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A Dry Martini

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This is a semi-philosophical inquiry into the subject of a Dry Martini, which is well known as an alcoholic drink. It is not truly a philosophical inquiry since I am not a philosopher. I am a geographer. The history of the American drink is rather murky. Some say that the town of Martinez in California invented the drink during the mid-1800s Gold Rush. When there was no Champagne to celebrate the good fortune in finding gold, the bartender insisted on something made from the ingredients he had on hand. There is also an assertion that it originated from New York's Knickerbocker Hotel, named after Martini & Rossi vermouth, which was first created in the mid-1800s.

Since knowledge is always metaphorical, so far as we understand something through something else, this inquiry is divided into two different paths. One of the paths leads the inquiry into the aesthetic experience of a Dry Martini. The other path leads the inquiry into the aesthetics of components – where humans and non-humans interact in the process of determining what aesthetics is in relation to objects, such as a Dry Martini. The question emerges at the intersection where these two paths meet – is it in the eye of the beholder and consumer that aesthetics is expressed, or is it a matter of time-space-layers and dominant perspectives within human and non-human networks where the aesthetic is determined and performed?

Path one – the ontology and epistemology of the lonely subject-object relation. Before moving on to the path of investigating how aesthetics is expressed, it is necessary to pay attention to the role of the performance of texts, and other objects as well, just in order to quickly glance at the second path. Texts have an agency. Texts are agents beyond dead and objective matter. Butler engages Morrison who says that words do not have direct causal power, but are influential on different levels at once: “language is thought of mostly as agency – an act with consequences” and that language has “... an extended doing, a performance with effects. Language is, after all,

‘thought of’, that is, posited or constituted as ‘agency’. Yet it is *as* agency that it is thought; a *figural* substitution makes the thinking of the agency of language possible. Because this very formulation is offered *in* language, the ‘agency’ of language is not only the theme of the formulation, but its very action. This positing as this figuring appear to exemplify the agency at issue”, (Butler p. 7). Later she proclaims, "... speaking is itself a bodily act", (p. 10).

So, when understanding the position of agency of philosophy when trying to investigate how aesthetics is performed it is necessary to move closer into, for instance Dewey, from whom it is possible to extract a few leads as to where the viewpoint of aesthetics is made.

The first clue is given in the Primary Experience as the Ontological and Epistemic Foundation of Science, and *Experience and Nature*, where Dewey introduced his ontology as naturalistic empiricism. The experience that is claimed to be primary is the one that is associated with a scientific point of view through the methods applied:

Genuine empirical method set out from the actual subject-matter of primary experience, recognizes that reflection discriminates a new factor in it, the act of seeing, makes an object of that, and then uses that new object, the organic response to light to regulate, when needed, further experiences of the subject-matter already contained in primary experience, (Mostajir, p. 112).

Further, when inspecting an object, such as a stone, he says that man’s doing with the world through interaction results in experiences. A “man” lifts the stone and says:

The stone is too heavy or too angular, not solid enough; or else the properties undergone show it is fit for the use for which it is intended. The process continues until a mutual adaption of the self and the object emerges and particular experience comes to a close, (*ibid.*, p. 113f).

An understanding of aesthetics, according to Dewey, thus involves the trained eye of an experienced scientific analyst, like himself. If the purpose is to foreground the trained and experienced scientist as determining nature through a trained and reflecting superior subject instead of God, it makes sense. However, there are similarities in the *modus operandi* between God and the portrait here of the scientist. God had the infinite and holy power to baptize the world by saying: “Let there be light”. In a way, God performed the same procedure compared to the scientist. Supposedly, after observing and having a thought about it first. The similarity lies in “how” this is done.

In both cases there are two isolated subjects inspecting, reflecting on and acting on a solitary object; God on the world and Dewey on a stone. There are merely two actors on stage, the subject and the object. There are no assistants, no crew and no institutional environment involved in the experience of the aesthetics. The thought of anything affecting the solitary act of aesthetic experience is ruled out:

Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality, (*ibid.*, p. 115),

The religious attitude... is much broader than anything indicated by 'moral' in its usual sense. The quality of attitude is displayed in art, science and good citizenship, (*ibid.*, p. 116).

This is just to make sure that no other subject may interfere with the activity of experiencing aesthetics. The problem here is that, on the one hand, scientific experience requires a rigorous education and an enormous set of precognitions that filter all types of experiences of the world before us. Although, this is not the same as the scientist's purpose being to construct an accurate mirror-representation of a world of objects, (*ibid.*, p. 114). On the other hand, the aesthetic experience is portrayed as a performance of an intimate and exclusive interaction between a subject and an object. When Kant speaks of existence and reality, his narrative also involves psychological interpretations, on the one hand, and logical and epistemological interpretations, on the other, thus excluding the possibility of any agency in the matter, or non-matter, investigated, (Hartnack, p. 29). The object in these types of narratives is not performing any agency of its own, but the peculiar thing is that the text about the stone is intended to perform a valid statement about how the world can be discovered through science. The only motive for the scientist is to find: "... balance, order, and integration with its environment", (p. 117). Following also Kant, in the *Critique of Judgment*, it is said that the power to judge is an a priori principle, not just a concept, which also can be seen as a desire to mimic the acts of God.

I would say that it is an extremely powerful act to follow the desire to inspect, categorize, and determine the state of the world. Even the moment before we realize an aesthetic experience it has been transformed from understanding the world, to changing the world through performative acts including both thought-and-actions, since thoughts are also actions that are performed. But, perhaps texts are more powerful than stones in some ways, depending on how big they are and the way that they are heading, of course.

There seems to be missing a cultural and social dimension tying everything together when Mostajir cites Dewey as claiming that with science, “experience presents itself as the method, and the only method for getting at nature” and that what makes the difference between the physical object and the subject looking into this is control: “that a total unanalyzed world does not lend itself to control”, (p. 111).

According to Mostajir, the reflective distinction between object and subject is, in essence, a recognition of the distinction between the mutable and immutable, allowing the development of methods to manipulate this mutability in beneficial ways. Problems arise when we deny reality to the totality of experience, relegating aspects of it to the realms of subjectivity and uselessness, and reify the abstracted world of physical objects as the sole true reality, (p. 112).

It can thus be concluded that the performance of aesthetic experience is performed by someone acting as a God-like figure who is trained for the purpose of doing so. It is an attempt to distinguish science from religion through the mimicry of procedures that excludes any other influences from the procedure than a subject and an object in order to produce control of the immutable. To me, this is not to be confused with a fallacy, it is rather to be seen as a strong desire to distinguish the work of a scientist or artist from religious dominance in a different space-and-time-layer. We need to be aware of the context in which the narratives are performed when considering aesthetic experiences.

Before continuing onto the second path and where the two meet, let’s have a look at the Dry Martini from this point of view. We can start by drawing up some wider aesthetic categories, such as:

- The look of the glass – the physical materials involved in drinking a Dry Martini
- The ingredients of the drink
- The composition of the drink – sight, substances, smell and taste
- The “lightheadedness” after consuming it
- The time-place of consumption
- The company with whom one is consuming the drink
- The memory of its effects
- The relation between humans and non-humans – the network component.

As far as I have come here, it may be possible to inspect some of the materials involved in an aesthetic experience by trained senses on the lonely subject-object view. Latour holds that the rationalization that took place during the so-called “scientific revolution” is not of the mind, of the eye, of philosophy, but of the sight, (p. 7). Why is perspective such an important invention? “Because of its logical recognition of internal invariances through all the transformations produced by changes in spatial location”, (Ivins, p. 9). With that in mind, the glass and all other parts of the Martini would vary according to geography. However, it could easily be evaluated as being too big, too small or not the right shape, as recognized in other geographical locations. It could also be evaluated if the glass was chilled before infusing the liquid into it or not. The ingredients could also be inspected as well as the composition of the drink. It is also characteristic how the alcohol goes into the blood rather quickly and produces a form of lightheadedness. The company could of course also be valued, however that might be a bit difficult to do sometimes due to social norms. We can account for all of its parts; sugar, water, juniper, the herbs, the material that brings heat to the boiler, the yeast, the factory that makes the distillation, the bottle, its cork, the machine that fills the bottles, the distributor, the shop that sells the liquid, the bars where it is consumed, the lemon and the Vermouth in it, the preparation of it. But it is difficult for us to actually grasp how these parts are related with the lonely subject and an object. This may be better understood if Foucault could be involved. He suggests how the same eyes suddenly began to look at “representations”. The “panopticon” he describes is a “*fait social total*” that redefines all aspects of the culture. What needs to be included, (if we follow Latour and Foucault) in order to inspect the Dry Martini, is thus a vision that brings in “social interests” or the “economic infrastructure” (Alpers, p. 201), and also an understanding of what seems to be in control of the interpretation could be rather tricky from the Deweyian point of view.

Path two – networks of humans and non-humans. In routing and taking a different path in order to arrive at the point where the first path ended, there is one crucial thing to remember. It may be fully enough to stay in a linear vision, and not include the intimate relation between humans and non-humans, including objects as well as other living species. It has already been said that vision is not immutable, perspectives change, and it is possible to bring home a Dry Martini from Manhattan by putting them together at home, and also take them back by suggesting to the bartender how you think it should be composed. Beyond the matter of control over the investigation of a Dry Martini, we need to know how the holy act of naming works. Texts and

narratives are powerful in providing evidence of the state of nature, and through ritual procedures it is possible to institutionalize the naming of things and relations. Apart from these institutionalized forms (such as with science) it also involves how the narrative is crafted: “A good novel makes the readers believe in its worlds by the force of persuasion (just like good science), not by the force of external authority”, (Kundera, p. 22). The novel narrative is indifferent to extra-linguistic reality, a trait which is compensated for by extraordinary sensibility to the reality of conversation, (Bruner). This means that science can provide us with nothing other than a good story! Science provides a good framework for investigating nature and social worlds by manipulating thoughts through the insights of a systematic way of investigating and narrating since we:

..... are structure determined systems we are open to any structural manipulation that respects the structural coherence proper to the structural domain in which it takes place. Or, the same said in more general terms, and in a way that result is more remarkable and at the same time more terrifying: any thing that we may choose to design can be implemented, if the design respects the structural coherence of the domain in which it takes place”, (Maturana).

In order to include networks of parts that are at play when judging the aesthetics of a Dry Martini, we need to view the doing of drinking and inspecting in terms of what the network consists and what is holding it together by drawing in social interest, economic infrastructure, and also the scientific institutional environment. In doing so, it is necessary to recognize a social and cultural perspective, and to acknowledge the power of texts and narratives as well as images. The conclusion here is that from a cultural perspective, we cannot exclude material objects as performing actions through agency. One can for instance see the meaning of “discourse” in a broad sense, as something intended to convey more than the fact that human communities exist socially through the medium of language (Pred, 1981 in Thrift 1996, p.79). It is even possible to expand semiotic analysis to include the material world (Latour, 1998). The parts that assemble the Dry Martini in all of its bits and pieces are thus what Serres calls quasi-objects, (p. 87). Quasi-objects are objects that stabilize social relations. Without them, all relations would be fickle and unstable. If social relations only consisted of contracts between subjects, they would quickly vaporize into air. Quasi-objects often replace and embody human actors in situations where they are seen to be appropriate or where it is unbearable for humans to be. The slice

of lemon is thus not an object, compared to a stone in the Sahara Desert; it carries meaning and acts with agency so that the aesthetic experience of the drink is recognizable and is experienced as a quality product.

Place, observer, and culture are intertwined and coupled, making it difficult to describe one without the other. Latour (1998) says that it makes a great difference whether culture is seen from a perspective that prioritizes the description of the structure of social life or whether the ambition is to trace the threadlike connections between humans that are produced by their actions. An inspection of a Dry Martini involves situated practices and thus cannot be defined as a *system* of actions creating meaning and values in a strictly *structural* sense. Latour says: “When the epistemological myth of an outside observer providing an explanation in addition to ‘mere description’ disappears, there is no longer a privilege”, (p. 5). Again, this is done with the reflexive knowledge that the observer has no privileged status in relation to other observers and that observation really is a question of moving among different frames of reference, (*ibid.*). We are all involved in making aesthetics and there is no privileged, God-like or scientific supreme viewpoint – we are placemakers among placemakers, Cheers!

The problem with material objects is that they are often viewed from the notion that particular forms of design influence the way that humans will interact and behave, and also how they are defined in terms of aesthetics. They are also seen as distinct and separate from the bodies that use them. This leads to the view that the material objects consisting of a Dry Martini are seen as complete, rather than being viewed as a process of something being made, (Carter, et al., 2011). The Dry Martinis are, however not detached from the bodies handling them. The drinks are constantly being interpreted, manipulated, and reinvented in terms of use; they always allow for new ways of making use of them in terms of agency.

If we now look closer at the human network that holds together the Dry Martini, we need to involve more than the network that produces the drink. There is a website that gives an overview of the kind of people among celebrities who prefer a Dry Martini.¹ We can read that famous people like Humphrey Bogart, James Bond, David Bowie, Johnny Carson, Winston Churchill, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway (although he seemed to have many favorites), Whitney Houston, Jack London, Dean Martin, Minogue Kylie, Richard Nixon, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Frank Sinatra, John Travolta, and Oprah Winfrey, all preferred Martinis.

¹ <http://juxtapable.com/celebrity-favorite-drinks/>

A range of humans and non-humans are thus holding the network of the Dry Martini together through persuasive narratives and images of what is aesthetic and what is valued as good. It is not merely a question of a trained artist or scientist who determines the aesthetics. It is a complete set of parts held together in a network of thoughts-and-actions consisting of humans and non-humans.

Conclusion. In order to justify this text, I would like to refer to Werner Herzog's Kaspar Hauser, who responds to the enlightenment-inspired scientist who wants to test Kaspar's intelligence by asking the classical question to which there is only one correct answer. He asks Kaspar how to reveal which of two people he meets is lying about the direction to a village. The correct answer to this philosophical question is that the traveler must propose a question with a double negation in order to reveal who is telling the truth and who is lying. Kaspar thinks for a while before he says that he would ask both of the people if they were a "löwenfrosch" (lion frog). If one of the persons would agree to that, he would reveal himself as a liar. The point of this persuasive story is that there are many ways to arrive at the same conclusion, and maybe they are not correct every time, but they may give other perspectives on reality than expected.

What has been investigated here is how the aesthetic is determined from an epistemological as well as ontological viewpoint, from Dewey and Kant to Latour, Butler, and Serres. First, the inquiry led to a discussion about the aesthetic experience before the making of a martini, as a craft or as a type of artistic process. After that, the inquiry lead into the aesthetics of components – where humans and non-humans interact in the process of determining what aesthetics is in relation to objects, such as a Dry Martini. The question was posed, is it in the eye of the beholder and consumer that aesthetics is expressed, or is it a matter of time-layers and dominant perspectives within human and non-human networks where the aesthetic is determined and performed?

The answer to this question is that it is difficult to say something about aesthetics without also including a time-space-layer and a cultural network understanding of what holds all the parts together that constitute an aesthetic experience. The parts consist of products included in the drink, the economic, cultural, social and political ingredients that support the Dry Martini, and the powerful non-humans acting as agents through material objects, such as texts and narratives, and people involved in producing these narratives. There is not merely a lonely subject-object relation involved in a Dry Martini. It should

be consumed in good company to be enjoyed in full, as I did a couple of days ago here at Wassard Elea.

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