

NSE 2017 Bergen

Keynote abstracts

“Aesthetic Experience in Science”

[Angela Breitenbach](#), University of Cambridge

Scientists routinely speak of the aesthetic merit of theories, proofs and explanations, often regarding the experience of beauty and elegance in science as a motivation for their work and an indication of its truth. But aesthetic judgments in science are as controversial as they are widespread. On one side, aestheticians have worried that statements about the beauty of a theory or the elegance of a proof are merely metaphorical and lack genuine aesthetic status. On the other side, philosophers of science have wondered why aesthetic concerns should play any role in the search for scientific knowledge. I address this two-fold challenge by asking how judgments of beauty could be both aesthetic proper and relevant for scientific enquiry. I propose an answer inspired by the Kantian idea that aesthetic experience is grounded, at least in part, in the subject’s spontaneous intellectual activities. I argue that relevant aesthetic judgments are grounded in the subject’s awareness of her creative intellectual activities in devising and grasping a theory. And I suggest that judgments of this kind may offer a heuristic tool for scientific enquiry by indicating achievements of understanding.

“Getting It: Art and Attunement”

[Rita Felski](#), University of Virginia and University of Southern Denmark

How does one “get” or fail to “get” a work of art? Why are we drawn to a certain painting or novel or piece of music and stubbornly unmoved by others that seem, on the face of it, not so very different? Can we do justice to what such a response feels like and why it matters—yet without scanting the prompts and pressures (a college syllabus, an over-the-top review, a parent’s approving look or raised eyebrow) that incline us toward some works rather than others? Perhaps attunement will give us a fresh slant on such questions. My talk considers various examples of attunement--both sudden and slow--with a particular focus on Zadie Smith's conversion to the music of Joni Mitchell.

"Aesthetic Experience and the Experience of Poetry"

Peter Lamarque, University of York

Literature doesn't lend itself easily to talk of 'experience', far less 'aesthetic experience'. No doubt drama is an obvious exception but drama is partially visual. Any kind of sensory experience seems at best marginal to, for example, the novel. To speak of the experience of a novel seems not to be speaking of sensory experience. Yet the aesthetic—certainly aesthetic experience—seems closely tied to the sensory. Do we then mean something different when talking of experience in the literary realm? Maybe. But poetry lends itself more readily to talk of experience, aesthetic experience in particular and even sensory experience. Is not much of the pleasure of poetry bound up with the sounds, rhythms and textures of poetic language? And is that not both sensory and aesthetic? Although this might seem incontestable it also hints at a kind of formalism in the aesthetic appraisal of poetry. If our focus is on sounds and rhythms what becomes of poetic subject matter? Is that excluded from aesthetic appraisal? That seems undesirable in itself, especially so for those who promote the indivisibility of form and content in poetry. Can form-content unity in a poem afford aesthetic experience? If so, how is that explained? If not, then are we back to a different kind of experience (more like the novel?) in associating poetry with aesthetic experience? These are some of the issues that the lecture will explore.

Keynote abstracts

"Aesthetic Experience Is Not Where the Action Is"

Dominic McIver Lopes, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Facts about an item's aesthetic value are normative. Tradition conceives aesthetic normativity as doubly theoretic and practical. That is, facts about aesthetic value make it the case both that aesthetic experiences can be correct or incorrect and that one has reason to perform acts of appreciation that involve having aesthetic experiences. I argue that it is common ground among all theorists that aesthetic value facts give agents reasons to act but that philosophical tradition mistakenly assumes that the only acts we have aesthetic reason to perform are acts of

experiential appreciation. Once we reject this assumption, a new theory of aesthetic normativity comes into view.