people without hearts of stone to laugh at the death of an impossibly good child [while at] the same time we still find something odd about such laughter." Marcia Eaton, "Laughing at the Death of Little Nell" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 1989): 269.

[4]Edgar Guest, "Hard Luck," Lines 1-12.

Are growin' more beautiful day after day;
Chattin' an' braggin' a bit with the men,
Buildin' the old family circle again. . . .
Hear the old voices still ringin' with song,
See the old faces unblemished by wrong,
See the old table with all of its chairs,
An' I'll put my soul in my Thanksgivin' prayers.[5]

Greenberg lashes out at *New Yorker* magazine as "high class kitsch" and calls the writers Georges Simenon and John Steinbeck "puzzling borderline" authors.[6] Greenberg contrasts the work of Maxfield Parrish, whose presumably kitsch paintings foreshadow the luminescent style of Thomas Kinkade, to the output of Michelangelo and Rembrandt. When comparing the illustrations of Norman Rockwell to the disjointed paintings of Georges Braque, Greenberg laments, "It is lucky…that the peasant is protected from the products of American capitalism, for he would not stand a chance next to a *Saturday Evening Post* cover."[7]

Essayist Rochelle Gurstein confesses to being sympathetic to Greenberg's claim that kitsch's "wide appeal . . . is due to the ease with which it is consumed."[8] Certainly there is truth to some kitsch being easily understood. Similar to many—if not most—television shows, most kitsch requires nearly no mental effort. People fall asleep in front of their TV's and kitsch trinkets all the time, but it is difficult to imagine falling asleep in boredom looking at Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. Coppenger voices Greenberg's objection in the context of films which "demand too little of the viewer. Their accessibility, their willingness to do the work, surely marks them as second rate. How can anything of value come forth without willful and studied attention?"[9] These

---

[5]Edgar Guest, "Thanksgiving," Lines 1-6, 29-32. Certainly not all of Guest's poetry describes happy occasions. Guest's poem "To All Parents" offers perspective on parents grieving the death of their child.

[6]Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." One wonders, in passing, if budding authors may feel their enthusiasm dampened when Nobel prize-winners like Steinbeck are labelled possible writers of kitsch.

[7]The next chapter analyzes, in depth, specific covers of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

[8]Rochelle Gurstein, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," *Raritan.* 22 (2003): 139.

[9]Mark Coppenger, "A Christian Perspective on Film," in *The Christian Imagination* ed. Leland

assertions by Gurstein and Coppenger constitute thoughtful applications of Greenberg's basic view.

However, the literature on kitsch from scholars who entertain Greenberg's bombastic ideas is generally harsher than the comments above. One finds scholars remonstrating, "The layman is at liberty to extend the label 'art' to all manner of *Kitsch* and hokum; and, though the high-minded theorist of art deplores such lax usage, he does not dispute its propriety, for it is exactly suited to the layman's ignorance and Philistinism."[10] How one defines art determines how one will judge the truth of that quote, but apart from its truth value, its tone is certainly uncharitable and elitist.

The History of Greenberg's View of Kitsch

Professor of fine arts at Harvard University T.J. Clark points out the common knowledge that "Greenberg's cultural theory was originally Marxist in its stresses,"[11] even though the Marxism in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" is generally beneath the surface, functioning more as a foundation than a point of argument. Additionally, Clark reveals that due to Greenberg's writing flowing very well, "a certain amount of elegant skirting around the difficult issues" takes place.[12] Pressing Greenberg's thinking on his Marxist

---

Ryken (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 291. Coppenger later responds to this objection. His response is incorporated into the next chapter.

[10]Francis Edward Sparshott, *The Theory of the Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 292. Italics in original.

[11]Timothy Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1982): 140.

[12]Ibid., 141. Interestingly, a main point of Clark's article is tucked into a footnote on page 149:

> Earlier Marxists did not need this rhetoric, this gasping after class positions which they did not occupy, because there was an actual job for them to do, one with a measure of importance, after all- the business of opposing the ideologies of a bourgeois elite and of pointing to the falsity of the seeming contest between that elite and the ordinary, power-wielding mass of the class.

In other words, as Marxists in the United States enjoyed the unprecedented wealth of the country (with Greenberg himself owning a Jackson Pollack painting, for example), their denunciations turned toward increasingly trivial problems.

underpinnings and his skirting of difficult issues, as Clark does, is appropriate, for Greenberg seems willing to press others but avoids the consequences of his own ideas, such as how the public can be taught to appreciate better art, how the public outside cities could engage Greenberg's idea of art at all, and the generally horrible art of Marxist Russia.

Ironically, discussion of kitsch is "something of a critical commonplace in discussions of Stalinist culture,"[13] according to Russian literature professor Phillip Bullock. Lenin himself mocked Tolstoy on different occasions. Yet under Marxist leadership according to Bullock, Soviet Russia, "tries to hide its own artifice; it rigorously denies its borders; it claims to be an organic and teleological whole, like some quasi-Hegelian emanation of the World Spirit in its Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist incarnation."[14] Greenberg's discussion of kitsch in the generation before him is harsh, but his discussion of kitsch at the time he wrote is nonexistent, a point not to be missed in light of the kitsch created by the Marxist cultures he adored. In spite of his mockery of Tolstoy, Lenin himself propagated Soviet kitsch, including "architectural kitsch, the Exhibition Hall of USSR Economic Achievements."[15] The irony is that Lenin who derided Tolstoy, propagated Soviet kitsch so much that "Soviet Russia is commonly used to illustrate the effects of kitsch socially and politically."[16] It should be emphasized, then, that Greenberg hollowly ignored the countrywide kitsch created by the Marxist systems he advocated.

Yet Greenberg's conception of kitsch proved popular and influential in the

---

[13]Philip Ross Bullock, "Andrei Platonov's *Happy Moscow*: Stalinist Kitsch and Ethical Decadence," *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 1 (2006): 204.

[14]Ibid., 205.

[15]Ralph Croizier, "The Avant-Garde and the Democracy Movement: Reflections on Late Communism in the USSR and China," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 3 (1999): 493.

[16]Eugenie Samier, "Toward Public Administration as a Humanities Discipline: A Humanistic Manifesto," *Halduskultuur: Administrative Culture*, no. 6 (2005): 35.

United States.[17] Rochelle Gurstein traces the subsequent effects of Greenberg's thinking, reporting that Dwight MacDonald built on Greenberg's view of kitsch when he wrote A Theory of Mass Culture." In that important article McDonald states that popular culture possesses, in Gurstein's words, "untold powers."[18] For MacDonald, the art of pop culture is not just bad art or non-art but a threat. Following Macdonald's lead, academics' calls warning of the dangers of mass culture—and the counter-shots in defense of it—became "shriller."[19]

Gurstein shows that the debate over kitsch shifted toward a broad discussion of popular, commercialized culture, while the arguments in favor of mass culture grew more sophisticated, with Edward Shils in particular defending mass culture as a side effect of the industrialization he promoted. Shils, in a categorization Gurstein likely does not use with positive meaning, "could barely be distinguished from . . . modern-day conservatives."[20] However, Shils pales in comparison to Leslie Fiedler whose article "The Middle Against Both Ends" was a defense of comic books. "Today, the threat of comics seems remote in a world of ever more gruesome and lurid pastimes," drolly acknowledges Gurstein, "but in the 1950s Fiedler's move was calculated to provoke outrage—just as the use of comics in pop art a few years later would—since comics were

---

[17]The upcoming paragraphs are indebted to the excellent history offered by Gurstein, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," 136-58.

[18]Ibid., 140.

[19]Ibid., 144. The astute reader may be noticing the similarities between Greenberg and foremost scholar of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno (e.g., roots in Marxism, viewing mass-produced art with suspicion). Adorno's voluminous writing is an order of magnitude more sophisticated than Greenberg's, for Adorno was a philosopher while Greenberg was an art critic, but certainly, Adorno attacked the art of pop culture as vociferously as Greenberg. Art professor Ian McLean cautions, "However, the writings on modernism by Greenberg and Adorno cannot be grouped within the same school of thought, except in the most general sense. Greenberg knew of the work by the Frankfurt School, but there is no evidence to suggest a trans-Atlantic dialogue between him and Adorno." Ian McLean, "Modernism and Marxism, Greenberg and Adorno" *Australian Journal of Art* 7, no. 1 (1988): 97. McLean concludes that the similarities between Greenberg and Adorno "can only be explained in terms of a shared climate of thought prevailing in the inter-war years" (97).

[20]Gurstein, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," 145.

widely regarded as the most toxic form of mass culture."[21] The debate over kitsch had metastasized into arguments condemning entire artforms and media. Comics, incidentally, were not just being attacked by conservatives. They were also being attacked by liberal intellectuals who viewed their moralism as propagandistic.[22] By legitimating decidedly low-quality art—many scholars at the time would have rejected calling comic books "art" at all, of course—Fiedler was able to equate low quality art with the avant-garde, insofar as they both rejected middle-class values.

Gurstein posits that both sides were too exhausted to defeat Fiedler's arguments[23] and subsequently, academics began teaching about art that "only a few decades before would have been beyond the pale of the literary establishment and the reading public."[24] What was controversial and provocative thirty years before was then considered passé and bland, with students considering their professors (and thus their professors' tastes and art choices) uncool.[25] Regardless of whether kitsch was catching up to the avant-garde or the avant-garde was regressing to kitsch, the 1960s saw students rebelling against their professors' never-before-so-modern tastes.

Gurstein then credits Susan Sontag's well-known book *Against Interpretation* with the final step of enshrining kitsch "as a superior brand of aestheticism, indeed, the last word in advanced taste."[26] It was not necessarily Sontag's argument, Gurstein argues,

---

[21]Gurstein, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," 145.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., 148.

[24]Ibid., 147. Indeed, colleges around the United States now offer entire courses examining comics, not just as springboards for another subject matter (e.g. "Palestinian/Israeli Conflict in Graphic Representation") but as the predominant object of study. In fact, colleges are even offering degrees in comics. The study of comics as a discipline was likely brought around due to the popularity and influence of semiotics, complementarily coupled with the rise of queer theory, gender studies, and critical theory as modes of analysis. Regardless of the academic mechanics underlying its history as an area of study, the analysis of comics is now entrenched in collegiate departments.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., 149.

that elevated kitsch thusly. Rather, "Sontag's playful [writing] style had the effect of making objections to mass culture from the old leftist perspective appear ridiculously overblown, humorless, even priggish,"[27] and even if Sontag's approach had not been more winsome than Greenberg's, Greenberg's objections are certainly immoderate.

Gurstein foregrounds what is most important in the history of Greenberg's view of kitsch: what is avant-garde today becomes kitsch tomorrow.[28] Since the artworld's output from the late nineteenth century to the present contributes toward the (re)cycling of avant-garde into kitsch, something is wrong with Greenberg's definition.[29] For her part, Gurstein advocates replacing high/low art distinctions with the terms "art and commercial entertainment,"[30] a move that Greenberg in his earlier years likely would have advocated. The kind of vast renaming Gurstein promotes would offer the benefit of protecting some art, but it would totally disenfranchise many people from thinking they were engaging with art.[31]

Fortunately, Greenberg softened his stance on kitsch in later years. He realized the contradiction in criticizing kitsch's spread through commercialization ("Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time") while lamenting that "peasants" had neither the time nor energy to appreciate art ("the peasant finds no 'natural' urgency within himself that will drive him toward Picasso in

---

[27]Gurstein, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," 149.

[28]Ibid., 152-53.

[29]Gurstein goes on to trace the effects of the debate in the eruption of Pop Art, but this additional history does not touch directly on what most would consider to be kitsch, and therefore it has not been included.

[30]Gurstein, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," 156.

[31]Gurstein's history of the dialogue surrounding kitsch is obviously helpful, but it suffers from three problems. First, current attitudes in favor of kitsch are significantly overstated: kitsch remains popular among the public, but art historians generally loathe it. Second, Gurstein seems to equate kitsch with camp, whose distinction and enjoyment is significantly different, as has already been explained in reference to Sontag's writing on it. Lastly, adapting Gurstein's proposed terminology is not a welcome move because it definitionally places a great many artworks outside the realm of art.

spite of all difficulties").[32] Greenberg certainly enjoyed art and wished it to spread more among poorer people.[33]

Comprehensive View of Kitsch

Karsten Harries, perhaps because of his philosophical training and years of experience teaching philosophy at Yale, offers insightful analysis concerning

> the strange ambiguity of the word Kitsch. On the one hand, the word does belong to art criticism—Kitsch is considered bad art; on the other hand, Kitsch is not simply bad art, but bad art of a particular kind. Here "bad" is not used so much in an aesthetic as in a moral sense. Kitsch is perverted art, and to understand this perversion, we have to relate art to a standard of truth or morality [sic].[34]

Kitsch theory and Tolstoyan aesthetics, therefore, share a belief that a standard of morality or truth is relevant to art.

Harries contends that one should not "confine Kitsch to representational art; there is much abstract Kitsch."[35] One might wonder what abstract kitsch would be, but Harries answers with a piercing question, "How many abstract paintings decorate homes and offices to lend them an air of culture, a certain dignity, which creates a proper environment for someone who wants to escape from his own hollowness into a civilized environment prepared for him by his interior decorator?"[36] Harries thus contributes to the development of a full-orbed definition of kitsch.

---

[32]Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."

[33]Reading about Greenberg causes one to wonder how much he injected his own personality into his definition of kitsch. In one of Greenberg's obituaries, an interviewer writes Greenberg told him, "Your taste can't transcend your personality." The interviewer goes on to recall, "Taste was Greenberg's favourite subject and confrontation often the way of beginning a talk. 'I'm a highbrow. What are you?'" Tim Hilton, "Clement Greenberg Obituary," *Independent* May 10, 1994, accessed November 22, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-clement-greenberg-1435127.html. One hopes that someday, the art critics who set themselves up to be arbiters of taste will cease pillorying how the public enjoys art.

[34]Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 75.

[35]Ibid., 82.

[36]Ibid.

For while definitions of kitsch that note its artificial sweetness, its neglect of evil and its placement of oneself in a community all contribute to identifying aspects of kitsch objects, it is only when they are welded to Greenberg's original view that a comprehensive assessment can occur. With a full-orbed view of kitsch, one sees both how rampant kitsch is in Western culture and how scholars can misidentify it. It has already been mentioned that Harries predicted the kitsch of the twentieth century would be sour while the kitsch of the nineteenth century was sweet. The twenty-first century seems to prefer ironic kitsch. Any time an artwork takes an ironic tone without offering reason for irony, it is in danger of being ironic kitsch.[37]

Eli Friedlander follows in his father Saul's footsteps of writing about Nazi kitsch.[38] He summarizes Greenberg's definition of kitsch as being "the striving for an effect," [39] a definition which sounds remarkably like Tolstoy's definition of art. Kitsch is dependent, according to Friedlander, upon "images whose message is emotionally gripping, images we are therefore attracted to or fascinated by."[40] If Tolstoy's definition of art is left as Tolstoy himself states it, it may be describing kitsch!

The Challenge of Greenberg's View of Kitsch

The challenge of Greenberg's definition to a Tolstoyan aesthetic is clear: Kitsch is defined as art that engages the audience's emotions inordinately, yet according to Tolstoy, art is precisely that which engages the recipient's emotions. Worse, a

---

[37]Many American teenagers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries embraced modes of speaking which drip with irony; perhaps their very mode of speaking is ironic kitsch.

[38]Eli Friedlander, "Some Thoughts on Kitsch," *History & Memory* 9, no. 1-2 (1997): 381. Friedlander summarizes Greenberg's definition of the avant-garde as "the attempt to elicit reflective conviction by presenting the conditions of representation," which does not sound anything like Tolstoy's definition of art.

[39]Ibid. Friedlander disagrees with Greenberg's definition of kitsch, noting that Greenberg can account for the use of kitsch as an opiate to the masses but not as the culture in which Nazi brutalism flourished.

[40]Ibid., 382.

Tolstoyan aesthetic labels an artwork that powerfully and immediately engages the audience's emotions as great art, yet Greenberg's definition labels that very artwork as kitsch. After all, artworks that are easy to grasp emotionally, bring people together, and require no education to understand perfectly fit both definitions.

In a Tolstoyan aesthetic the engagement of the audience's emotion is a virtue. An artwork is deemed good when it shares with the audience the emotion that the creator herself felt, and when that artist causes the audience to be overwhelmed with that emotion, a Tolstoyan aesthetic calls that artwork great. On the other hand, kitsch theory gauges as a negative the standard of art that Tolstoy uses. The problem, in short, is that Greenberg's view of kitsch looks nearly identical to Tolstoy's theory of good art. So, one seems forced to choose between the Tolstoyan aesthetic of judging an artwork as good or Greenberg's theory of judging that same artwork as kitsch. Yet both these perspectives struggle with problems, including whether a Tolstoyan aesthetic could be used to justify emotionally potent art such as Hitler's speeches and how a critic can justify his accusations of kitsch as being anything more than personal opinion.

Replying to Greenberg's Conception of Kitsch

Replies to Greenberg's view of kitsch are presented here, including the dismantling developed by Robert Solomon. One resolution to the dilemma would be simply choosing Greenberg or Tolstoy's view and dismissing the other. Yet both views possess insights and problems making wholesale acceptance or dismissal of either unwarranted. Fortunately, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic can utilize three defenses in response to Greenberg's definition of kitsch. The defenses are offered here in ascending order of strength.

The first defense results from acquiescing to kitsch being the stark, immoral manipulation of emotions but countering that good art is the moral evocation of emotion. Notre Dame Professor Erika Doss cautions against allowing the nakedly ambitious

manipulation of emotions to cause one to dismiss emotions altogether because "capitalizing on popular and public response suggests the significance, rather than the triviality, of emotions and prompts questions about what, in fact, generates such response."[41] Doss's caution for Greenberg and Tolstoy is helpful because it reveals they both believe certain emotions to be immoral. However, the root disagreement does not consist of which emotions are immoral but in Greenberg's assertion that kitsch stirs emotions either too quickly or too easily. Therefore, this first defense elucidates an area of similarity between Greenberg and Tolstoy but does not reconcile their views.

Coppenger addresses head-on the concern that some art may be too easy to understand or too straightforward with its emotion. In regard to critics condemning certain movies for being too easy to digest, Coppenger observes that their condemnation

> reflects a curious value structure. They seem to elevate the obscure, the difficult, the esoteric. Of course, experience teaches us that some of the finest things are available to only the diligent. And so we might insist that the viewer encounter a range of difficulties, for his own good. But surely this misses the point of the filmmaker's art. It is his task to appropriate the inaccessible, the obscure, and render it accessible and clear. He should eliminate obscurity, not transmit it.[42]

Coppenger is not simply dismissing the critics' concern about artworks that affects their audiences immediately. He is rather suggesting that a "range" of artworks be contemplated by the audience. Greenberg never offers an explanation for how kitsch engages the audience's feelings so easily, and in fact, one wonders how supposedly bad art could manipulate emotion so easily. In most fields, having more power is considered a good trait, after all. Coppenger's practical solution strikes one as sensible for most laypeople,[43] but Greenberg's followers (and Tolstoy, were he alive) would likely suggest

---

[41]Erika Doss, "Makes Me Laugh, Makes Me Cry: Feelings and American Art," *American Art* 25, no. 3 (2011): 3-4. Along these lines, Sidney questions, "But what, shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious?" Philip Sidney, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Robert Kimbrough. 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 138.

[42]Coppenger, "Christian Perspective on Film," 291.

[43]Coppenger's solution, to be fair, is not at all an attempt at addressing the Greenberg theory of kitsch. Rather, Coppenger is writing in the specific context of "invisible films," his term for movies that hide their very createdness and thus engulf viewers in such a way that the viewers temporarily forget they

that it does not address their actual theories. In other words, advising someone to engage with artworks of various degrees of difficulty constitutes prudent advice, but it does not adjudicate between the qualities of kitsch versus good art.

The most telling rebuttal of Greenberg's view of kitsch arises from viewing its scope. Simply put, Greenberg's definition is too broad, too easily applicable to a variety of objects sharing little in common with each other. When a definition of kitsch captures Repin's painting *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan on November 16, 1581* (1885: Tretyakov Gallery) and *Sher-Ruff Paws* in the same group of art, the net has been cast too widely. Greenberg claims kitsch engages the audience's emotions too much but never mentions how much emotion is too much, so critics have been able to lob the title of "kitsch" upon any artwork that affects them uncomfortably. Robert Solomon launches a counter-attack on Greenberg's definition in his famous article "On Kitsch and Sentimentality." Solomon asks,

> Is the charge that kitsch provokes too much of these affectionate emotions, or that it provokes them at all? And when the critics of sentimentality call an emotion "immature" or "naive" are they really contrasting it with more mature and knowledgeable emotions or are they, again, dismissing emotions as such?[44]

Solomon goes on to argue, convincingly, that feeling emotion at all has been looked down upon in aesthetics, with the gentler emotions particularly singled out.[45] "The usual cultivated response," Solomon remarks," …is a sneer."[46] That a sneer itself indicates the emotion of contempt seems to fly right past art critics. Critics following Greenberg's account prefer other emotions but do not admit it, likely even to themselves. That is how Solomon devastates Greenberg's account, showing that Greenberg's distaste of emotion

---

are at the cinema. The quote above is Coppenger's response to an attack on invisible films, but its appropriateness as a response to Greenberg's definition of kitsch validates its inclusion here.

[44]Robert Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, No. 1 (Winter, 1991), 5.

[45]Ibid., 6.

[46]Ibid.

is not grounded in theory but in class concerns,[47] distrust of emotion,[48] and personal preference (against sweet kitsch and for colder, more cerebral art).49

Because the literature about kitsch is predominantly about sweet kitsch, a few remarks about the bifurcated relationship between sentiment and sentimentality are needed. On the one hand, if transmitting certain positive emotions to audiences is labelled sentimentality, then art critics need to explain why transmitting positive emotion is morally wrong. Philosopher of art Deborah Knight has carried on Solomon's argument and points to rich but unacknowledged irony:

> The criticisms raised against sentimentality, though forcefully insistent in tone, seem, on the whole, predictable, programmed, predigested. But these terms (predictable, programmed, predigested) are the very sort standardly used about sentimentality by those who decry it.[50]

The discipline of philosophy has historically decried "sentiments" as irrational, temporal, and untrustworthy while idealizing reason as rational, eternal, and trustworthy.[51] Yet to condemn sentimentality based on its linguistic similarity to sentiment is both to partake in a fallacious word game and to ignore philosophy's bias for reason.[52]

On the other hand, it is more likely that scholars generally view sentimentality not as synonymous for all expression of emotion but as "the type of feeling kitsch elicits,"[53] and if so, the question is whether sentimentality is as off-limits to current-day

---

[47]Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," 8-9.

[48]Ibid., 10.

[49]Ibid., 9.

[50]Deborah Knight, "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality: A Meta-Aesthetic Perspective," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999): 411.

[51]Ibid., 418. Certain signals indicate philosophy's posture toward emotion is beginning to change, with journals focused on the philosophy of emotion becoming increasingly widespread. The journal *Motivation and Emotion* has been published from 1977 to the present, and two other journals, *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* and the *Journal for Philosophy of Emotion*, are in beginning stages.

[52]Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *passim*.

[53]Judy Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch: The Politics of Design," *Home Cultures* 3, no. 3 (2006): 209.

art critics as patriotism was to Tolstoy. In this latter case, the art critic is simply expressing a personal preference for a different flavor of emotions, and furthermore, he is following the taste of the times which lean toward the sour and ironic. One hopes that the out-of-touch and haughty judgment that twentieth century critics sensed in Tolstoy's rejection of patriotism will someday be applied by art historians to their own rejection of sentimentality.[54]

Solomon concludes his excellent discussion of kitsch with his own definition. "Kitsch is art (whether or not it is good art) that is deliberately designed to so move us, by presenting a well-selected and perhaps much-edited version of some particularly and predictably moving aspect of our shared experience…"[55] Solomon arrives closer to the essence of kitsch than anyone else. His definition misses only one aspect of kitsch which will be examined now.[56]

---

[54]Knight's article "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality" offers a nuanced but tactful argument that the current popularity of condemning sweet kitsch is itself rooted in what Knight calls "second-order, self-directed sentimentality" (418).

[55]Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," 12.

[56]Every major definition of kitsch has now been individually examined, collated, and found wanting even in aggregate. The problem with each of these definitions is that they have identified aspects of kitsch without arriving at an understanding of kitsch's core, namely, the aspect that makes something kitsch. If what all kitsch shares in common can be identified, then critics can argue about whether an object lacks or possesses that characteristic.

CHAPTER 7

A NEO-TOLSTOYAN AESTHETIC RESPONDS TO KITSCH

The faults in Greenberg's definition are now clear, so a re-appraisal of kitsch is presented which situates kitsch in the broader realm of art (unlike scholars who view kitsch as non-art) while simultaneously articulating why kitsch is bad art. It is possible to retain the insights of kitsch theory and Tolstoyan aesthetics while avoiding their problems. A neo-Tolstoyan approach seeks to do just that, explaining three things: what makes kitsch low-quality art, what delineates art from non-art, and what is the criterion for high-quality art. This chapter then stress-tests a neo-Tolstoyan theory of art by examining various artworks that have been called kitsch.

A Re-Appraisal of Kitsch's Place in Art

By roughing out the broad contours of art using pictures as examples, kitsch can be defined more narrowly in the context of art. Pictures constitute an excellent example because they can be sorted into three categories. Many pictures exist only to convey information. These data-relaying pictures may be labelled with the term "diagram," and this category of pictures is not art. Other pictures are created using the materials of art, but they are not created to convey an emotion. Instead, they are created by children as practice with material; these pictures fall into in a second category called "crafts."[1] When a person creates a picture to cause others to feel an emotion, however,

[1]Of course, adults can create crafts too, and when an adult creates a craft, they are likely to attempt to imbue it with their own emotion. However, if the adult is having to follow step-by-step after another's instruction, the adult may not have the talent to imbue much of their own emotion into their creation (e.g., people imitating the strokes of Bob Ross on their own canvas but not knowing what he is

the resultant picture belongs to the category of art.[2]

This third category, art, is comprised of two sub-divisions, differentiated by how the artwork conveys emotion. Some pictures convey emotion by offering a perspective on something outside themselves. This sub-division of art is referential. It refers to people, language, events, places, or other things. Cartoons and family photographs normally fall in this sub-division. These pictures' value rests in their reference and referent. This kind of picture need not warrant study of its craftsmanship, because as a vessel for emotion toward the reference, the picture must simply be of minimal quality to communicate the emotion intended.[3] People seem to intuit that their attention should be focused on the referent, and that is why one rarely sees a person studying a political cartoon for its aesthetic artisanship. One may indeed return to a funny or insightful cartoon over and over, but its value rests primarily in what it references, not its own craftsmanship.

The other sub-division of art is comprised of artworks whose emotional conveyance is self-originated. These warrant ongoing engagement due to their own, non-referential execution. A picture of a flower in the prior sub-division may be intended to provoke happiness in the viewer due to its connotation of daisies, for example, but a picture of a flower in this sub-division conveys emotion *not* primarily because it looks like an existing flower but because of its own execution, as does Jan Brueghel the Elder's *Flowers in a Basket and a Vase* (1615: National Gallery). Pictures in this sub-division need not be abstract and certainly may be of a representational genre, for what is

---

actually painting until he scrapes off some paint and reveals it is a mountain range).

[2]Of course, bleed over between categories is expected. While some pictures may rest firmly in only one of these categories, other pictures may occupy two categories. That a Venn-Diagram of these categories might show overlapping circles does not harm the theorizing in the main text.

[3]The claim here is not that the artwork's quality is irrelevant. Rather, the artwork *must* have a minimum quality of skill to transfer its emotion. If the artwork does not meet that minimum standard of quality, then the audience will note the lack of skill rather than feel the emotion.

significant is not their style but the quality of composition and craftsmanship. Pop Art paintings were widely maligned by the public for their banal content, while art critics quickly realized that the execution itself was often excellent—and conveyed emotion. Masters of an artform and genre can often create masterpieces out of everyday ideas, while untalented artists struggle to create ongoing interest even out of fantastical content.

For reasons that cannot be elaborated here due to space concerns, artworks in this second sub-division are generally viewed as "better" art than the first sub-division. No judgment as to either sub-divisions' actual worth is here prescribed. Rather, this simple observation is intended only as a description of the general attitude of both laypeople and art critics, because it is important to the definition of kitsch presented shortly.

Of course, these two sub-divisions of art are also not mutually exclusive, and individual artworks almost inevitably share some aspects of both. Yet these categorizations help one understand how terms arose like "Fine Art" to describe a Rembrandt portrait or "mass art" to describe a Dallas Cowboys player poster. The Rembrandt portrait is certainly of a long-dead, real person, but it falls into the second sub-division since it conveys powerful emotion not because of its referent but through its craft and execution. The hypothetical Dallas Cowboys player poster likely falls into the first sub-division because the emotion conveyed is due to its referent.

A simple test to determine which sub-division an individual artwork falls into is to place the artwork in front of a person cognizant of the artform and genre then ask the person why it engages them. If the person's interest is gained solely because of its content ("That's Emmitt Smith!") or cannot be kept because of its content, then the artwork likely falls in the first-subdivision. If a person is engaged by the artwork apart from knowledge of any reference(s) it makes, the artwork is more likely to belong in the second sub-division.

Kitsch, then, is any artwork which transmits emotion through referencing something else while pretending to possess that emotional invocation itself. In other words, it evokes a referent but takes credit for the emotional conveyance of its referent. Kitsch falls into the first sub-division but presents itself as existing in the second sub-division. Kitsch both perpetuates the value judgment that second sub-division art is the best and attempts to insinuate itself into that sub-division (see figure 4 below).

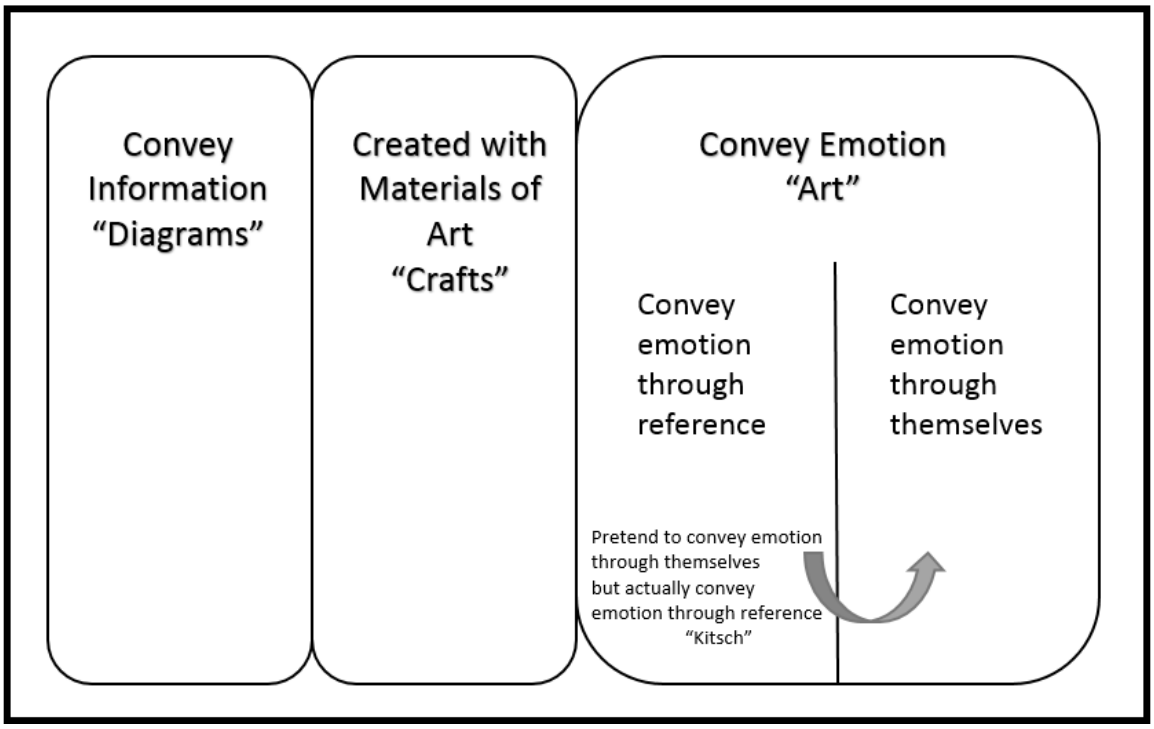

Figure 4. Categories of pictures

Additionally, its merit lies not in itself but in its reference. The better an artwork of the second sub-division is, the more it causes people to think about it, but kitsch is created to cause people to think very little about itself and instead trampoline to what people associate to it. Kitsch is referential but deceptive. With little attempt to get the audience to stare at itself, kitsch instead encourages the audience to think of its

referent but transfer resulting feelings to the kitsch. Grandmothers purchase Precious Moments figurines because they love children, and people purchase velvet paintings because they love Elvis—not because either group plans to spend a great length of time staring at their figurines or velvet Elvises.[4]

Kitsch is thus not defined by sentimentality, ease of emotional impression, poor quality, bad taste, or the other existing definitions, although aspects of any of those may be present. For example, one understands kitsch quickly if one gets the referent which is likely why Greenberg identified quick, easy emotion as the core of kitsch. When kitsch objects can make their references without good craftsmanship, one will likely encounter poor quality, and that is probably why scholars have thought of kitsch as synonymous with bad taste.

The definition of kitsch offered here explains why cheap prints can be kitsch-y. The print reminds one of the artwork, but it does not copy the original well enough to evoke the same level of emotions. That is another cause for people rarely staring at a poor print for a length of time. People may likewise purchase a *Mona Lisa*-emblazoned backpack, and if that backpack signals that it wishes to be taken seriously, it is kitsch. If the backpack signaled it did not intend to be taken seriously, it would be camp). Either way, the backpack's purposes are to evoke the original while positively commenting on the taste of its owner, not to convey the powerful emotions of *Mona Lisa* itself. Likewise, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel is a masterpiece; a picture of part of it on a purse is kitsch.

Or turning to Pop Art, those paintings were representations of items in mass culture, but the artworks' emotionality resided in addition to (or in some cases, despite) their representation. One could stare at the painting and be captivated by the painting

---

[4]Robert Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, No. 1 (Winter, 1991): 11.

itself. On the other hand, book-page-sized facsimiles of these artworks are almost inescapably kitsch, because the dual nature of copying and smaller spatial representation combine to rob the artwork of its power. Once Pop Art paintings are reduced to the size of the ads they often imitated, the results signal importance due to their references but do not convey any emotion arising from themselves, and that combination makes those tiny pictures kitsch.[5]

These examples make the point: Kitsch is holographic, visually recalling people, places, or things which are not actually present. A card that has "Happy Anniversary" printed on it in understated font is not kitsch. It simply intends to share an emotion toward an event, and thus it is very simple art. A card with "Happy Anniversary" printed in pseudo-handwritten font on top of a picture of diamonds and roses is kitsch, because it pretends that its emotions are important and self-generated, although no diamonds, roses, or handwritten letters are present.

Although they have not placed it in the overall context of art as here, other scholars have noticed either kitsch's borrowing or credit-taking, and their insights need to be examined. In an article about the camp culture around Carmen Miranda, University of Arizona professor Melissa Fitch references a kitsch figurine. Purportedly a limited edition of 5,000,[6] it is a "collectible" cow in a dress with fruit on its head. Fitch carefully articulates that the figurine imitates an animal imitating Lucille Ball who was imitating Carmen Miranda who was "imitating a Bahian Afro Brazilian woman."[7] The imitation present in the kitsch object strips away authenticity. Fitch mentions Baudrillard's famed

---

[5]It is regrettable that art textbook publishers likely turn off their readers to the art in question due to grainy, miniature, black and white pictures.

[6]http://www.lucystore.com/vintage-i-love-lucy-be-a-pal-bear.html now mentions there are 10,000 figurines; apparently, they were not so limited as when Fitch wrote.

[7]Fitch Melissa, "Carmen, Kitsch, Camp and My Quest for Coordinated Dinnerware," *Chasqui* 40, no. 2 (2011): 57.

concept of simulacrum in this context, with a simulacrum being an imitation of something that is itself not real.[8] Fitch is entirely right: Kitsch objects are often simulacra physically enacted. Yet as mentioned before, kitsch not only references but takes the credit due to its referent.

Dennis Dutton notices the "parasitic" aspect of kitsch as well. He says "The perfect example of kitsch is the religious souvenir: ugly taken by itself, it begs for acceptance by reason of its associations, the meanings it derives from spirituality. In this sense, kitsch objects are parasitic."[9] Dutton is right about that. Kitsch is associative without being particularly symbolic in a literary sense; it typically does not hold up under scrutiny for its power and meaning lies only in its associations. Kitsch does not generate its meaning but derives it.

Christian installation artist Betty Spackman agrees, affirming

> Souvenirs are what most people think of when kitsch is discussed—the miniature Eiffel towers from France, the Elvis memorabilia from Graceland, and so forth. Souvenirs (unlike relics) do not have to be authentic materials. *They are simply carriers of remembrance, proofs of passage*.[10]

Kitsch items need neither sustain nor withstand a high level of involvement because they are a tool for feeling something else. Spackman goes on to observe, "Perhaps this could be said of all art to varying degrees, but it is this ability to be depositories of stories, of ideas, and of belief that make these seemingly weak objects [i.e., kitsch] so intensely profound."[11]

---

[8]Melissa, "Carmen, Kitsch, Camp," 57. Fitch builds on Sontag's explanation of camp, explaining that camp makes use of kitsch knowingly.

[9]Dennis Dutton, "Literary Theory and Intellectual Kitsch," *Literature & Aesthetics* 2 (2012): 23-34, 26.

[10]Betty Spackman, "Reconsidering 'Kitsch,'" *Material Religion* 1, no. 3 (2005): 414. Emphasis mine.

[11]Ibid., 414-15. Although he was a Christianity and the Arts professor at the time (and has gone on to be a Professor of Religious Studies at Duke), David Morgan wrote an incredibly uncharitable follow-up to Spackman titled "Response to Spackman, 'Reconsidering "Kitsch,"'" *Material Religion* 1, no. 3 (2005): 417-20. He demeans her view of kitsch as "put[ting]s matters in a way that only a conservative Calvinist perspective can see things" (419). However, it is not clear from her article what denomination or

Robert Solomon shows how scholars have missed the referential nature of kitsch, revealing

> It is the critic of kitsch, not the kitsch lover, who assumes that the saccharine velvet painting of Jesus is the object of devotion or the Bouguereau children are themselves the object of tender affection. Quite the contrary, the objects of such emotions—what they are really "about"—are God and children (perhaps one's own children) respectively, and the artistic quality of the cause has little to do with the appropriateness of the actual object or the genuineness of the emotion.[12]

Solomon references kitsch's quality. Although individual kitsch objects may be of extremely high quality, kitsch only needs to have good enough quality to identify its referent then take the viewer on a round trip that results in the kitsch object receiving the credit for the referent's emotional evocation.

While scholars addressing kitsch have often sensed that it contains a deficient moral element, their struggle to pinpoint the moral problem sprung from looking in the wrong places. Samier, referring to Matei Calinescu's moral position on kitsch, shines a spotlight on "its deceptive qualities: 'the whole concept of kitsch clearly centres around such questions as imitation, forgery, counterfeit, and what we may call the aesthetics of deception or self-deception'; it is a 'specifically aesthetic form of lying.'[13] Only with difficulty can one affirm that sweetness, community, bad taste, and invoking emotion too easily are *moral* problems. Yet once one sees that kitsch stirs emotion from something

---

tradition of Christianity Spackman holds nor do any of her claims about kitsch rely on that, but Morgan continues to mischaracterize and malign what she asserts. Rather than discussing kitsch, Morgan gripes, "She appears to want to expand the range of esthetic considerations available to her coreligionists. That is to be welcomed in a day when conservative Christians in the United States show an alarming tendency to want to rewrite the founding documents of American democracy and foist their narrow values on everyone else" (418), accusations that have little to do with kitsch and everything to do with conspiratorial rumor-mongering. Morgan infers of Spackman "She manifests a quality that I've observed in many educated, artistically sophisticated Evangelicals: they are often propelled by a curious guilt and a nagging sense of inadequacy," (419) an *ad hominem* attack disguised as an observation. In fact, Morgan so spectacularly fails in his mean-spirited misunderstandings that correcting his mistakes would take more space than his article. To her credit, Spackman did not respond to Morgan's attacks.

[12]Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," 11.

[13]Matei Calinescu, ed. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 229, quoted in Eugenie Samier, "Toward Public Administration as a Humanities Discipline: A Humanistic Manifesto.," *Halduskultuur: Administrative Culture*, no. 6 (2005): 38.

besides itself yet through ostentation or deception wishes the audience to think that the emotion arose solely from it, one can see why kitsch is morally enigmatic. The words "morally enigmatic" are chosen carefully because kitsch artworks' level of deception varies, and compared to other objects and actions that are obviously wrong, kitsch is both of lesser intensity and certainty. So, to assist in judging the worth of artworks, a guide is presented next.

A Neo-Tolstoyan Matrix

A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic resolves the problems with Tolstoy's views and kitsch theory while adding explanatory power. Specifically, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic uses two criteria to divide artworks into four quadrants, creating a matrix which can both generate and evaluate examples.[14] The criteria are strong/weak emotional impact and good/bad morality. Figure 5 below shows these criteria along with examples mapped to each quadrant.

Broken into planes, the vertical quadrants correspond to emotional impact. Likewise, the horizontal planes correspond to morality. Thus, the quadrants comprise four categories: emotionally weak/bad morality (e.g., most "b" movies), emotionally impactful/bad morality (e.g., erotica), emotionally weak/good morality (e.g., the figurines found in Christian bookstores), and emotionally impactful/good morality (e.g., *The Quiet Duel*, the encaustic paintings of Dan Addington).

[14]This matrix is inspired by the one Caryl Emerson describes in her chapter on Tolstoy's aesthetics in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*. Emerson remarks that Tolstoy judges art based on "true versus counterfeit and good versus bad." By "good versus bad," Emerson takes Tolstoy to be referencing morality, as does the augmented matrix offered here. Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics," *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 239.

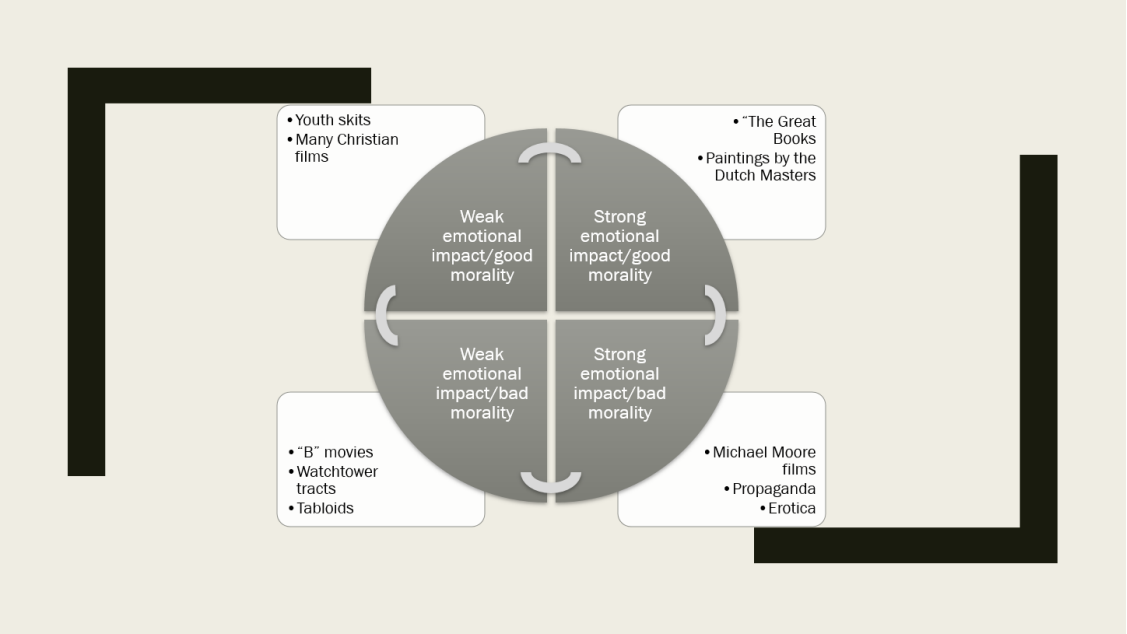

Figure 5. A Neo-Tolstoyan Matrix

While the morality of Tolstoy's aesthetic is grounded in his own morality, Christianity offers a foundation of revelation from which to assess the morality of art. So, neo-Tolstoyan rubric can actually explain what makes an artwork bad: not because of emotional impact but if its emotional impact is directed toward an immoral end. The matrix facilitates discussion of all art, including kitsch, through clarifying the criteria being used. Even if people subsequently disagree about which quadrant should house an artwork, this matrix offers a place from which to argue concerning emotional impact and morality.

eM	EM
em	Em

Figure 6. Where "E" stands for emotional impact, "M" stands for morality, and capitalization corresponds to strength of impact/morality.

The simplified matrix in figure 6 shows that emotional impact can be gauged not just by weightiness but also by whether the emotion elicited fails to match that which the artist intended. When the emotional impact of a film is so hampered by its budget that the feelings of the audience are guffaws instead of horror or disbelief instead of relief, it gets labelled a "b movie" and is intuitively placed in the low emotional impact plane—the morality it espouses determines what quadrant it occupies. Thus, the neo-Tolstoyan matrix makes it easy to see that most critics would place sweet kitsch into the left-hand plane, due to those artworks' low emotional impact on the critics.[15] People who are impacted positively by kitsch artworks would likely place them in the upper right quadrant, making them synonymous with good art to those people. An explanation of why laypeople may legitimately place art in contradictory categories to experts may assuage concerns about the matrix.

Neuroaesthetics is confirming what aficionados of art have long maintained, namely that "experts and laypersons pay attention to different aspects of paintings."[16] Critics and artists pay attention to technique and quality while untrained people focus more on what is depicted, i.e., the content. Additional neuroaesthetic studies may confirm this same outcome in other artforms besides painting. Chatterjee and Vartanian think so too, referring to an article whose imaging studies on music that evokes sadness in listeners shows that it is pleasurable when met by three conditions. Those conditions are as follows:

> First, the sadness evoked by music must be perceived as non-threatening. In this sense, the context within which the sadness is experienced is key. Second, it must be perceived as aesthetically pleasing. Finally, it must lead to psychological

---

[15]Sweet kitsch, it will be recalled, was the dominant kitsch of the nineteenth century, exemplified by Precious Moments figurines. The twentieth century saw art aficionados become infatuated with its opposite, sour kitsch.

[16]Anjan Chatterjee and Oshin Vartanian, "Neuroscience of Aesthetics," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1369, no. 1 (2016): 182. It must be stated, again, that neuroaesthetics is a new field, and its evidence should be taken into consideration lightly.

benefits, including evocation of memories, empathy, and mood regulation.[17] Chatterjee and Vartanian draw a connection—hypothetical insofar as it has not been tested—that Sachs' work may also apply to "similar aesthetic phenomena in other domains."[18] Chatterjee and Vartanian specifically suggest horror movies, hypothesizing that the fear itself may be pleasurable when the above three conditions are met. Their hypothesis is imminently reasonable, even if it remains untested.

Film-makers and art critics likely gravitate to "art films" for the same quality of technique and not because of the art film's content. When a film follows (or knowingly breaks) the rules of cinematography, editing, or sound design, critics are likely to enjoy it far more than a movie with ten times the budget that does not seem to be aware of the rules. Likewise, rare is the classic movie that attained its status despite attention to technique and quality. When an artist skillfully creates with respect for a genre's indicators of success, even exploring unusual or unpleasant emotions can be satisfying.

Philosopher Daniel Shaw misunderstands this line of thinking, contending, "Some forms of affective theory and expressionist theory such as those of Leo Tolstoy and Eugene Veron imply that any emotion expression is necessarily aesthetically rewarding. That seems to be a mistake."[19] Shaw believes artworks which caused the audience to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, boredom, or depression would not be popular. Shaw's assertion misunderstands Tolstoy's aesthetic in two fairly obvious ways: Tolstoy neither contends that all emotional connection is morally right nor that all of it is satisfying. Most significantly, Shaw simply discounts the experience

---

[17]Matthew E. Sachs, Antonio Damasio and Assal Habibi, "The Pleasures of Sad Music: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers of Human Neuroscience* 9 (2015): 404, accessed July 28, 2018, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4513245/ quoted in Chatterjee and Vartanian, "Neuroscience of Aesthetics," 183.

[18]Chatterjee and Vartanian, "Neuroscience of Aesthetics," 183.

[19]Daniel Shaw, *A Philosophical Account of the Nature of Art Appreciation* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2000), 43.

of millions of people who enjoy genres which explore less positive emotions (e.g., the blues, horror).

A philosophy of art must not only provide criteria by which to distinguish between non-art and art. It must also give guidelines for distinguishing between gradations of bad, good, and better-quality art. Harries agrees, insisting, "If a philosophy of art fails to provide criteria by which to distinguish the good [art] from the bad, it is inadequate."[20] Using the matrix of a neo-Tolstoyan theory of art combined with extensive knowledge of an artform's genre, one may provide just such criteria.

Using the Neo-Tolstoyan Matrix to Analyze Artworks

The neo-Tolstoyan matrix will now be stress-tested by engaging artworks. A variety of artworks are evaluated to see how their analyses differ. Seeing the neo-Tolstoyan matrix in action through examining a particularly troubling example of art allows one to gauge its performance.

Nazi performance art in general and Hitler's speeches specifically—both presented in the context of rousingly nationalistic rallies—are dangerously misunderstood if dismissed simply as "bad art." The danger arises in ignoring their emotional impact. Their very real emotional impact on their audiences elevated them into being some of the most moving, and subsequently ideologically compelling, art of the twentieth century. So, according to the neo-Tolstoyan matrix, it was not that Nazi rallies were emotionally insignificant art but rather that their moral components were horrid. In fact, a similar conclusion is reached by the expert critic of Nazism Saul Friedlander, and his son, Eli. Eli repeats that if the Nazis themselves created art that may be categorized as kitsch, one immediately wonders about "the nature of the kind of kitsch that *can* be so juxtaposed

---

[20]Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 74.

with death."[21] Scholars have historically confused kitsch with "bad art," and in the case of Nazi arena performances, a better judgment is that they were not kitsch but emotionally impactful, morally horrendous artworks.

On a positive note, a re-examination of Norman Rockwell's output shows the empowerment that Tolstoy's aesthetic offers popular art. Insofar as Rockwell's paintings convey emotion, his work is art. In fact, some of Rockwell's art, including his famous series *The Four Freedoms*, is moving emotionally, and according to Tolstoy's aesthetic that makes them good art, not just pictures made for a magazine and used by the United States government as propaganda. Famed Star Wars creator George Lucas has stated both he and Steven Spielberg relish Norman Rockwell's illustrations, saying, "He really captured society's ambitions and emotions, and, as corny as they are, that's what America is."[22] So, an examination of Rockwell's paintings/illustrations provides an excellent opportunity of applying a neo-Tolstoyan approach to (supposed) kitsch.

In Doss's discussion of Greenberg's theory of kitsch, Doss refers to *The Gossips*, writing

> A cover from 1948, which consists of fifteen people depicted in groups of two, grapevining gossip from one person to the next, catalogues human emotions from shock and disapproval to insolence, mirth, and anger, which are captured in the pair at bottom right, where the man who is the subject of this emotional chatter—Norman Rockwell himself—yells at the woman who instigated it up in the top left-hand corner of the painting.[23]

---

[21]Eli Friedlander, "Some Thoughts on Kitsch," *History & Memory* 9, no. 1-2 (1997): 376. Italics in original. Friedlander argues that some—although not necessarily all—kitsch is borne not out of twisted beauty but a twisted sense of the sublime. Friedlander goes on to associate kitsch "not with a debilitating and debased culture of the masses, but rather with a phenomenon in which the most advanced thinking can lose itself. Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism is one such example" (378). Friedlander's article attempts to explain kitsch as being a degradation of the sublime, but it does not compute, in a literal or metaphorical sense. How Friedlander's definition of kitsch could apply to a large amount of kitsch (e.g., "Sher-ruff Paws")—or how his definition of kitsch even functions—remain sadly unclear.

[22]Erika Doss, "Makes Me Laugh, Makes Me Cry: Feelings and American Art," *American Art* 25, no. 3 (2011): 4, quoted in Virginia M. Mecklenburg, ed., *Telling Stories: Norman Rockwell from the Collections of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg* (New York: Abrams, in association with the Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2010), 20.

[23]Doss, "Makes Me Laugh," 6.

Figure 7. *The Gossips*

The Gossips, as well as many of Rockwell's pictures, contains content critics have shown unwillingness to examine carefully, from the stray hairs, bad teeth, age wrinkles, and fat pockets to unflattering, "unposed" angles (see figure 7 above). This image inspires a smirk at the willingness of people to gossip, a chuckle at the mirth and feigned shock evinced by the subjects, and a pause for reflection on the harm, embarrassment, and wasted time of rumor-mongering.

At the same time, examining the artwork up close allows one to see that Rockwell is pushing red in his skin tones and using dark lines to emphasize wrinkles. Rockwell utilizes fine detail work on veins and inky blacks for rare shadows cast by curled hair and hats. Even people unable to examine it up close can still see that Rockwell is using negative (white-colored) space to separate *and* tie together the different vignettes. Likewise, one need not be able to examine the artwork closely to see that Rockwell plays with perspective. When the models are turned to pass the gossip on, Rockwell reveals new details and shows the passage of time, as cigars burn down and articles (such as the mechanic's pencil) shift.

There are no nubile nudes, lifeless silks, or cute children depicted; no person in the piece would be called beautiful as presented. Definitions of kitsch rooted in those ideas fail here. The subject matter itself is presented humorously, but the subject matter itself is not sweet, so a view of kitsch which roots it in saccharine sweetness fails too. However, according to this chapter's definition of kitsch, *The Gossips* is kitsch if the emotions it shares are rooted in reference while the piece takes credit for the referenced feelings it shares. Whether *The Gossips* is kitsch or not is not an easy determination to make, for Rockwell seemingly winks at the audience by including himself as the last model. Just because an artwork is referential does not make it kitsch, and Rockwell does not seem to be signaling the hallmark of kitsch, namely, the desire to claim referenced value as springing from itself. A reasonable conclusion is that scholars have too often conflated illustration with kitsch; *The Gossips* is probably not kitsch but high-quality illustration, occupying the quadrant of positive morality and strong emotional impact.

Figure 8. *The Connoisseur*

Another example from Rockwell, *The Connoisseur*, is more difficult to evaluate, ironically due to its higher quality (see figure 8 above). The splatters, drippings, and spills of paint instantly evoke Pollock, although the color space itself is classic Rockwell: bright primaries. The paint splashes may initially appear to be random, but Rockwell has placed four areas of blue around the man's body and dumped a white gob of paint directly in front of the man. That white paints combines with the man's baldness—an intentional choice, to be sure—to draw the audience's attention directly to the middle of the painting. Subtly, Rockwell denies the satisfaction of being able to see the middle of the painting, for the man's head blocks it. The final artwork is a composite,

with Rockwell having initially completed the painting-within-a-painting before later adding the observer and surroundings. Incredibly, Rockwell submitted a section of the painting-within-a-painting to an exhibition in New York (signed with an Italian signature) where it took first place.[24]

Indeed, the man's respectful posture, with hat in hands and standing at attention, lets the audience know this moment must be taken very seriously. Yet coupling the piece's name with the subject's standing so close to the painting that he cannot take it all in, it is not unwarranted to sense a playful or even ironic air to the piece. Ambiguous and multi-layered emotions are communicated to the viewer. To simply dismiss this painting as kitsch would be pejorative. Unlike *The Gossips*, *The Connoisseur* shares emotion mostly from itself, for one looks at it and experiences emotions apart from associations to outside objects, even Pollock's splatters. One might legitimately argue *The Connoisseur* to be kitsch if one can establish that its emotional conveyance is solely due to its reference and that the painting simultaneously desires credit for that emotion. Gazing at the painting longer, however, reveals a richness that both motivates and rewards additional viewing.

Turning from paintings, one sees that a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic can tackle particularly difficult areas, such as breast cancer kitsch. Cancer survivor Barbara Ehrenreich recalls the proliferation of breast cancer artwork and wonders aloud if the hyper-feminine, pink ribbons and teddy bears are accomplishing anything aesthetic.[25] When people change the conversation instead to raising money or encouraging checkups from breast cancer artworks, Ehrenreich responds that positive results are debatable. When it comes to "awareness," Ehrenreich reports, "To the extent

---

[24]"Connoisseur," accessed March 7, 2018, http://www.nrm.org/thinglink/text/Connoisseur.html#.

[25]Barbara Ehrenreich, "Welcome to Cancerland: A Mammogram Leads to a Cult of Pink Kitsch," *Harper's* November 2001, 51-52.

that current methods of detection and treatment fail or fall short, America's breast cancer cult can be judged as an outbreak of mass delusion."[26] Because breast cancer artwork generally draws its meaning solely from its associations yet still claims significance for itself, it is kitsch. Certainly, one sees middle school students (including boys) wearing bracelets that exclaim, "I heart boobies," a sentiment likely not far removed from a teenager spending exorbitant time studying a book of William-Adolphe Bouguereau's nudes, the only difference being that the advocates surrounding breast cancer awareness have normalized sexualized, worn kitsch.

One might argue that kitsch is encountered in advertisements more than anywhere else. A video commercial campaign provides an excellent example. In 1949, Gjon Mili took long-exposure photographs of Picasso "painting" with a flashlight, with the long-exposure time leaving a squiggly line visible only in photographs (see figure 9 above for one of the photographs).[27] In the 2000s, the phone company Sprint made a series of commercials using squiggles of light to portray anthropomorphized machinery. Sprint's commercials are imitative, they do not warrant looking at for long, and their self-proclaimed importance makes them kitsch. Because so many advertisements and commercials associate themselves (and/or their product) to something else but then desire credit for that importance, they are kitsch, and they kitschify the public's mental space analogously to smoke polluting the air.

---

[26]Ehrenreich, "Welcome to Cancerland," 52. Ehrenreich mentions, "A tote bag distributed to breast cancer patients by the Libby Ross Foundation . . . contains, among other things, a tube of Estée Lauder Perfumed Body Crème, a hot-pink satin pillowcase, an audiotape 'Meditation to Help You With Chemotherapy,' a small tin of peppermint pastilles, a set of three small inexpensive rhinestone bracelets, a pink-striped 'journal and sketch book,' and—somewhat jarringly—a small box of crayons. Marla Willner, one of the founders of the Libby Ross Foundation, told me that the crayons 'go with the journal—for people to express different moods, different thoughts…' though she admitted she has never tried to write with the crayons themselves" (46). Ehrenreich decries the infantilizing aspect of including crayons and remarks that "men diagnosed with prostate cancer do not receive gifts of Matchbox cars" (46-47).

[27]Anthony White, "Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch," *Grey Room* 1, no. 5 (2001): 67.

Figure 9. Untitled photograph of Pablo Picasso by Bjon Mili

As opposed to the word "sculpture," an indicator that one is encountering kitsch is the word "figurine." Attfield comments that kitsch "can work for some who refuse to take art too seriously and at the same time be appropriated to respond to personal needs for sentiment. Kitsch can use humor to be subversive and make powerful political statements by exaggerating artificiality and making light of serious concerns."[28] A figurine like *Sher-ruff Paws* bears Attfield's observation out, as the person buying it

[28]Judy Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch: The Politics of Design," *Home Cultures* 3, no. 3 (2006): 208.

seems afraid neither of police or the crime that warrants their existence (see figure 3). Instead, *Sher-ruff Paws*' ad copy encourages the owner that its value lies not in its connotation of dogs dressed up in silly outfits but rather in its "masterfully handcrafted" status. *Sher-ruff Paws* constitutes a (literally miniscule) piece of sweet kitsch whose weak morality is matched only by its weak emotional impact.

Figure 10. Untitled picture of anti-police kitsch

A recently popular digital artwork[29] offers the opposite perspective on police,

[29]Max Kutner,"Rethinking Rockwell in the Time of Ferguson," Smithsonian, accessed June 23, 2018, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/rethinking-rockwell-time-ferguson-180952485/.

and one cannot help but wonder if its popularity is due to its moralizing as the quality of the artistry leaves much to be desired (see figure 10 above). The boy's head is crudely photoshopped at a neck-breaking angle. The gun resting unsecured on the ground now partially obscures Rockwell's own signature. The baton initially appears to be leaning against the boy's chair but upon closer examination is hanging in mid-air. The photoshop work has virtually no merit from its quality. However, the picture's crudity of skill is overshadowed by the malice exuded by a policeman unnecessarily armed not only in riot gear but with a short-barreled rifle. This picture is certainly, in the words of Harries, sour kitsch. It is emotionally impactful but over-the-top, and unless one feels hatred or fear of police, one will find it morally lacking. Studying it leads not to further rewards but revealing faults.

Kitsch need not be physical either. As an example of "intellectual" kitsch, Dutton offers postmodernist reliance on quantum physics for proof of epistemological uncertainty.[30]

> Postmodern culture presents us with a veritable chain of kitsch borrowing. At the top of the chain are physicists, innocently going about their work in subatomic physics and making incidental statements about the limits of what can be known about elementary particles. Next come poststructuralist philosophers, who though they understand no physics, remove from their original context such words as 'indeterminacy' and appropriate them to give an aura of prestige to their theories of literary criticism. Next, we have postmodern artists and their salesmen who, though they do not understand it, are happy to borrow poststructuralist/postmodern philosophical rhetoric to give an intellectual sheen to their wares. Finally comes the buyer of the work of postmodern art, who doesn't understand the work or the philosophy which validates it, or the physics which validates the philosophy, but who places it in his living room (next to the leather-bound books), certain that he has made the right investment.[31]

Dutton's scalding irony, appropriate here given that people are basing their spiritual and

---

The digital artwork is untitled, although it is clearly superimposed on top of Norman Rockwell's *The Runaway*. That the magazine of the Smithsonian would feature art of such poor quality indicates the powerful lure of timeliness.

[30]Dutton, "Literary Theory and Intellectual Kitsch.," 25-26.

[31]Ibid., 28.

financial decisions on inappropriately borrowed and incorrectly applied ideas, reveals that the only people not involved in the kitsch chain are the physicists. Undoubtedly the worst offenders in Dutton's description are the philosophers, who lead both artists and the public astray with their justifications of bad morality.[32]

Eugenie Samier is a scholar of administrative systems. Samier asserts that although Soviet Russia is known in academia for its kitsch, "Western systems can equally be subjected to this kind of critique."[33] In fact, kitsch has taken such root in business and academics that Samier uses the word *kitschification*, the result of being turned into kitsch, to describe current business and academic bureaucracies.[34] In a move certain to make her unpopular with administrators everywhere, she reasons

> One can kitschify anything, reducing it to decontextualised, uncritical, and popularised stereotype or cliché lacking historical or textual accuracy, including academic thought. Popular versions of Machiavellian management and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* abound in bookstores, on the internet, and sadly, in some university seminars. Intellectual kitsch also lacks theoretical provenance – the origins (particularly in textbook-style volumes) are missing, particularly theories that clearly originate with major social and political thinkers, like Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Hegel, and Habermas. Instead, simplified and easily applied versions of their work, without critical and self-reflective character, historical context or moral implications of the original, alleviate readers (and their instructors) of the effort and commitment necessary to a more comprehensive and complex understanding. As with any other form of kitsch, administrative technique can be pre-digested, prepackaged and sold as a largely unproblematic.[35]

It takes courage for Samier to proclaim that kitsch—while perhaps more obvious in other cultures—is widespread in Western culture. Especially in the fields of business and academics, the latter increasingly seems to wish itself to be an example of the former. Yet the Western business world is awash in administrative kitsch. In a kitsch

---

[32]Similarly, preachers should eschew using ideas they do not understand as illustrations to give their preaching more authority.

[33]Samier, "Toward Public Administration," 35.

[34]Ibid. Samier describes Tolstoy as an author who writes about the "dehumanization of bureaucratic structure" (35).

[35]Ibid., 39.

administrative environment, people do not follow the leader because they believe in him but because the bureaucracy forces them—and at the same time, the administrator refers to himself as a leader. To make it explicit, when an administrator calls himself a leader, that is administrative kitsch because it draws on the power of one concept (leadership) while actually being another (administration). When implemented as institutional policy, kitsch has negative effects on people's quality of life.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

In *What Is Art?* Tolstoy rejects classical understandings of aesthetics and proposes an alternative of pleasing explanatory power. Yet he augments his definition of art with injudicious claims that warrant correction, and after his death, kitsch theory arose. In particular, Greenberg defines kitsch in such a way that it lines up with Tolstoy's conception of good art. The next three sections summarize the reasoning behind these arguments, a fourth section shows how one can judge kitsch objects' morality individually, and a final section offers suggestions to Christians about art.

Outline of Tolstoy's Aesthetic

Through analyzing Tolstoy's documented claims on art, the events that happened to him, and the religious environment which affected him so deeply, chapters 2 and 3 suggested reasons that unify Tolstoy's thinking on art. Having discarded beauty as the locus of aesthetics, he instead says that the transmission of feelings through the creation of an object forms the basis of art. Therefore, a great many things outside the "the arts" are just as legitimately art as paintings, sculpture, and music. From jokes to home decoration to movies and more, the question "What is art?" is answered by the reply, "anything made to get other people to feel the way the artists themselves felt."

Having provided an explanation of art, Tolstoy proceeds to offer criteria for judging the quality of art. First, an artwork should be judged by how infectiously it causes the audience to feel what the artist intends. An artwork fails totally if it does not cause one to feel anything at all. The artwork must be judged a failure as well—although to a lesser extent—if it inspires a different feeling than the artist intends. Secondly, not

all feelings should be shared, according to Tolstoy. Any feeling Tolstoy judges as immoral (and there are many) should be off-limits to an artist. Lastly, Tolstoy does not raise this concern to the level of being a criterion, but he strongly believes that individual artworks should be universally appreciable, leading him to reject most of his own body of work in addition to much of the world's most celebrated art (e.g., Shakespeare's writings and Beethoven's later compositions).

The Nuances of a Neo-Tolstoyan Aesthetic

Tolstoy largely theorizes with a hammer, simultaneously breaking the field's walls that keep real art from recognition but also smashing the field's existing artworks of the highest quality. A neo-Tolstoyan aesthetics maintains continuity by approving, with Tolstoy, the validity as art of anything created to transmit feelings to another and that the primary indicator of an artwork's worth is how well it transmits feelings. Yet his definition of art needs to be tweaked in four areas: corrections in emotional theory, a strong moral foundation rooted in revelation, a re-calibration of the ideal audience, and expansions on the effects of time and authorship.

Since he does not address the nature of emotions but does criticize certain emotions as immoral, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic offers an account of how emotions arise (in response to real or fictional situations). Further, it stipulates that the morality of an emotion is dependent upon the object toward which it is felt. Determining the ethical worth of an emotion warrants a stout moral system. Whereas Tolstoy's morality is rooted in his "own opinion,"[1] the alternative recommended here transfers moral authority from people to the God who revealed himself in the Bible. For adopting biblical ethics ennobles the full range of emotions and offers guidelines for how to feel toward matters of importance. Additionally, because Tolstoy was not a Christian, his aesthetic is

[1]Robert Sloan Latimer, *With Christ in Russia* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 134.

religious but not Christian. The Tolstoyan aesthetic developed here benefits from grounding art in the biblical doctrine of Creation.

Unfortunately, Tolstoy entangles people's ability to be engaged by art and a mandate that all art should be understood by all people, so a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic unknots the two. The ideal audience for an artwork cannot simply be any person. Instead, the individual must have experience with the genre in question. Rejecting artworks in a genre one does not understand (as Tolstoy did) reflects poorly only on the judge, not the artworks. Likewise, feeling a sense of communion with others similarly impacted by an artwork constitutes a joyful yet secondary experience. So, artworks need not be judged on how broadly they appeal but rather whether they appeal to the artist's intended audience.

To assist in judging individual artworks, chapter 7 presented a matrix which can facilitate discussion through examining an artwork's emotional impact and morality. Of course, no matrix is an end-all/be-all, and this one is not designed to be. Instead, it offers a helpful context with which to judge an artwork's worth and to discuss which quadrant fits it best.

Contours and Challenges of Kitsch Theory

Although some recent theoreticians have attempted to argue that kitsch differs from art only in style, most scholars continue to view kitsch as being moral deficient. Chapter 5 examined the various proposals given for the moral problem of kitsch, ranging from its being over-sweet or over-sentimental to causing self-satisfaction to denying the world's evil. These definitions touch on some kitsch objects but do not adequately explain all of them. Chapter 6 presented Greenberg's definition of kitsch which decries the very art Tolstoy's aesthetic praises: emotionally powerful and easy to understand. However, even when the best aspects of the other definitions of kitsch are combined with Greenberg's to arrive at a full-orbed, historical understanding, the resulting conception

suffers from being overly broad. After all, it applies to art ranging from Andy Warhol's paintings of soup cans (which critics decried for not adopting a tone of contempt) to composer Nino Rota's music (which generally leans towards sentimentality, even in movies like *The Godfather*). If these great artworks are kitsch, then nothing, it seems, is safe from that accusation. So, what is needed is a definition of kitsch that identifies and explicates its core.

Chapter 7 modestly presented just such an identification. Building on the aesthetic theory of Dutton and Spackman, it recognizes kitsch as being similar to illustrative art in that its emotionality is externally generated, yet unlike illustrative art, kitsch attempts to disguise its referents and instead suggest its value springs from itself. Very much like a hologram, kitsch's value lies solely in its reference to an object or idea that is not actually present, while masquerading as if it were. The conception presented here, in short, is that anything which references something else but claims credit for its emotional impact constitutes kitsch. As an example, it is not sweetness that makes Precious Moments kitsch but that the figurines take credit for the cherubic nature of small children.

How to Judge the Morality of Kitsch

Calinescu's previously quoted dictum that kitsch is an "aesthetic form of lying" was on the right track but too strong.[2] Kitsch, rather, is an aesthetic form of deception, and *the deception lies not in the emotion expressed but in the source of that emotion*. Deception can be put toward many purposes, and not all deception is lying. Of course, if one thinks all deception is immoral, one will be drawn to the conclusion that all kitsch is immoral. However, numerous examples of deception can be given that are

[2]Matei Calinescu, ed. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 229.

certainly not sinful, such as magic tricks, computer-generated special effects in movies, or wearing camouflage. Perhaps a more even-handed conclusion, therefore, is that kitsch is inherently morally problematic and best judged on a case-by-case basis.

Nevertheless, the individualistic nature of kitsch pieces does not preclude practical counsel on how to approach them. In fact, practical guidance can be offered, under the general dictum that the harm of a kitsch item stands in direct proportion to how many people it affects. So, when a kitsch artwork is enjoyed by people in their home, it impacts far less than kitsch thinking implemented throughout an institution, or even a country.

Analogies will prove helpful in explaining lightweight, localized versions of kitsch: Even the kitschiest art object on a family shelf is less harmful than eating a fast food meal, and it is not sinful to eat fast food. Of course, eating only fast food at every meal is likely not only to produce health problems but to prevent the enjoyment of the delicious foods present in the world. Knockoffs provide another analogue to kitsch. Wearing a knockoff watch or a knockoff perfume is not likely to fool a person discriminating enough to recognize the substantially more expensive—and likely at least a little better—original. Most people, though, enjoy the sense of confidence in wearing a knockoff but realize they should not draw attention to it in case someone with discerning taste points out its falsified pedigree.

An even better analogy imagines a person owning a knockoff without realizing it. Unless they try to sell it or boast of it, the person is harming no one. Kitsch art is thus like a synthetic jewel, capable of bringing pleasure and admiration to an untrained eye. If the other person is enjoying it unaware of its pedigree and without trying to impress others, it would be cruel for a perfumer to ridicule the knockoff fragrance; for a watchmaker to mock the knockoff watch; for the chef to deride the fast food meal; or for

the art critic to deride someone's kitsch art.[3] In Jesus' parable of two men praying on a street corner, the one begs God for forgiveness while the second man loudly proclaims his gratitude for not being like the first. Art scholars, and all Christians broadly, should hold their art education and art taste humbly. People who enjoy kitsch still deserve respect.

So, the warnings of Greenberg and others about kitsch art remain histrionic and distractive, deflecting attention from more important things. A Christian should not remotely worry about other people enjoying kitsch art. Instead, a Christian may wish to bring others up from kitsch wisely and respectfully, in the same way a gourmet hopes to teach others the manifold pleasures of artisan cheeses beyond Velveeta nachos. Life is hard for everyone, though, and better to have Velveeta nachos than nothing; a Christian connoisseur of art knows that good art nourishes the emotional life better than poorer art, but better to enjoy some poorer art than none. Bashing kitsch objects may be taken by many people, and rightly so, as bashing aspects of their very identities. Taste should not be weaponized. Demonizing bad taste in order to belittle people appears an order of magnitude more immoral than having uneducated taste.[4]

Apart from art, when kitsch objects or ideas begin affecting more people, Christians should begin taking more notice of them. When kitsch thinking begins dictating how other people should live, Christians should become even more reflective and willing to speak as needed. Kitsch policies, for example, derive their legitimacy from referencing one thing but enacting another; because they literally affect people's

---

[3]Attfield explains it would be cruel because early twenty-first-century Americans "form their identity through their unconscious attitudes to things, as well as through their consciously chosen lifestyles and the accoutrements that go with it." Judy Attfield, "Redefining Kitsch: The Politics of Design," *Home Cultures* 3, no. 3 (2006): 208.

[4]Solomon agrees, stating, "The matter of aesthetic bad taste is being wrongly used to condemn or belittle genuine feeling." Robert Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, No. 1 (Winter, 1991): 11.

lives, Christians should be aware of their effects. Kitsch policies may be implemented in businesses, colleges, churches, at the micro level of families or the macro level of countries.

When kitsch spreads out across a society (as in Soviet Russia), the danger increases exponentially. The most potent danger of kitsch, according to Samier, "is that on sufficient scale, and with a sufficient permeation of societal sectors, kitsch not only disables people's capacity for aesthetic judgment, but also for political and moral judgement."[5] The morally horrible propaganda in North Korea under the communist dynasty constitutes a frightening example of kitsch covering an entire country. Kitsch is not the cause of that nationwide disaster, by any means. Yet it propagates emotions toward unfitting ends, and one worries with Samier that it deadens the populace's moral judgment even worse than their aesthetic judgment.

Final Considerations and Implications

Unlike the authoritarian kitsch of socialist countries, the West has historically been tempted by sweet kitsch, perhaps due to the misconception that sweet emotions are synonymous with beauty. An emphasis that art is not primarily about beauty thus offers a sobering corrective to the West, and in particular, the Western church. In a stern warning for pastors against kitsch, preaching professor Johan Cilliers shows Christians that God embraces the totality of life and not just the beautiful.

> The cross of Christ was "ugly," and yet it embodies the strange "aesthetics" of God. It has its own scandalous "beauty." It underlines the fact that that which we deem "ugly" could in fact be "beautiful." This means that the Gospel of the (ugly) cross does not shrink away from the ugliness of life, does not gloss over it and does not try to dish up a sanitized version of it. Kitsch does exactly that. But the cross is not kitsch. Unfortunately, however, the cross can be kitschified, can be swept along in theological and liturgical strands that sentimentalize and sugarcoat it.[6]

---

[5]Eugenie Samier, "On the Kitschification of Educational Administration: An Aesthetic Critique of Theory and Practice in the Field." *International Studies in Educational Administration* 36, no. 3 (2008): 10.

[6]Johan Cilliers, "The Unveiling of Life: Liturgy and the Lure of Kitsch," *HTS Theological*

Cilliers' comments on the corrosive nature of religious kitsch call to mind the "Golgotha Fun Park" unironically intended to present Christians with a fun time of minigolf. Because beauty can be turned into a concept that serves simply to pleasure oneself, the Christian must guard against religious kitsch. For in religious kitsch, according to Cilliers, "Grace is cheapened and perverted and becomes just another tool in our so-called 'pursuit of happiness.'"[7] When pastors acknowledge grace but subordinate it to their own desires, they kitschify grace and mislead their listeners.

Turning from kitsch to art more broadly, preachers should be aware that if anything created to share emotions with another is art, portions of the Bible are truly art.[8] Although those passages are not solely art, *they most certainly are art*. Preachers should approach these passages of the Bible as the art they are, and therefore, those texts should not be reduced to bullet points. Preachers may boldly embrace Barzun's idea quoted before, that art is not merely intended to gild propositional statements. The Psalms, the parables of Jesus, and many other passages offer not just truth—although true they are—but an emotional perspective on a subject. Had God intended solely to supply a list of doctrines to believe, he certainly could have done so and at substantially shorter length. So, preaching is not just "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15) but also the injunction to "kindle afresh the gift of God" in a spirit of "power and love and discipline" (2 Tim 2:6-7). A patient, excellent cook may explain what is inside the dish to her children, but the very nature of a dish entails a combination of ingredients all included for the overall effect. Therefore, the preacher should never end his job having only broken

---

Studies 66, no. 2 (2010) accessed October 10, 2016, https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/815.

[7]Cilliers, "The Unveiling," https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/815, Cilliers closes his article stating that kitsch "cannot fathom the *ugly beauty of the cross*." [italics in original]

[8]Certainly, portions of the Bible seem to be intended strictly to offer information, record history, or even teach. Also, declaring that passages in the Bible are art should not be taken as a reduction, in any way, of their worth or profit for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Fortunately, evangelical Bible colleges/seminaries generally place great emphasis in preaching classes on determining Bible passages' genre and intentions.

the text down to its bare meanings; when the Bible is also art, the preacher's job is to try his best to get the listeners to feel what God wants them to feel from the passage. Emerson affirms that "the good news about authentic art is compatible with the Good News about Christ."[9] A preacher should not function like a museum guide who dispassionately and mechanically goes through his presentation; rather, he intends his love for the piece and his enthusiasm for the teaching to be infectious.[10]

For Christians more broadly, a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic condones judging an artwork's value not by its creator but by its emotional effect. Pride of place is not given to wealthy or well-known artists but instead to artworks powerfully evoking emotions in moral ways. While hundreds of artworks have fiscal values in excess of what many workers earn in a year, some of those artworks are worthless in actual quality. From Duchamp's readymades to many of Picasso's drawings, artworks that would otherwise be dismissed except for their creator still ought to be dismissible. For their fiscal value lies solely in celebrity, no different from autographed items. In fact, that is all they are—autographed collectibles.

Finally, people at all stages of life should be charitable toward unfamiliar genres. Emerson recalls that "Tolstoy could cavalierly reject whole genres as divisive and inauthentic if he personally was not moved."[11] Tolstoy's hubris shows the need for humility toward artforms and genres one either does not understand or does not appreciate. Christian art critics ought to strive even more than non-professionals, seeking

---

[9]Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics: A Harmony and Translation of the Five Senses," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 12 (2000): 9.

[10]A related problem occurs when preachers take the same tone (solemnity, jokiness, heated indignation, weepiness, dryness, etc.) with every passage of the Bible. While any artwork may offer varying emotions and therefore biblical texts themselves often offer numerous emotions, the overall feelings that a scripture offers should be the goal a preacher aims for his audience to leave feeling. Otherwise the preacher is exegeting only the knowledge but not exegeting the emotion.

[11]Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics," *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 239.

both humility and knowledge as well. Rather than sitting in judgment upon entire genres, Christians are better served by embracing the mindset of ethnodoxology, moving toward a questioning but active position that asks, "How can this genre be used to glorify God?"

APPENDIX

THE SIXTY-FOUR AESTHETIC THINKERS ADDRESSED BY TOLSTOY IN *WHAT IS ART?*

Tolstoy engages with numerous authors' ideas of art in the early pages of *What Is Art?* Since no English-language source indexes those authors, this appendix constitutes a comprehensive list in the same order as Tolstoy presents them. The numerous authors Tolstoy reckons only as being in agreement with others' thought are intentionally excluded from this list. In other words, if Tolstoy does not interact with them but only mentions people as agreeing with other thinkers, they are not present on the list. Where translators or Tolstoy himself made mistakes, corrections are presented after the author's name.

1. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762)
2. Ludwig Schutz[1] (1838-1901)
3. Johann Georg Sulzer (1720-1779)
4. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)
5. Karl Philipp Moritz[2] (1757-1793)
6. Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1716-1768)
7. Anthony Cooper[3] (1671-1713)

---

[1]Listed in the Pevear translation but not actually addressed in the Pevear translation. Not listed or addressed in the Maude translation. Tolstoy may have listed Schutz then forgotten to address his thought.

[2]Listed in the Pevear and Maude translations but not actually addressed by Tolstoy in either translation.

[3]Tolstoy simply calls him "Shaftsbury," likely because Cooper was the third Earl of Shaftsbury.

8. Francis Hutcheson (1695-1746)
9. Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782)
10. Edmund Burke (1729-1797)
11. Yves-Marie “Pere” Andre (1675-1765)
12. Charles Batteux (1713-1780)
13. Jean Le Rond d’Alembert (1717-1783)
14. Voltaire (1694-1778)
15. Francesco Mario Paggano (1748-1799)
16. Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1730)
17. Giuseppe Spalletti[4]
18. Franciscus Hemsterhuis (1721-1790)
19. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
20. Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805)
21. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814)
22. Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829)
23. Adam Muller (1779-1829)
24. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1774-1854)
25. Karl Wilhelm Solger (1780-1819)
26. Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832)
27. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)
28. Christian Hermann Weisse (1801-1866)
29. Arnold Ruge (1802-1880)
30. Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807-1887)
31. Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841)

[4]I have been unable to discover the year of birth or death of Spalletti, although he appears to have published works in the 1700’s.

32. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

33. Karl Edward von Hartmann (1842-1906)

34. Karl Julius Ferdinand Schnaase (1798-1875)

35. Julius von Kirchmann (1802-1884)

36. Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894)

37. Julius Bergmann (1840-1904)

38. Josef Jungmann (1830-1885)

39. Victor Cousin (1792-1867)

40. Theodore Jouffroy (1796-1842)

41. Adolphe Pictet (1799-1875)

42. Jean Charles Leveque (1818-1900)

43. Felix Ravaisson (1813-1900)

44. Charles Renouvier[5] (1815-1903)

45. Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893)

46. Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-1888)

47. Victor Cherbuliez (1829-1899)

48. Guillaume Hubert de Coster[6]

49. Mario Pilo (1859-1921)

50. Hippolyte Fierens-Gevaert (1870-1926)

---

[5]Tolstoy apparently misremembered the author's name because he correctly names the book *On the Foundation of Induction* but states the author is Renouvier, not its actual author Jules Lachelier. Neither Maude nor Pevear address this mistake and continue to list Renouvier as the author. The original quote is Jules Lachelier, *Du Fondement de l'Induction* (Paris: Libraire Philosophique de Ladrange, 1871), 92, accessed July 11, 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=amAZAAAAMAAJ&dq=du%20fondement%20de%20l'induction%20lachelier&pg=PA92#v=onepage&q&f=false. The earliest correction of the error apparently originates in *La Grande Revue*, 8, (1899): 286-287, accessed July 11, 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=143gVQ4krVEC&dq=ne%20craignons%20pas%20de%20dire%20renouvier&pg=PA287#v=onepage&q.

[6]Named incorrectly by Pevear as Charles de Coster. Guillame Hubert de Coster, whose year of birth and death I have been unable to discover, published a work on aesthetics in 1880.

51. Josephin “Sar” Peladan (1858-1918)

52. Eugene Veron (1825-1889)

53. Thomas Reid (1710-1796)

54. Archibald Alison (1757-1839)

55. Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802)

56. Richard Knight (1750-1824)

57. Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

58. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)

59. John Todhunter (1839-1916)

60. James Bowling Mozley[7] (1813-1878)

61. Grant Allen (1848-1899)

62. William Paton Kerr[8] (1855-1923)

63. William Angus Knight (1836-1916)

64. James Sully (1842-1923)

[7]Named incorrectly by Pevear as John Morley of Blackburn, and not listed in the Maude translation. Tolstoy’s reference is to James Bowling Mozley because his book *Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford and on Various Occasions* matches the title and date of publication listed by Tolstoy while John Morley’s books do not match.

[8]Named incorrectly by Pevear as Edward Ker.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Alberigo, Giuseppe, and Jose Oscar Beozzo, eds. *The Holy Russian Church and Western Christianity*. Glen Rock, NJ: SCM Press, 1996.

Bantock, Geoffrey. *Studies in the History of Educational Theory*. Vol. 1. Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1980.

Barzun, Jacques. *The Use and Abuse of Art.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Beardsley, Monroe C. *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1975.

Besancon, Alain. *The Forbidden Image*. Translated by Jane Todd. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000.

Best, David. *Feeling and Reason in the Arts*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985.

Bloom, Harold. *The Art of the Critic*. Vol. 7. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985.

_____, ed. *Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.

Bourdeaux, Michael. *Risen Indeed: Lessons in Faith from the USSR*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983.

Buss, Andreas E. *The Russian-Orthodox Tradition and Modernity*. Boston: Brill, 2003.

Burnham, Scott. *Beethoven Hero*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Cooke, Richard. *Religion in Russia under the Soviets.* Cincinnati: Abingdon Press, 1924.

Coppenger, Mark. *Moral Apologetics for Contemporary Christians*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011.

Currey, Mason. *Daily Rituals.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

Curtiss, John Shelton. *Church and State in Russia.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1940.

Davis, Nathaniel. *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.

Detweiler, Craig, and Barry Taylor. *A Matrix of Meanings* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Dukore, Bernard F. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974.

Dunlop, John B., Richard S. Haugh, and Alexis Klimoff. *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*. Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1973.

Egan, David, and Melinda A. Egan. *Leo Tolstoy: An Annotated Bibliography of English Language Sources from 1978 to 2003*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005.

Ellis, Jane. *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness*. New York: St. Martin's Press in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1996.

Fedotov, Georgy P. *The Russian Religious Mind.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946.

Flaccus, Louis W. *Artists and Thinkers.* Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967.

Froncek, Thomas. *The Horizon Book of the Arts of Russia*. New York: American Heritage, 1970.

Fraser, Giles. *Redeeming Nietzsche.* New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002.

Gilbert, Katharine Everett, and Helmut Kuhn. *A History of Esthetics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953.

Gill, David W., ed. *Should God Get Tenure? Essays on Religion and Higher Education.* Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997.

Goldman, Emma, Harry Gilbert Carlson, Erika Munk, and Paul Avrich. *The Social Significance of Modern Drama*. New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987.

Harries, Karsten. *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

Higgins, Kathleen. *The Music Between Us: Is Music a Universal Language?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

House, Francis. *Millennium of Faith: Christianity in Russia, AD 988-1988*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988.

Hughes, Robert P., and Irina Paperno, eds. *Russian Culture in Modern Times*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Iswolsky, Helene. *Christ in Russia; the History, Tradition, and Life of the Russian Church*. Milwaukee: Bruce, 1960.

Jasper, David, and Mark Ledbetter, eds. *In Good Company: Essays in Honor of Robert Detweiler*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994.

Johnson, Robert. *Reel Spirituality.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Jones, Malcolm, ed. *New Essays on Tolstoy*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 2011.

Joad, C. E. M. *Matter, Life, and Value.* London: Oxford University Press, 1929.

Kaplan, Charles. *Criticism: Twenty Major Statements.* San Francisco: Chandler, 1964.

Kaufmann, Walter Arnold, and Paul Gottfried. *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994.

Knight, Mark, and Thomas M. Woodman. *Biblical Religion and the Novel, 1700-2000*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.

Krabill, James, ed. *Worship and Mission for the Global Church.* Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013.

Kulka, Tomas. *Kitsch and Art*. University Park: Penn State Press, 2002.

Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Translated by Michael Heim. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.

Latimer, Robert Sloan. *With Christ in Russia*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910.

Leeuw, Gerardus van der. *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*. New ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith & Art*. Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw Publishers, 1980.

Matual, David. *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels: A Critical Study*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.

McBride, Joseph. *The Catastrophe of Success*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

McLean, Hugh. *In the Shade of the Giant: Essays on Tolstoy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Miliukov, Pavel, Michael Karpovich, Eleanor Davis, and Valentine Ughet. *Outlines of Russian Culture.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942.

Montgomery, Marion. *Romancing Reality: Homo Viator and the Scandal Called Beauty*. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002.

Mounce, Howard O. *Tolstoy on Aesthetics: What Is Art?* Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2002.

Muchimba, Felix. *Liberating the African Soul.* Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2007.

Muggeridge, Malcolm. *A Third Testament*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1976.

Murphy, Daniel. *Christianity and Modern European Literature*. Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1997.

Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Lectures on Russian Literature*. Edited by Fredson Bowers. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1981.

Nahm, Milton C. *Aesthetic Experience and Its Presuppositions*. New York: Harper, 1946.

Nicholl, Donald. *Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997.

Niebuhr, Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers: 1975.

Orwin, Donna Tussing, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Pepper, Stephen Coburn. *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956.

Perris, George Herbert. *Leo Tolstoy, the Grand Mujik: A Study in Personal Evolution*. London: T. F. Unwin, 1898.

Pushkarev, Sergei G., Vladimir Stepanov, and Gleb Iākunin. *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union: Reflections on the Millennium*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989.

Rader, Melvin, ed. *A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology*. 3rd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960.

Rader, Melvin, and Bertram Emil Jessup. *Art and Human Values*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

Rewald, John, Irene Gordon, and Frances Weitzenhoffer. *Studies in Impressionism*. New York: H. N. Abrams, 1986.

Romanowski, William. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001.

Rookmaaker, Hans. *The Complete Works of H. R. Rookmaaker*. Carlisle, England: Piquant, 2002.

Ross, Stephen David, ed. *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984.

Ryken, Leland. *The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts.* Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1981.

_____. *Realms of Gold: The Classics in Christian Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2003.

_____. *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.

Scott, William Thompson. *Chesterton and Other Essays*. Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1912.

Sharpe, Robert A. *Contemporary Aesthetics: A Philosophical Analysis*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Shaw, Daniel. *A Philosophical Account of the Nature of Art Appreciation*. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2000.

Sheppard, Anne D. R. *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Sidney, Philip. *Selected Prose and Poetry.* Edited by Robert Kimbrough. 2nd ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.

Smith, Ralph Alexander. *Aesthetic Concepts and Education.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970.

Sparshott, Francis Edward. *The Theory of the Arts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Stern, Bernhard Joseph, and Samuel Smith. *Understanding the Russians: A Study of Soviet Life and Culture*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1947.

Ten Boom, Corrie. *The Hiding Place.* New York: Bantam Books, 1982.

Thompson, Ewa M. *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987.

Tolstoy, Alexandra. *Tolstoy: A Life of My Father*. Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975.

Tolstoy, Leo. *Anna Karenina.* Translated by Constance Garnett. Edited by Leonard Kent and Nina Berberova. New York: Modern Library, 2000.

_____. *Childhood, Boyhood & Youth*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964.

_____. *The Journal of Leo Tolstoi*. Translated and edited by Rose Strunsky. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1917.

_____. *The Kreutzer Sonata*. London: Remington, 1890.

_____. *Leo Tolstoy, His Life and Work; Autobiographical Memoirs, Letters, and Biographical Material*. Edited by P. Biriukov. New York: C. Scribner, 1906.

_____. *The Lion and the Honeycomb: The Religious Writings of Tolstoy*. Translated by Robert Chandler. Edited by Andrew Wilson. London: Collins, 1987.

_____. *Recollections & Essays.* Translated and edited by Aylmer Maude. London: Oxford University Press, 1937.

_____. *Resurrection.* Translated by Leo Wiener. New York: Heritage Press, 1963.

_____. *Tolstoy's Letters*. Translated by R. F. Christian. 2 vols. New York: Scribner, 1978.

_____. *War and Peace*. Translated by Louise Shanks Maude, Aylmer Maude, and Amy Mandelker. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

_____. *What Is Art?* Translated by Aylmer Maude. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers, 1899.

_____. *What Is Art?* Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

_____. *The Wisdom of Tolstoy.* Translated by Huntington Smith. New York: Philosophical Library, 1968.

Tsanoff, Radoslav Andrea. *Autobiographies of Ten Religious Leaders; Alternatives in Christian Experience*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1968.

Weitz, Morris. *Problems in Aesthetics: An Introductory Book of Readings.* New York: Macmillan, 1959.

Witte, John, and Michael Bourdeaux. *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.

Woiwode, Larry. *Words for Readers and Writers: Spirit-Pooled Dialogues.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Zenkovsky, Vasily Vasilyevich. *Russian Thinkers and Europe.* Ann Arbor, MI: J. W. Edwards, 1953.

Zernov, Nicolas. *The Russians and Their Church*. New York: Macmillan, 1945.

Articles

Ali, Tariq. "The Blair Kitsch Project." *Monthly Review* 51, no. 8 (2000): 13.

Anderson, Peter. "The World as It Is Made to Seem: News & Views." *South African Journal of Science* 106, no. 7/8 (2010): 1-2.

Aniol, Scott, Robert Pendergraft, Lori Danielson, Jessica Wan, Da Jeong Choi, and Kughaho Chishi. "Worship from the Nations: A Survey and Preliminary Analysis of the Ethnodoxology Movement." *Artistic Theologian* 3, (2015): 2-21.

Antonov, Konstantin, and Alexey Chernyak. "Art and Morality: Tolstoy vs. Leontiev." 97-103. Accessed October 26, 2016. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Konstantin_Antonov/publication/306061706_Art_and_Morality_Tolstoy_vs_Leontiev/links/57af11a108ae15c76cb7f566.pdf.

Attfield, Judy. "Redefining Kitsch: The Politics of Design." *Home Cultures* 3, no. 3 (2006): 201-12.

Barchana-Lorand, Dorit. "Educating Sentiment: Hume's Contribution to the Philosophy of the Curriculum Regarding the Teaching of Art." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 49, no. 1 (2015): 107-28.

Barran, Thomas. "Rousseau's Political Vision and Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*" *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 5 (1992): 1-13.

Batori, Zsolt. "Genre Identification and the Case of Horror." *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* no. 2 (2010): 34-45.

Bayley, John. Review of *Tolstoy: The Critical Heritage*, by A.V. Knowles. *The Review of English Studies* 32, no. 125 (February 1981): 91-92.

Berger, John. "Ways of Seeing." In *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, edited by Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj, 116-24. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011.

Bloch, Ernst, Michael Lowy, and Vicki Williams Hill. "Interview with Ernst Bloch." *New German Critique*, no. 9 (1976): 35-45.

Blume, Gwendolyn J. "The Reader-Brand: Tolstoy in England at the Turn of the Century." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53, no. 3 (2011): 320-37.

Boylan, Alexis L. "Stop Using Kitsch as a Weapon: Kitsch and Racism." *Rethinking Marxism* 22, no. 1 (2010): 42-55.

Bremer, Thomas S. "A Touristic Angle of Vision: Tourist Studies as a Methodological Approach for the Study of Religions." *Religion Compass* 8, no. 12 (2014): 371-79.

Buch, Esteban. "Adorno's 'Schubert': From the Critique of the Garden Gnome to the Defense of Atonalism." *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005): 25-30.

Buckler, Julie. Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, edited by Donna Tussing Orwin. *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 14 (2002): 155-57.

Bullock, Philip Ross. "Andrei Platonov's *Happy Moscow*: Stalinist Kitsch and Ethical Decadence." *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 1 (2006): 201-11.

Chatterjee, Anjan, and Oshin Vartanian. "Neuroscience of Aesthetics." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1369, no. 1 (2016): 172-94.

Chojna, Wojciech. Review of *Tolstoy's What Is Art?* by Terry Diffey. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 3 (1988): 434-36.

Cilliers, Johan. "The Unveiling of Life: Liturgy and the Lure of Kitsch." *Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (2010): 1-5.

Clark, Timothy. "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art." *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1982): 139-56.

Clements, Paul. "The Excluded Terms of Culture: Cultural Inclusion as Spectacle." *Journal for Cultural Research* 10, no. 4 (2006): 323-42.

Cohen, Phil. "A Beautifying Lie? Culture and Kitsch @London2012." *Soundings*, no. 50 (2012): 84-94.

Connor, Steven. Review of *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, by Matei Calinescu. *The Modern Language Review* 85, no. 1 (1990): 134-35.

Coppenger, Mark. "A Christian Perspective on Film." In *The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts*, edited by Leland Ryken, 285-302. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1981.

Croizier, Ralph. "The Avant-Garde and the Democracy Movement: Reflections on Late Communism in the USSR and China." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 3 (1999): 483-513.

Daniels, Charles B. "Tolstoy and Corrupt Art." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 8, no. 4 (1974): 41-49.

DeLyser, Dydia. "Collecting, Kitsch and the Intimate Geographies of Social Memory: A Story of Archival Autoethnography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40, no. 2 (2015): 209-22.

Denner, Michael A. "Accidental Art: Tolstoy's Poetics of Unintentionality." *Philosophy and Literature* 27, no. 2 (December 17, 2003): 284-303.

_____. Review of *Tolstoy: A Russian Life*, by Rosamund Bartlett. *Slavic Review* 72, no. 3 (2013): 664-65.

Doggett, Tyler, and Andy Eagan. "How We Feel about Terrible, Non-Existent Mafiosi." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84, no. 2 (March 2012): 277-306.

Dorsch, Fabian. "Emotional Imaging and Our Responses to Fiction." *Enrahonar* 46, (2011): 153-76.

Doss, Erika. "Makes Me Laugh, Makes Me Cry: Feelings and American Art." *American Art* 25, no. 3 (2011): 2-8.

Dutton, Dennis. "Literary Theory and Intellectual Kitsch." *Literature & Aesthetics* 2 (2012): 23-34.

_____. "Tomas Kulka on Kitsch." *Philosophy and Literature* 21 (1997): 208-11. Accessed May 15, 2018. http://www.denisdutton.com/kulka_review.htm.

Eaton, Marcia. "Laughing at the Death of Little Nell." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 1989): 269-82.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Welcome to Cancerland: Mammogram Leads to a Cult of Pink Kitsch." *Harpers* November, 2001.

Emerson, Caryl. "Leo Tolstoy and the Rights of Music under Stalin." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 14 (2002): 1-14.

_____. "Prosaics in *Anna Karenina*: Pro and Con." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 8 (1995): 150-76.

_____. "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 100, no. 1 (1985): 68-80.

_____. "Tolstoy on Stage: The Power of Darkness at La Mama, March 4-7, 2010." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 22 (2010): 118-21.

_____. "Tolstoy's Aesthetics: A Harmony and Translation of the Five Senses." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* no. 12 (2000): 9-17.

Emerson, Caryl, Andrew Wachtel, and Gary Jahn. "Roundtable Discussion of *Tolstoy's Art and Thought 1847-1880* by Donna Tussing Orwin." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 6 (1993): 157-70.

Emery, Jacob. "Art Is Inoculation: The Infectious Imagination of Leo Tolstoy." *The Russian Review* 70, no. 4 (2011): 627-45.

Fisher, John Andrew. "On Carroll's Enfranchisement of Mass Art as Art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 1 (2004): 57-61.

Fitch, Melissa A. "Carmen, Kitsch, Camp and My Quest for Coordinated Dinnerware." *Chasqui* 40, no. 2 (2011): 55-64.

Friedlander, Eli. "Some Thoughts on Kitsch." *History & Memory* 9, no. 1-2 (1997): 376-92.

Gershkovich, Tatyana. "Infecting, Simulating, Judging: Tolstoy's Search for an Aesthetic Standard." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 1 (2013): 115-38.

Goldman, Alan. "Emotions in Music (A Postscript)." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 1 (1995): 59-69.

Goodrich, Chauncey S. Review of *Kitsch, the World of Bad Taste*, by Gillo Dorfles. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, no. 4 (1971): 514.

Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." *Partisan Review* 6 (Fall 1939). Accessed November 22, 2017. http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html.

Gribble, James. "The Reality of Fictional Emotions." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16, no. 4 (1982).

Gurstein, Rochelle. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited." *Raritan* 22 (2003): 136-58.

Gusevich, Miriam. "Decoration and Decorum, Adolf Loos's Critique of Kitsch." *New German Critique* no. 43 (1988): 97-123.

Hare, Richard. "Did Tolstoy Correctly Diagnose the Disease of 'Modern' Art?" *The Slavonic and East European Review* 36, no. 86 (1957): 181-88.

Harrison, Mary-Catherine. "The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy." *Narrative* 16, no. 3 (October 2008): 256-78.

Hughes, Richard I.G. "Tolstoy, Stanislavski, and the Art of Acting." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (1993): 39-48.

Isenberg, Jillian. "Fiction Without Pretense." PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013.

Jahn, Gary R. "The Aesthetic Theory of Leo Tolstoy's What Is Art?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, no. 1 (1975): 59-65.

Jones, W. Gareth. Review of *Tolstoy*, by Henry Gifford. *The Modern Language Review* 78, no. 4 (1983): 997-98.

Joyce, Richard. "Rational Fear of Monsters." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40 (2000): 209-24.

Kansteiner, Wulf. "Of Kitsch, Enlightenment, and Gender Anxiety: Exploring Cultural Memories of Collective Memory Studies." *History and Theory* 46, no. 1 (2007): 82-91.

Katz, Michael. Review of *The Death of Tolstoy: Russia on the Eve, Astapovo Station, 1910*, by William Nickell. *Slavic Review* 70, no. 2 (2011): 479-80.

Khan, Hallmur. "Doctoral Dissertations Written in the United States and Canada on Leo Tolstoy, 1913-1996." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 9 (1997): 85-92.

Kind, Amy. "The Heterogeneity of the Imagination." *Erkenntnis* 78, no. 1 (February 2013): 141-59.

Kinkade, Merritt. "The Kitsch Controversy." Accessed April 17, 2017. http://www.kinkadefamilyfoundation.org/blog/the-kitsch-controversy.

Knight, Deborah. "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality: A Meta-Aesthetic Perspective." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 4 (1999): 411-20.

Kokobobo, Ani. "Authoring Jesus: Novelistic Echoes in Tolstoy's Harmonization and Translation of the Four Gospels." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 20 (2008): 1-13.

Koppe, Tilmann. "Evolutionary Psychology and the Paradox of Fiction." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2009). Accessed November 3, 2013. http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-236635034/evolutionary-psychology-and-the-paradox-of-fiction.

Kupersmith, Peter. "The Whole World of Tolstoy." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 18 (2006): 70-74.

Leddy, Thomas. "Roger Scruton on Kitsch." Aesthetics Today blog, entry posted September 30, 2013. Accessed November 2, 2017. http://aestheticstoday.blogspot.com/2013/09/roger-scruton-on-kitsch.html.

Lehrer, Jonah. "Mysteries of The Artistic Mind: What Makes Art Great?" *Psychology Today*, July/August, 2009.

Madsen, Catherine. "Argues That Renewal Liturgy Is Just so Much Kitsch." *Tikkun* 16 (2001): 41-45.

Mandelker, Amy. Review of *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and His Art*, by Rimvydas Silbajoris. *Slavic Review* 51, no. 2 (1992): 384-85.

Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 83-109.

McLean, Ian. "Modernism and Marxism, Greenberg and Adorno." *Australian Journal of Art* 7, no. 1 (1988): 97-111.

Mendelson, Andrew, and Zizi Papacharissi, "How Defined Realness Affects Cognitive & Emotional Responses to Photographs." *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (2007): 231-43.

Meyers, Jeffrey. "Filial Memoirs of Tolstoy." *Biography* 11, no. 3 (1988): 236-52.

Morgan, David. "Response to Spackman, 'Reconsidering "Kitsch."'" *Material Religion* 1, no. 3 (2005): 417-20.

Morse, Russell. "Ethnomusicology: A New Frontier." *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1975): 32-37.

Morson, Gary Saul. "The Tolstoy Questions: Reflections on the Silbajoris Thesis." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 4 (1991): 115.

_____. "The Worlds of Others." *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 49, no. 2 (2011): 6-15.

Moulin, Dan. "Leo Tolstoy the Spiritual Educator." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13, no. 4 (2008): 345-53.

Nadkarni, Maya. "The Master's Voice: Authenticity, Nostalgia, and the Refusal of Irony in Postsocialist Hungary." *Social Identities* 13, no. 5 (2007): 611-26.

Orwin, Donna Tussing. Review of *Tolstoy*, by A. N. Wilson. *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 2 (1989): 73-74.

Picciuto, Elizabeth. "The Experience of Fiction." PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2013.

Radford, Colin. "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* S49 (1975): S67-80.

Robinson, Douglas. "Tolstoy's Infection Theory and the Aesthetics of De- and Repersonalization." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 19 (2007): 33-53.

Rozenblium, Lia. "Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (Closing the Distance) At the Turn of the 1870s-1880s." *Russian Studies in Literature* 45, no. 4 (2009): 62-97.

Sachs, Matthew E., Antonio Damasio & Assal Habibi. "The Pleasures of Sad Music: A Systematic Review." *Frontiers of Human Neuroscience* 9 (2015): 404. Accessed July 28, 2018. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4513245/.

Samier, Eugenie. “On the Kitschification of Educational Administration: An Aesthetic Critique of Theory and Practice in the Field.” *International Studies in Educational Administration* 36, no. 3 (2008): 3-18.

_____. “Toward Public Administration as a Humanities Discipline: A Humanistic Manifesto.” *Administrative Culture*, no. 6 (2005): 6-59.

Scruton, Roger. "Kitsch and the Modern Predicament." *City Journal* (Winter 1999). accessed November 2, 2017. https://www.city-journal.org/html/kitsch-and-modern-predicament-11726.html.

Sklar, Howard. “Believable Fictions.” *The Electronic Journal of the Department of English at the University of Helsinki* 5 (2009). Accessed November 22, 2013. http://blogs.helsinki.fi/hes-eng/volumes/volume-5/believable-fictions-on-the-nature-of-emotional-responses-to-fictional-characters-howard-sklar/.

Solomon, Robert C. “On Kitsch and Sentimentality.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, no. 1 (1991): 1-14.

Spackman, Betty. “Reconsidering ‘Kitsch.’” *Material Religion* 1, no. 3 (2005): 405-16.

Stecker, Robert. “Should We Still Care about the Paradox of Fiction?” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 3 (July 2011): 295-308.

Thomson, Katherine. Review of *Tolstoy on Aesthetics: What Is Art?*, by Howard O. Mounce. *Mind* 112, no. 445 (2003): 162-66.

Tolstoy, Alexandra. “Tolstoy and the Russian Peasant.” *Russian Review* 19, no. 2 (1960): 150-56.

Troncale, Joseph. Review of *Tolstoy’s Aesthetics and His Art*, by Rimvydas Silbajoris. *Russian Review* 52, no. 1 (1993): 105-6.

Trivedi, Saam. “Artist-Audience Communication: Tolstoy Reclaimed.” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 2 (2004): 38-52.

Volgin Igor. “Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.” *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 50, no. 3 (2011): 57-67.

Weitz, Morris. “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 1 (1956): 27-35.

Wertz, Spencer K. “Human Nature and Art: From Descartes and Hume to Tolstoy.” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 32, no. 3 (1998): 75-82.

Westbrook, John. “Cultivating Kitsch: Cultural Boveism.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 6, no. 2 (2002): 424-35.

White, Anthony. “Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch.” *Grey Room* 1, no. 5 (2001): 54-77.

Wilson, Andrew P. “‘Beholding the Man’: Viewing (or Is It Marking?) John’s Trial Scene alongside Kitsch Art.” *Biblical Interpretation* 24, no. 2 (2016): 245-64.

Wyman, Alina. “Discourse and Intercourse in The Kreutzer Sonata: A Schelerian Perspective.” *Christianity & Literature* 64, no. 2 (2015): 147-70.

ABSTRACT

A NEO-TOLSTOYAN RESPONSE TO KITSCH

Daniel Joseph Cabal, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
Chair: Dr. Mark T. Coppenger

Leo Tolstoy's aesthetic theory in *What is Art?* defines art as the transmission of emotion through the creation of an object. Awareness of Tolstoy's history and beliefs extends a more generous understanding to some of his controversial evaluations of famous artworks, but remaining problems with his theory require substantial enough changes to result in a neo-Tolstoyan aesthetic. Although kitsch proves difficult to define and the variety of existing definitions are examined, Clement Greenberg's understanding of kitsch particularly challenges Tolstoy's aesthetic through denouncing features of art which Tolstoy celebrates. A conception of art grounded in a biblical ethics of emotion is presented that synthesizes these competing viewpoints. The resulting synthesis offers clarification on the essence of kitsch and suggestions on how to evaluate the worth of artworks.

VITA

Daniel Joseph Cabal

EDUCATION

B.A., Boyce College, 2002
Adv. M.Div., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

English Teacher-Trainer, Faizabad, Afghanistan, 2003
Adjunct Faculty, Badakshan Medical College, Faizabad, Afghanistan, 2004
Adjunct Faculty, Faizabad Pedagogical Institute, Faizabad, Afghanistan, 2004-2005
Grader, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, 2007
Middle/High School Teacher, Covenant Classical School, Fort Worth, Texas, 2008-2010
Adjunct Faculty, Tarrant County College, Fort Worth, Texas, 2009, 2011

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastor, Era First Baptist Church, Era, Texas, 2005-2007
Associate Producer, Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, Texas, 2010
Director, Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, Texas, 2010-2011