

University of Tartu

Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics

What Makes the Emotion of Being Moved
an Aesthetic Emotion?

Master's Thesis in Philosophy

MyungHoon Jeong

Supervisors: Riin Sirkel and Uku Tooming

Number of Character: 93,755

Year

2026

Contents Table

Introduction	2
(1) The Preliminary Analysis of Accounts of Being Moved	5
1. General Account of Being Moved by Florian Cova & Julien Deonna	5
1.1. Cova and Deonna’s Account: The Salience of Core Positive Value	6
1.2. Critical Analysis of Cova and Deonna’s Account.....	7
2. Menninghaus et al.'s account of Being Moved as an Aesthetic Emotion.....	11
2.1. Menninghaus et al.’s Account of Being Moved as an Aesthetic emotion.....	11
2.2. Critical Analysis of Menninghaus et al.’s account.....	13
(2) Being Moved as an Aesthetic Emotion.....	16
3. The Core Positive Value of Being moved by an artwork: Truthfulness	17
3.1. Truthfulness as the core positive value for artwork experiences	17
3.2. Explanation for negative value and non-core positive value cases.....	21
4. An Aesthetic Virtue Correlated Being Moved: Aesthetic Transparency	25
4.1. Aesthetic Transparency and Truthfulness	26
4.2 Aesthetic Transparency in Artwork Experience	29
5. Addressing Potential Concerns	32
5.1. Sappy Film Cases	32
5.2. Conceptual Conflation	33
5.3. Over-Intellectualization	34
Conclusion	36
References.....	39
Abstract:	40
Annotation	41

Introduction

The goal of my thesis is to clarify the nature of being moved as an aesthetic emotion. While being moved has been considered an aesthetic emotion in philosophical literature, it is not easy to find a rigorous explanation of what makes it an aesthetic emotion.¹ This leads to the following question: If being moved is indeed an aesthetic emotion, how exactly can it function as one? My aim is to fill in this gap and examine how we should understand this emotion in light of existing theories of being moved and aesthetic emotion.²

This study is limited to representational artworks, such as literature, film, theater, and music involving lyrical or narrative content. Specifically, this discussion focuses on artworks depicting tragic and conflicted aspects of human life, including death and loss, and ethically controversial acts such as murder or deception. The examples employed throughout, including Oedipus, *The Great Gatsby*, and Edward Hopper's paintings, are chosen for their familiarity and their close connection to everyday experiences of feeling moved.

This thesis builds upon the findings of two papers. In the tradition of analytic philosophy, Cova and Deonna (2014) make one of the rare attempts to give a general account of being moved that should apply to all cases of feeling moved, including artwork experiences. The account of being moved proposed by Cova and Deonna, nevertheless, leaves some difficulties in explaining the diverse ways in which artworks can move appreciators. This motivates me to examine a well-established account of aesthetic emotions by Menninghaus

¹ Noël Carroll employs “being moved” as an emotion (or feeling) in the context of aesthetic appreciation: “I may simply be unmoved one way or the other during an aesthetic experience; I notice the droopiness of the weeping willow tree, but I may be moved to neither sadness nor delight by it” (2002, 163). Here, I take him to be using the term in the sense of an aesthetic emotion. Although his discussion focuses on the nature of aesthetic experience rather than on being moved itself, he appears to presuppose it as an aesthetic emotion. Similarly, Jenefer Robinson acknowledges being moved as an aesthetic emotion, referring to the Geneva Emotion Music Scale (GEMS), which includes “being moved” among aesthetic emotions. Although she notes that some emotions on the list are problematic, she does not identify being moved as one of them (2019, 216). While her account primarily aims to explain the nature of aesthetic emotion, being moved is treated as one of its instances.

² My initial research question was “Why is being moved an aesthetic emotion?” However, the formation of the question raised some conceptual errors. Firstly, this formation seems to imply that all the experience of being moved occurs for the aesthetic sense, which is not correct. One research suggested this issue, and corrected my question into “how can being moved function as an aesthetic emotion?” These two questions may concern different kinds of answers, but In this paper, I mainly focus on explaining how being moved can function in an aesthetic sense.

et al. (2019), who present the general characteristics of aesthetic emotion while also proposing being moved as a primary example. Drawing upon the research of Cova and Deonna and Menninghaus et al., this study aims to develop an account of how experiences of being moved evoked by artworks can function as aesthetic emotions.

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first two chapters aim to establish the theoretical foundation for understanding how being moved functions as an aesthetic emotion. In **chapter 1**, I explore the general account of being moved in Cova's and Deonna's paper "Being moved" (2014). By grounding the concept of being moved in psychological research, their work provides an account for analyzing it as an aesthetic emotion through conceptual analysis. Specifically, they identify the formal objects of being moved, namely the salience of a core positive value. Their account is inclusive enough to capture a wide range of everyday cases of being moved. Yet, as I will show, their account does not capture the distinctive nature of being moved in artwork cases.

In **chapter 2**, I focus on the account of being moved as an aesthetic emotion by Menninghaus et al. in their paper "What Are Aesthetic Emotions" (2019). Menninghaus et al. propose that aesthetic emotion accompanies aesthetic appreciation/evaluation, and is tuned to and predictive of aesthetic virtue or appeal. This account remains limited, however. It does not address how being moved predicts a positive evaluation of an artwork, which is associated with explaining its involvement in aesthetic virtue or appeal. Consequently, the question of what makes being moved an aesthetic emotion remains unresolved.

The following two chapters are dedicated to developing an account of being moved as an aesthetic emotion. Following the two preceding studies by Cova and Deonna and Menninghaus et al., these chapters aim to develop an explanation of experiences of being moved by artworks. In Chapter 3, grounded in Cova and Deonna's account, I argue that truthfulness functions as a central evaluative concern in experiences of being moved by artworks. Artworks invite appreciators to evaluate how they disclose and embody meaningful aspects of human experience through artistic organization. The discussion then focuses on substantiating with cases in which artworks represent values that are negative or personally irrelevant to the appreciator, yet remain capable of moving them. Through this, I argue that being moved can function when an artwork conveys its meaning in a sincere and

accurate way, making truthfulness salient.

Building on Menninghaus et al., in Chapter 4, I introduce aesthetic transparency as an aesthetic virtue associated with experiences of being moved in artwork contexts. Aesthetic transparency denotes an artwork's capacity to make meaningful aspects of human experience intelligible and accessible through honest realization and faithful realization. In this chapter, I describe the concept of transparency and illustrate this virtue through an analysis of *The Great Gatsby* and *Bent Pipe Runs*.

Chapter 5 addresses several potential concerns regarding this account. First, I examine so-called "sappy" film cases. Jesse Prinz and Joerg Fingerhut (2018) argue that being moved does not properly qualify as an appreciative aesthetic emotion because such experiences do not necessarily predict positive evaluations of artworks. In response, I argue that being moved nevertheless remains a strong candidate for an aesthetic emotion, provided that it tends to accompany positive evaluative engagement with artworks. Second, I address the concern of conceptual conflation. This objection arises from the claim that the psychological phenomena discussed throughout this thesis, such as sadness, shock, or existential uneasiness, differ significantly from the traditional understanding of being moved. In response to this concern, I argue that emotionally mixed and psychologically complex responses of being moved to artwork contexts can legitimately be allowed as the scope of being moved. Finally, I examine the concern that introducing interpretation into artwork appreciation risks over-intellectualizing experiences of being moved, since interpretation may appear to overly emphasize the cognitive feature of appreciation. I argue that interpretive engagement primarily stabilizes evaluative appreciation rather than precluding the possibility of its immediate emotional response to an artwork. Through addressing these concerns, I aim to clarify how being moved can plausibly function as an aesthetic emotion in artwork experiences.

Lastly, I would like to make it clear that this thesis does not cover every possible experience of being moved. The focus is on obvious cases in which being moved functions as an aesthetically evaluative response to artworks, particularly cases predictive of positive aesthetic evaluation through interpretive engagement. Cases where being moved arises without understanding the artwork, therefore, fall outside the scope of this discussion.

(1) The Preliminary Analysis of Accounts of Being Moved

The first two chapters establish the conceptual account for understanding how being moved functions in artwork experiences. To clarify the nature of being moved as an aesthetic emotion, I first examine its general character of being moved through the account proposed by Cova and Deonna. Then, I argue that although their theory provides an influential conceptual analysis grounded in psychological research, it leaves certain aspects of artwork experiences theoretically underexplained, especially cases involving negative or personally irrelevant values. To explore a more specifically aesthetic account, I then turn to the account of aesthetic emotion proposed by Menninghaus et al. While they identify being moved as a paradigmatic aesthetic emotion, their account remains unclear regarding how experiences of being moved contribute to positive aesthetic evaluation. Through these discussions, the first two chapters aim not only to clarify the strengths and limitations of both theories, but also to establish the foundation for my own account of being moved as an aesthetic emotion.

1. General Account of Being Moved by Florian Cova & Julien Deonna

Cova and Deonna (2014) provide a rigorous conceptual analysis of the nature of being moved, grounded in psychological research. While their account offers valuable insights into being moved, it remains somewhat vague when applied to artistic contexts. Their analysis systematically characterizes being moved, specifying its formal object, particular object, and associated psychological phenomena. In other words, they argue that we feel moved when our core positive value stands out or becomes salient. However, their account does not explicitly address cases in which we are moved by artworks. As I will show, their reliance on core positive values, such as kindness, solidarity, love, or life, leads to an explanatory gap when applied to artworks that represent negative values or values irrelevant to the appreciator's core positive values. This chapter therefore examines both the strengths and limitations of their account to prepare for the investigation into what makes the emotion of being moved an aesthetic emotion.

1.1. Cova and Deonna's Account: The Salience of Core Positive Value

This section analyzes Cova and Deonna's framework regarding being moved, focusing on their identification of its formal object: the salience of core positive values. According to them, we feel moved when "positive values are brought to the fore and manifest themselves in a particularly salient way" (2014, 453). Based on this idea, the formal object of being moved is "standing out" (2014, 454) of core positive values, and its particular object is an "event or situation" (2014, 455). In other words, being moved as an emotion involves an individual's core positive value and the process by which these values become salient through specific events or situations. Furthermore, they contend that being moved is neither a mere joy nor sadness, but rather a distinct "deferential emotional attitude" (2014, 457) toward salient core positive values.

Cova and Deonna posit that being moved involves values that are not only positive but also core to the individual. Examples of such positive values include "solidarity, courage, kindness, health, fraternity, love, life itself" (2014, 451). However, we do not feel moved by mere positive values, but by core positive values. Core values are "important and central" values to a person (2014, 454)³. For instance, Cova and Deonna point out that while experiencing fine wine may be considered a positive value to an individual, the experience of tasting it is unlikely to move us, insofar as wine is generally not regarded as a 'core' positive value (2014, 454).

Based on the concept of core positive values, Cova and Deonna argue that being moved occurs when core positive values appear in a "particularly salient way" (2014, 454), or "succeed in making a stand" (2014, 451). They specify the occasions when core positive values are salient. (1) Core values become salient when they are "threatened." My family bond, when it is my core value, can be threatened when a family member passes away. (2) Core values are brought to the fore when an occasion is "extraordinary." The birth of a child

³ What is the meaning of "important"? Cova and Deonna add, "'Core values' may be said to be those that a moral community treats as possessing 'transcendental significance' which preclude comparisons, trade-offs, or indeed any mingling with more mundane values" (Tetlock et al., 2000, as cited in Cova and Deonna). This quote implies that a core value is significant enough that it is non-negotiable and incomparable to mundane values. If one says a specific value is their core value, it is unlikely to be compared or exchanged for other mundane values. Indeed, if someone considers family his core value and keeps choosing wine over family bonds, we may doubt whether family is actually his core value.

is extraordinary in the sense that it breaks the mundane rhythm of life and highlights a value embodied in this event. Lastly, (3) they manifest saliently when an occasion is “designed to celebrate” the value. A wedding ceremony is designed to celebrate love as a value, in the sense that the elements used in the ceremony are intended to make love salient. In our daily lives, we often forget our core values, but certain events and occasions remind us of them in a particularly salient way.

Lastly, Cova and Deonna argue that being moved is neither sadness nor joy, but rather a deferential emotional attitude. While being moved may initially resemble sadness, being moved is not merely an unpleasant feeling, since “we like to be moved” (2014, 456). However, it is also not mere joy, since “it is perfectly appropriate to feel joy at rather shallow events, like finding money in the street, the rain ceasing, or victory in a video game” (2014, 456). Furthermore, given that the formal object of being moved concerns core values, “it is the deferential emotional attitude that something as important as a core positive value deserves” (2014, 457). Thus, being moved involves an emotionally reverential orientation toward values perceived as deeply important.

Thus, Cova and Deonna’s main claim can be summarized as follows: their main claim that we feel moved when our core positive values make a stand or manifest in a salient way in our minds, and this emotion is neither mere joy nor sadness, but a kind of deferential emotional attitude. This account, however, raises difficulties in explaining some artwork cases. Many artworks display negative values or values that are not important to the appreciator. If being moved depends on the salience of core positive values, how can we be moved by such artworks? In the next section, I address this problem by examining cases in which artworks depict values that are negative or not core positive values for appreciators.

1.2. Critical Analysis of Cova and Deonna’s Account

Artworks often address unsettling subjects. Such themes may depict tragic or morally troubling aspects of human life, which are difficult to understand straightforwardly as core positive values. Moreover, certain works portray values that may be entirely detached from appreciators’ core positive values. Does Cova and Deonna’s account of being moved, grounded in the salience of core positive values, adequately explain these kinds of artworks?

This issue becomes especially important in cases involving morally or emotionally unsettling artworks. Such artworks may move appreciators not because they present conventionally positive values, but because they sincerely and meaningfully disclose disturbing aspects of human experience. Indeed, many historically significant artworks contain morally troubling, tragic, or emotionally unsettling themes. Works such as *The Scream* by Edvard Munch, *The Godfather*, or *Anna Karenina* are often regarded as aesthetically important despite presenting anxiety, violence, despair, moral conflict, or emotional suffering. Reflecting on such cases partly motivated the central question of this thesis: how experiences of being moved by artworks can nevertheless function as aesthetically valuable responses even when artworks present negative or unsettling aspects of human life.

Although Cova and Deonna's account explains many everyday cases of being moved, it remains unclear how their account applies to such artwork cases involving negative values or irrelevant to one's core positive values. Since artworks depict various kinds of negative values as their main theme, such as irrationality, depression, and evil, as well as positive values like friendship, love, and courage, it is not clear whether only positive values are engaged when we feel moved by artworks. Moreover, if their account is applied consistently, even when a positive value is identified in an artwork, it must align with the spectator's core positive values to elicit a sense of being moved. However, it is not uncommon to feel moved by artworks portraying values that bear little relation to our core positive values.

Indeed, artworks that move us often depict not only positive values but also morally problematic situations or emotionally negative content. This creates difficulties in understanding how core positive values are rendered salient when encountering such negative content. For example, the song "Norwegian Wood" by The Beatles tells the story of a man setting fire to a woman's room after becoming frustrated with her. Cova and Deonna's account would seem to imply that, if listeners feel moved by this song, the listener's core positive value must become salient. However, aside from aesthetic factors such as musical elements, it is unclear which core positive values are being foregrounded. Although one might suggest values such as love or kindness become salient, it sounds unnatural to say that love or kindness directly becomes salient through this song in the same

way that they become salient in everyday life.⁴

Another issue that requires clarification is that we can also imagine cases in which an appreciator feels moved by an artwork that presents values that seem irrelevant to their core positive values. Fingerhut and Prinz (2018) make a similar point. They explain: “We might marvel over works that address topics that are not our central concerns (think of Joseph Beuys’ *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, or Christian art for atheist appreciators), and we can come to admire minimalist artworks that do not move us in the traditional sense” (2018, 114). This claim is mainly intended to show that feeling moved by an artwork does not guarantee a positive evaluation of an artwork.

While I leave open the question of whether being moved necessarily involves a good evaluation of an artwork at this point, these examples nevertheless suggest a further issue for Cova and Deonna’s account. In artwork cases, appreciators can feel moved even when the represented values do not straightforwardly correspond to their own moral or personal commitments. In this case, it is difficult to see how Cova and Deonna’s model would explain such cases. Granted that these instances do not imply the falsehood of their theory itself, one possible way to reconcile this issue would be to identify another core positive value, because another core positive value may yet become salient. It may suggest that artwork experiences involve a different kind of core positive value from those typically operative in everyday experiences of being moved.

The issue may stem from the fact that appreciators often try to understand artworks. By attempting to understand and engage with values in artworks that do not straightforwardly correspond to their own core positive values, they may nevertheless feel moved. For instance, atheist appreciators may still feel moved by Christian artworks in spite of not sharing the religious commitments represented in them, through understanding and engaging with those artworks. More generally, this suggests that we may still feel moved even when the represented values do not correspond to our core positive values. However, such cases do

⁴ It might be noted that the listener feels moved because they may regard listening to music as a core positive value. However, it is also possible that someone with no interest in music, who does not treat the artwork experience with any particular interest, could be moved by this song. For instance, he might, by chance, encounter this song on the street, become curious about its narrative, and then feel moved by it. In this case, music as a positive value does not seem to play a significant role in feeling moved.

not by themselves refute Cova and Deonna's account. They may suggest that another core positive value becomes salient in artwork experiences of being moved. In chapter 3, I will argue that truthfulness can remain salient in this case.

To sum up this section, I have argued that Cova and Deonna's account does not fully clarify how artworks move us. In artworks depicting morally unsettling themes or emotionally negative content, it is difficult to explain how our core positive values become salient through the represented content itself. Moreover, we may feel moved by artworks whose represented values do not straightforwardly correspond to an appreciator's own core positive values. This does not necessarily show that Cova and Deonna's theory is fundamentally flawed. Rather, these cases suggest that artwork experiences may involve a different kind of core positive value from the moral or personal values emphasized in their account. Leaving the discussion of this issue for later parts, I will next examine the account of being moved as an aesthetic emotion proposed by Menninghaus et al. They give an account of aesthetic emotion, and explicitly regard being moved as an aesthetic emotion. their account helps clarify both the nature of aesthetic emotion and the way being moved functions within artwork experience.

2. Menninghaus et al.'s account of Being Moved as an Aesthetic Emotion⁵

In this chapter, I analyze Menninghaus et al.'s account of being moved as an aesthetic emotion in 'What Are Aesthetic Emotions?' (2018). The paper provides an overview of the concept of aesthetic emotion, examining characteristics of aesthetic emotion, such as cognitive appraisals, liking, and related phenomena, based on empirical studies. Their account further introduces being moved as a primary example of an aesthetic emotion. Accordingly, their analysis is important for understanding the nature of aesthetic emotion and for clarifying why being moved is often regarded as an aesthetic emotion. According to Menninghaus et al., being moved is closely associated with positive evaluations of the artwork. Based on their framework, I will critically analyze their account then, delineating specific challenges that must be addressed for explaining 'being moved' as an aesthetic emotion.

2.1. Menninghaus et al.'s Account of Being Moved as an Aesthetic emotion

Menninghaus et al. outline aesthetic emotion on the basis of Kant's aesthetic theory and propose the four characteristics of aesthetic emotion. Aesthetic emotions are:

1. "full-blown discrete emotions that, ... *always include an aesthetic evaluation/appreciation* of the objects or events under consideration."
2. "differentially tuned to, and predictive of, a specific type of *aesthetic* virtue, or, defined in subjective terms, *a specific type of aesthetic appeal*. These are reflected in the attributes differentially assigned to the eliciting objects or events. The majority of these attributes are derivatives of the respective emotion category, such as 'moving,' 'fascinating,' 'surprising,' 'shocking,' 'suspenseful,' and so forth."
3. "... aesthetic emotions are *associated with subjectively felt pleasure or displeasure* during the emotional episode."
4. "an important (though certainly not the only) *predictor of resultant liking or disliking*." (2019, 171-172)

⁵ Prinz and Fingerhut (2020) and Jenefer Robinson (2020) discusses the concept of aesthetic emotion. However, Prinz and Fingerhut does not include being moved in aesthetic emotion in their list, and Jenefer Robinson does not mainly discuss being moved as an aesthetic emotion. Thus, I focus on Menninghaus et al.'s debate.

Among these characteristics, the first and second claims are particularly important for the present thesis, since they suggest two central criteria for understanding aesthetic emotion.

The first condition stipulates that aesthetic emotions always involve aesthetic appreciation/evaluation. One example discussed by Menninghaus et al. is the case of “feelings of suspense” (2019, 171). In narrative artworks, suspense arises through uncertainty regarding unfolding events, while this suspenseful feeling contributes to appreciating the artwork as “well-made and powerfully engaging narratives” (2019, 171), which is why Menninghaus et al. regard suspense as an aesthetic emotion. More generally, Menninghaus et al.’s account suggests that aesthetic emotion is an emotion insofar as the emotion attracts appreciators to engage with the artwork and leads to a positive evaluation.

The second condition concerns the relation between aesthetic emotions and aesthetic virtues or aesthetic appeal. According to Menninghaus et al., “Aesthetic emotions are responsive (“tuned to”) to aesthetic virtues, or aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, these emotions are predictive of aesthetic virtues/appeals.

Aesthetic virtue refers to valuable qualities of an artwork. Menninghaus et al. suggest that the virtue is often expressed in the form “the feeling of x(aesthetic virtue)” (2018, 176), such as ‘the feeling of elegance’, ‘the feeling of grace’. This emotional experience is closely connected to an aesthetic virtue. In this sense, aesthetic emotions are responsive to, and predictive of, aesthetic virtues.

Aesthetic appeal is the attractive and engaging aspects of an artwork that draw appreciators to engage with the artwork, depending on how effectively it evokes the intended emotion in the audience. An example they suggest is abstract paintings.⁵ To illustrate, abstract art derives its appeal from presenting complex, difficult-to-parse features that simultaneously invite the viewers to make sense of them. This interpretive process contributes to the viewer’s aesthetic pleasure and encourages deeper engagement with the artwork. In this sense, aesthetic appeal concerns the degree to which an artwork can aesthetically engage and attract its audience.

After explaining the concept of aesthetic emotion, Menninghaus et al. attempt to show that being moved is an aesthetic emotion. The authors draw on empirical research showing that

appreciators tend to evaluate artworks positively when they are moved by them. The first study they cite shows, “labeling a speech or an artwork as moving does indeed entail a genuine aesthetically evaluative dimension.” (2019, 177) This suggests that being moved predicts a positive aesthetic evaluation. Furthermore, another study discussed in the paper shows that a slight change in the placement of artworks affects participants' survey responses.⁶ These studies imply that being moved predicts a good quality of an artwork, leading Menninghaus et al. to conclude that being moved is an aesthetic emotion.

Summing up, according to Menninghaus et al., aesthetic emotions are emotions that predict positive aesthetic evaluation and are tuned to, and predictive of aesthetic virtues, or aesthetic appeals. Aesthetic virtues concern good qualities of an artwork, such as “the feeling of elegance” or “the feeling of grace,” and Aesthetic appeal concerns the degree to which an artwork aesthetically engages and attracts its audience. Furthermore, being moved is considered an aesthetic emotion, as appreciators tend to give a positive evaluation of artworks when they feel moved by them. However, whereas the authors offer some empirical evidence for the claim that being moved is an aesthetic emotion, it is difficult to identify a specific explanation of how being moved involves aesthetically positive evaluation. In the next section, I argue that the account does not show a relationship between being moved and certain aesthetic virtues or appeals.

2.2. Critical Analysis of Menninghaus et al.’s account

In this section, I claim that Menninghaus et al.’s account raises difficulties concerning the relationship between being moved and aesthetic virtues or aesthetic appeals. Although they show that good evaluations of an artwork are often accompanied by feeling moved, their account remains underspecified about the relationship between being moved and the aesthetic virtues associated with this emotion.

To clarify the purpose of this discussion, it is beneficial to remind my research question. My

⁶ “The modifications specifically targeted metrical regularity and rhyme, and hence stylistic features of poetic diction. Average ratings for being moved were significantly affected by these formal modifications of diction.” (2019, 177) The idea here seems to be that changes in artistic forms affect how they evaluate an artwork when they feel moved.

primary question for this thesis is how being moved can work as an aesthetic emotion. While aesthetic philosophers in the analytic tradition often treat being moved as an emotion associated with aesthetic experience, they rarely explain how being moved functions as an aesthetic emotion. Menninghaus et al. come close to answering this question. Their account, however, remains unclear regarding the relationship between being moved and aesthetic virtue or aesthetic appeal, which needs to be explained to support their claim. My proposal is that if we can specify a kind of aesthetic virtue related to feeling moved in artwork experience, and clarify how these virtues or appeals related to the core positive values involved in being moved, then the character of being moved as an aesthetic emotion can be more clearly explained.

To better understand these issues, it is helpful to consider the taxonomical distinction between aesthetic emotion terms offered by Menninghaus et al. The authors distinguish two classes of aesthetic emotion terms. The first class “draws on emotion terms that are also, and mostly primarily, used with an “ordinary” emotion meaning, such as joy, amusement, nostalgia, surprise, being moved, being shattered, fascination, boredom, disgust, and anger” (2019, 176). The ordinary emotion terms acquire an aesthetic evaluative function when employed in an artwork context. For instance, regarding being moved by artworks, “we enjoy and like a work of art because it moves” (2019, 176). The second class terms are often, as I suggested above, expressed as “the feeling of x (aesthetic virtue)” (2019, 176). In the second class, the aesthetic virtue involved in the emotional experience is expressed more explicitly.

Unlike the second class of aesthetic emotion terms, the first class of emotional terms does not always make clear which aesthetic virtues are involved in the emotional experience. The authors note, “In the second class (feelings of beauty, etc.), it is crystal clear that the feelings are about aesthetic virtues. In the first class, however, this is far less obvious and in fact not necessarily the case” (2019, 176). Since being moved belongs to the first class, it must be explained how this emotion is related to aesthetic virtues, in order for it to count as an aesthetic emotion. If so, this naturally raises the question of which kind of aesthetic virtues or appeals are associated with the experience of being moved by artworks.

Another question concerns how Cova and Deonna’s account of being moved relates to

aesthetic virtues or appeals. According to their analysis of being moved, we feel moved when our core positive values stand out in a salient way. Given that aesthetic emotions are tied to aesthetic virtue or appeal, the question is how “standing out of core positive value’ is related to a specific aesthetic virtues. Menninghaus et al. mention Cova and Deonna’s research in their paper (2019, 177), but do not seem to intergrate Cova and Deonna’s account into their account of aesthetic emotion. However, the character of being moved as an aesthetic emotion could become clearer by clarifying the relationship between the general feature of being moved proposed by Cova and Deonna, and the characteristics of aesthetic emotions proposed by Menninghaus et al..

In closing this section, the model proposed by Menninghaus et al. leaves two questions unanswered regarding the nature of being moved as an aesthetic emotion. Although their claim is grounded on aesthetic virtue(or appeal), they do not explain which kind of aesthetic virtues are related to being moved. Second, it also remains unclear how the salience of core positive values can be connected to aesthetic virtues/ appeals. In the following two chapters, I aim to develop an account that bridges these two theories by explaining what the core positive value involved in artwork experience is, and suggesting what kind of aesthetic virtue is related to this emotion. Based on this strategy, I argue that the core positive value of being moved is truthfulness, and that one of the aesthetic virtues associated with feeling moved is aesthetic transparency.

(2) Being Moved as an Aesthetic Emotion

In the previous chapters, I examined two accounts of being moved. First, Cova and Deonna argue that we feel moved when our core positive values become salient. Second, Menninghaus et al. claim that aesthetic emotions are emotions tuned to and predictive of aesthetic virtue or aesthetic appeal. While both accounts shed light on the general character of being moved as an aesthetic emotion, they leave open how being moved operates specifically in aesthetic contexts. Cova and Deonna's account does not fully clarify how being moved can arise in cases involving negative themes or values seemingly unrelated to an appreciator's own core positive values. Meanwhile, Menninghaus et al.'s account leaves unclear which kinds of aesthetic virtues or appeals are associated with being moved and how being moved is related to them.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I aim to develop an account that draws on Cova and Deonna and on Menninghaus et al. by addressing the unresolved issues in artwork experiences. To do so, I propose that (1) the core positive value involved in being moved by artworks is truthfulness, and (2) one of the aesthetic virtues facilitating feeling move in artwork experience is aesthetic transparency. On this view, we are moved by artworks when truthfulness becomes salient while evaluating an artwork through interpretative and evaluative engagement. Artworks invite appreciators to evaluate the sincerity and accuracy of what they present. Connecting the evaluative process to the salience of truthfulness of an artwork, I describe aesthetic transparency as the capacity of an artwork to reveal meaningful human concerns and values through the complex organization of artistic elements in an honest and faithful way.

3. The Core Positive Value of Being moved by an artwork: Truthfulness

In this chapter, I examine the core positive value involved in experiences of being moved by artworks, which I argue is truthfulness. In the first section, I argue that truthfulness becomes salient through appreciators' evaluation of the sincerity and accuracy with which artworks present their subject matter, making it a central value in artwork experiences. In the next section, I introduce several artwork cases, including the Oedipus case and the appreciation of a religious novel by an atheist. These cases suggest that appreciators may feel moved even when the represented values are morally troubling or unrelated to their own core personal values. Through these examples, I argue that truthfulness is a strong candidate for the core positive value involved in experiences of being moved by artworks.

First, however, I should explain the reason I suggest another kind of core positive value in artwork experiences. As suggested in Chapter 1, artworks can move appreciators even when they depict morally troubling themes or values not directly aligned with the appreciator's own values. This does not mean Cova and Deonna's account is mistaken. Rather, their account rightly suggests that being moved relates the salience of an important positive value, which helps explain many cases of feeling moved. However, in artwork experiences, the salient value in artworks may not be limited to the appreciator's own core positive values. Appreciators may instead be moved by the way artworks reveal and organize meaningful human concerns while they appreciate artworks. This suggests the need for a different kind of core positive value, rather than a rejection of Cova and Deonna's account. If an account remains capable of explaining broader cases, it is not reasonable to reject it entirely. What I try to do, then, is to find another feasible core positive value capable of explaining both negative-value cases and the appreciation of artworks. In the following section, I argue that truthfulness is a plausible candidate for such a value, since it concerns both the sincerity and accuracy with which artworks present their subject matter. By contending this, I attempt to elucidate how being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion.

3.1. Truthfulness as the core positive value for artwork experiences⁷

In this section, I argue that the core positive value in experiences of being moved by artworks is truthfulness.⁸ By truthfulness, I mean the value through which appreciators assess whether an artwork sincerely and accurately presents its subject matter.⁹ To develop this claim, I focus on how appreciators evaluate the truthfulness of artworks through interpretative engagement, though interpretation and evaluation should be distinguished, as I discuss below. Interpretation involves two dimensions: an intellectual process of identifying the meaning artworks represent, and an evaluative activity through which appreciators assess how sincerely and accurately an artwork reveals and organizes meaningful human concerns. Appreciators may thus feel moved when they recognize truthfulness through interpretive engagement with an artwork.¹⁰

One preliminary issue that needs to be discussed is whether truthfulness can be justified as a core positive value. In ordinary interpersonal life, sincerity and consistency between words and actions, which I consider as elements of truthfulness in social life, are often treated as deeply important evaluative qualities. When such qualities are absent, relationships may lose

⁷ My thesis does not attempt to provide a complete theory of truthfulness. Rather, I use truthfulness as an evaluative engagement through which appreciators assess how artworks sincerely and accurately present meaningful aspects of human experience.

⁸ The initial formulation of the core positive value involved in artwork experience was “truth”, by which I mean a value to pursue right beliefs. However, the notion of truth raises difficult questions regarding what kind of truth aesthetic experience concerns. Moreover, the term “truthfulness” better reflects the present intuition underlying my account, namely that appreciators are often moved by an artwork’s honest and faithful realization of its thematic objects. For this reason, I employ the concept of truthfulness rather than truth. For broader discussions concerning aesthetic truth, see Peter Lamarque (2014).

⁹ Although the present account shares certain similarities with notions such as authenticity, I employ the term “truthfulness” because authenticity alone does not fully capture the evaluative dimension involved in experiences of being moved by artworks. Arguably, authenticity sounds too strong. If an artwork is evaluated as authentic, it may indicate its genuine state. However, I personally believe it is very difficult to determine an object's authenticity. It seems to require a more strict interpretative process to conclude the authenticity. An artwork is not appreciated in a strict sense. We might just enjoy an artwork and find some truthfulness, recognizing a sincere attitude and somewhat precise expression of an artwork. Thus, I chose truthfulness to reflect our mundane experience of an artwork.

¹⁰ I consider interpretation not as the arbitrary production of meaning by appreciators, but as pointing out that interpretive engagement reveals that appreciators are concerned with whether artworks sincerely and expressively realize meaningful human concerns. When appreciators interpret artworks, they attempt not only to identify meanings, symbols, or themes, but also to understand why artistic elements are organized in particular ways and whether those elements successfully contribute to the artwork’s thematic vision. In this sense, interpretation functions as evidence that experiences of being moved involve evaluative concern with truthfulness rather than mere recognition of content.

trust and emotional significance, particularly in crucial social relationships. When a situation becomes serious between me and someone I care about, such as a friend or family member, truthfulness is often what matters most. Imagine that my friend keeps telling me I am his best friend while repeatedly lying to me. This can test whether he truly considers me a friend. Given that Cova and Deonna describe a core positive value as one that cannot be easily exchanged for mundane values, Truthfulness fits this description, especially considering how central it becomes in serious situations.

Truthfulness, thus, seems to concern both the evaluation of the intention to behave and the performance of that intention. Although it is difficult to apply this idea directly to artwork cases, truthfulness can serve as an evaluative process through which appreciators assess the sincerity and accuracy with which artworks present meaningful human concerns, such as one's state of mind, an artist's view of an event, or events themselves. By reading a novel, watching a movie, listening to a song, or viewing a painting, appreciators can evaluate the truthfulness of an artwork, particularly in terms of sincerity regarding what is depicted and accuracy in how the depiction is realized.

Sincerity is frequently concerned with the willingness to display uncomfortable or conflicting elements, and accuracy concerns whether artworks convincingly realize their thematic or experiential objects.¹¹ Imagine viewing a Dutch still-life painting that centers on beautiful flowers and depicts insects around them. One may be moved by the exquisite depiction of flowers while also understanding the meaning that the painting seeks to deliver. One impression the appreciator may form is that the conflict between the insects and the flowers expresses something meaningful. He might then conclude that the artwork conveys a theme such as "there are always greedy beings surrounding genuine beauty." He could then evaluate the painting as sincere because it reflects an aspect of life without concealing its ugliness, and as accurate because it effectively conveys this theme.

Since sincerity and accuracy concern both what an artwork seeks to convey and how

¹¹ The notion of accuracy employed here should not be understood as mere technical precision or artistic effort alone. Experiences of being moved appear to depend on the conjunction of sincerity and accuracy, insofar as artworks not only present their subject matter honestly, but also realize and organize it successfully in an expressive and meaningful manner.

successfully it conveys it, appreciators often approach artworks by trying to understand what they present and how their artistic organization contributes to this presentation. Put differently, evaluating the truthfulness of artworks often requires interpretation. Appreciators need to understand the relationship between an artwork's thematic concerns and the artistic means by which those concerns are presented before they can judge whether the artwork is sincere and accurate. Interpretation is therefore not limited to merely identifying thematic content. Appreciators also often evaluate whether artworks present their subject matter sincerely and accurately based on their interpretation. In this sense, interpretation already carries an evaluative dimension through which appreciators assess the truthfulness of artworks.¹²

This evaluative engagement helps explain how being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion. According to Menninghaus et al., aesthetic emotions are typically accompanied by some form of aesthetic evaluation. When appreciators interpret artworks while reflecting on their sincerity and accuracy, their emotional responses are connected to the evaluation of the artwork. This implies that being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion, as we have to understand and evaluate the quality of an artwork while assessing whether it is truthful.

Furthermore, interpretation provides a basis for assessing the truthfulness of artworks. By understanding how artworks present meaningful human concerns, appreciators may regard them as sincere and accurate in their expression of those concerns. Then, they come to engage with understanding the artwork's structure, the author's intention, its theme, or its historical background. These factors provide a solid basis for evaluating the artworks' truthfulness. When artworks can be effective enough to convey their truthfulness and appreciators can properly understand and evaluate it, truthfulness can become salient as a core positive value within the experience of being moved. If so, one plausible explanation is that being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion when the truthfulness of an artwork becomes salient as appreciators reasonably interpret and evaluate it.

At this point, one might wonder whether interpretation and evaluation are the same activity.

¹² I do not claim that interpretation is necessary for every immediate experience of being moved. Rather, interpretive engagement provides a more stable basis for evaluative appreciation, especially in aesthetically valuable cases.

I suggest, however, that interpretation and evaluation should be distinguished. Appreciators may interpret an artwork by attempting to understand its meaning or formal organization without yet evaluating its truthfulness. For instance, an appreciator may initially respond to a painting as aesthetically striking or emotionally engaging before reflecting on how sincerely and accurately it presents its thematic vision. However, interpretive engagement can still lead to evaluative reflection on the artwork's truthfulness.¹³

To sum up, I argue that experiences of being moved by artworks primarily concern truthfulness as a core positive value. In artwork experiences, interpretive engagement can lead to evaluative reflection concerning how sincere and accurate artworks depict the thematic concerns. Sincerity and accuracy become objects of evaluative attention when appreciators seek to understand why particular elements are presented and whether they meaningfully contribute to human concerns represented in the artworks. By this interpretive and evaluative approach, truthfulness can be salient as a central positive value, by which an explanation of how being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion. Therefore, truthfulness becomes a strong candidate as a core positive value.

3.2. Explanation for negative value and non-core positive value cases

In this section, I explain how we feel moved by artworks representing negative values or values irrelevant to an appreciator's own core positive values. In Chapter 1, I argued that we may still feel moved even when the represented values in artworks appear negative or unrelated to an appreciator's core positive values. To address this issue, I argued in the previous section that truthfulness can become salient as a core positive value through an evaluative engagement with how the artwork sincerely and accurately realizes its human concerns. On this basis, I suggested that truthfulness is a strong candidate for the core positive value regarding being moved by artworks. To clarify how truthfulness can become salient in artworks that represent negative or personally irrelevant values, this section

¹³ Interpretive engagement may deepen experiences of being moved in some cases, particularly when it contributes to appreciating how sincerely and accurately an artwork realizes its thematic concerns. For example, additional reflection on an artwork's symbolism, historical background, or formal organization may intensify an appreciator's sense of the artwork's significance. However, it is also true that such interpretive enrichment is not necessary for being moved by an artwork.

discusses several examples.

The first example is *Oedipus*. This play is often interpreted as presenting negative aspects of human existence, such as ignorance regarding one's own life or human weakness in the face of fate. Nevertheless, the play still continues to move modern audiences through its tragic narrative. Human fate remains deeply significant in relation to autonomy or the desire to shape one's own life. This concern may be important, but it is often overlooked as individuals go through their busy lives. The play raises the unsettling question of whether we truly control our lives. In this sense, appreciators may feel moved not because the represented values themselves are positive, but because the artwork truthfully reveals meaningful concerns about human existence.

The play presents Oedipus's life as both admirable and tragic. Although Oedipus is wise enough to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, he unknowingly commits terrifying acts against his parents. In this sense, the play sincerely discloses troubling aspects of human existence, especially human ignorance and vulnerability before fate. At the same time, these existential concerns are accurately realized through the play's dramatic structure. The appearance of the prophet Tiresias is especially effective in addressing these concerns, since he predicts Oedipus's life before Oedipus himself does, prompting appreciators to reconsider human fate as a topic. Put differently, this contrast between prophetic insight and Oedipus's self-ignorance intensifies the tragic tension surrounding the limits of human knowledge. Moreover, the gradual revelation of Oedipus's past and the dramatic irony intensify the tension between human intelligence and helplessness. As the narrative progresses, audiences are led to confront the fragility of self-knowledge and autonomy. In engaging with these dramatic elements interpretively, appreciators may come to better understand how the play realizes these existential concerns through its tragic structure. Thus, although *Oedipus* presents painful and negative aspects of life, audiences may nevertheless be moved because the truthfulness of an artwork often appeals to them.

Artworks that present values irrelevant to an appreciator's core positive values can also move appreciators by making truthfulness salient. Values unrelated to our own concerns often lack significance in ordinary life. Nevertheless, the sincerity and accuracy with which artworks present such values can lead appreciators to engage with them seriously. Imagine a fictional

novel depicting a Buddhist monk sacrificing himself for others on the basis of Buddhist faith. Even if I am a selfish atheist, like the example discussed by Prinz and Fingerhut, I may still feel moved if I judge that the novel presents the monk's sacrifice and religious commitment sincerely and accurately. In such a case, appreciators may feel moved not because they personally share these religious concerns, but because the artwork truthfully realizes the concerns, leading them to engage interpretively with its narrative structure and thematic presentation.

In ordinary life, appreciators may avoid sustained reflection on troubling aspects of important human concerns, such as death, vulnerability, or the fragility of love, leading these concerns to recede from attention. However, artworks can reorient appreciators toward important positive values such as love, autonomy, and human flourishing. Cova and Deonna discuss being moved in terms of the reorientation of core positive values: "Yet, on certain occasions, your mind is reoriented to focus on this value(core positive value)" (2014, 453).

¹⁴ In the case of *Oedipus*, audiences may initially encounter painful or troubling material. Nonetheless, the play's truthful realization of existential concerns can also prompt the reconsideration of the importance of autonomy, self-knowledge, and human flourishing, while confronting the fragility and limits of human ability. Similarly, artworks presenting values irrelevant to an appreciator's own commitments may nevertheless reveal crucial human concerns through their sincere and accurate presentation. In this sense, the present cases can still be understood within the broader structure of Cova and Deonna's account, since artworks reorient appreciators toward important concerns that become salient through evaluative engagement with the artwork's truthfulness.

Someone might object that appreciators are ultimately moved by their own core positive values. Indeed, important values such as autonomy, love, or human flourishing may become salient through artwork experiences. However, the salience of such values depends upon the truthfulness with which the artwork presents and realizes its subject matter. Without sincere and accurate realization, it becomes difficult to explain why negative or personally irrelevant material would nevertheless move appreciators, since what moves appreciators is not their

¹⁴ Emphasis is added by me

core positive values, but the represented values in the artwork. Thus, while core positive values may emerge through artwork experiences, truthfulness remains central in explaining how these values become salient in experiences of being moved by artworks.

To sum up, this section has explained how artworks representing negative or personally irrelevant values can nevertheless move appreciators. Such cases suggest that represented values themselves do not primarily explain experiences of being moved by artworks. Rather, appreciators are moved when artworks sincerely and accurately reveal meaningful aspects of human experience through their artistic organization. In these cases, interpretive engagement contributes to evaluative reflection concerning the artwork's truthfulness and how it realizes its thematic concerns. Thus, these cases support the claim that truthfulness is a strong candidate for the core positive value. In this process, feeling moved is aesthetically involved in the artwork experience, suggesting that being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion as appreciators interpret and evaluate the truthfulness of an artwork.

4. An Aesthetic Virtue Correlated Being Moved: Aesthetic Transparency¹⁵

In Chapter 3, I argued that truthfulness functions as the core positive value in experiences of being moved by artworks. When appreciators engage with artworks, they evaluate how sincerely and accurately artworks realize their crucial human concerns, thereby making truthfulness salient. In Chapter 2, I also discussed the relationship between aesthetic emotion and aesthetic virtue. According to Menninghaus et al., aesthetic emotions are emotions tuned to and predictive of aesthetic virtue or aesthetic appeal. Since they regard being moved by artworks as an aesthetic emotion, this suggests that experiences of being moved are responsive to the corresponding aesthetic virtue. However, I also pointed out two difficulties in explaining how being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion regarding their account. First, Menninghaus et al. do not clearly explain what kind of aesthetic virtue is associated to being moved. Second, it remains unclear how the salience of core positive values in experiences of being moved relates to aesthetic virtue in the appreciation of artworks.

In this chapter, I introduce one of the aesthetic virtues connected to being moved, namely

¹⁵ I clarify that I received help from ChatGPT in writing this chapter. The purpose of using this AI was to brainstorm and polish my written English. I mainly asked what I was missing in explaining the concept of transparency and how to distinguish the concept from truthfulness, which is considered the evaluation of an artwork in this thesis, while transparency concerns artwork elements such as narrative, sentences, melody, rhythm, colors, and shapes to realize a thematic vision of an artwork. Since an evaluation of an artwork often contains both understanding and assessment of the quality of an artwork simultaneously, it was demanding for me to realize what I was missing to explain the concept of transparency and how to differentiate it from truthfulness. Thus, for example, on May 15th(2026), I asked, “What am I missing to explain transparency?” Then, ChatGPT suggested a standard to differ the two concepts. It articulated more clearly that truthfulness is engaged with the evaluative dimension of an artwork, and the concept of transparency should explain how it makes an artwork praiseworthy. Through this chat, I came to know some necessary information to proceed with my discussion. Additionally, as a non-native speaker, my written English has often confused readers and been pointed out as unnatural. Thus, I asked ChatGPT, “Is it natural?” and accepted its suggestion when I also agreed with it. For instance, I chose the word ‘faithful realization with my own decision. I only had an intuition that this word might fit my concept of the effective outcome of artistic elements. However, I had two issues. Firstly, this word choice might sound like an emphasis on emotional aspects, so readers might feel confused, even if it reflects a kind of precise description of an artwork. The second issue was that I had only a rough idea, namely that this kind of realization effectively conveys the author’s and characters’ state of mind, especially regarding important values such as love or friendship. However, this was too rough to use, and I asked Chat GPT what I am missing to describe this realization. Then I asked ChatGPT what I need to articulate this rough idea, and it suggested the word ‘embodying some human concerns’, which sounds generic. But I chose this because artwork often conveys not only someone’s state of mind but also a view of a specific event. Sometimes, artworks focus solely on describing an event in a neutral tone. Thus, I chose the phrase ‘human concerns’ to describe a wider range of artwork cases. Afterward, to make this coherent, I try to maintain using human concerns in other parts concisely, because if I change this word too freely, it might change the whole idea of this thesis. Except for what I have clarified here, the basic idea and arguments presented in this chapter are motivated by my own train of thought.

aesthetic transparency. By aesthetic transparency, I mean the artistic capacity through which artworks organize their elements so that their human concerns become intelligible and accessible to appreciators. Aesthetic transparency should not be identified with truthfulness itself. Rather, transparency enables appreciators to engage evaluatively with the artwork's truthfulness by the honest and faithful realization of meaningful human concerns. In this sense, I contend that aesthetic transparency functions as the artistic condition through which truthfulness can become salient in feeling moved by artworks. In the first section, I clarify the relation between aesthetic transparency and truthfulness by explaining honest and faithful realization as dimensions of truthful artistic realization. In the second section, I apply this account to several examples in order to illustrate transparent and less transparent artworks.¹⁶

4.1. Aesthetic Transparency and Truthfulness

Aesthetic transparency concerns the way artworks make thematic concerns accessible through their artistic organization.¹⁷ Artworks consist of diverse artistic elements, such as sentences and narrative structure in novels, rhythm and melody in music, color and composition in painting, or acting and dialogue in film and theatre. These elements can convey various meanings and emotional aspects. Aesthetic transparency arises when such artistic elements are organized in ways that make meaningful human concerns intelligible and experientially accessible to appreciators. I suggest that honest and faithful realizations contribute to making the human concerns represented in an artwork more graspable.

In the previous chapter, I argued that appreciators can evaluate the truthfulness of artworks

¹⁶ An important distinction should be clarified. The distinction between sincerity/accuracy and honest/faithful realization concerns two different levels of analysis. Sincerity and accuracy refer primarily to evaluative dimensions through which appreciators assess artworks, whereas honest realization and faithful realization concern the artistic ways in which such evaluative qualities become aesthetically realized within artworks themselves. On the basis of this distinction, I now develop the concept of aesthetic transparency as an aesthetic virtue through which sincerity and accuracy become aesthetically realized within artworks.

¹⁷ I employ the term "aesthetic transparency" rather than "aesthetic clarity" because the concept is not intended to imply complete explicitness or singular interpretive determinacy of a meaning that artworks deliver. Rather, aesthetic transparency concerns the capacity of artworks to render complex, conflicting, or multi-layered aspects of human experience intelligible and accessible through artistic organization while preserving their complexity, so that it can lead appreciators to engage an interpretative process.

by assessing their sincerity and accuracy. Sincerity concerns whether artworks are willing to reveal uncomfortable or conflicting aspects of human experience without concealing them, whereas accuracy concerns whether artworks organize their artistic elements effectively in realizing their experiential concerns. Through such artistic realization, artworks render important human concerns intelligible to appreciators. This allows appreciators to interpret and evaluate artworks on the basis of how sincerely and accurately those concerns are presented. Hence, if an artistic organization presents human concerns truthfully, those concerns become more accessible to interpretive and evaluative appreciation.

I suggest that aesthetic transparency is one of the aesthetic virtues. Aesthetic transparency refers to artworks' capacity to realize meaningful human concerns in an intelligible manner through artistic organization. To explain the sincerity of artworks, I propose honest realization as one element of aesthetic transparency. The second element is faithful realization, which concerns the accuracy with which artworks realize their crucial experiential concerns. I argue that important human concerns become intelligible through the honest and faithful realization of artistic elements, thereby enabling appreciators to evaluate how successfully artworks disclose and embody such concerns.

Honest realization can be recognized when artworks disclose meaningful human concerns without concealing their troubling or uncomfortable dimensions. Thus, it concerns the choice of an object to depict. As discussed in Chapter 3, Dutch still-life paintings often include elements such as insects, rotting fruit, or other signs of mortality and decay. These artistic elements contribute to honest realization insofar as the artworks reveal the vulnerability and impermanence underlying ordinary objects rather than presenting them as purely beautiful or idealized.

Faithful realization can be recognized when artworks organize their elements in ways that effectively embody their thematic concerns. Unlike honest realization, which concerns revealing meaningful human concerns without hiding uncomfortable topics, faithful realization concerns how such concerns are aesthetically realized through artistic organization. Edward Hopper's paintings illustrate this decently. Hopper often employs empty spaces, limited social interaction, muted colors, and strong contrasts between darkness and artificial light. These artistic elements do not merely accompany the theme of

his paintings, such as loneliness or alienation, but meaningfully embody them within the experience of the artwork itself. Through such an organization, appreciators can more intelligently interpret and evaluate the artwork's thematic concerns.¹⁸

Although honest and faithful realizations are closely related, they can be distinguished in terms of the truthful expression of an artwork. Honest realization primarily concerns what meaningful human concerns artworks disclose without concealing their troubling or uncomfortable aspects. Faithful realization, meanwhile, concerns how such concerns are aesthetically embodied through artistic organization. Elements such as decay in a painting of an apple, insects in Dutch still-life paintings, or emptiness and isolation in Hopper's paintings may contribute to honest realization insofar as they disclose vulnerability, mortality, or alienation.

However, faithful realization depends upon how such concerns are organized and embodied through artistic elements such as composition, lighting, color, narrative structure, or characterization. Artworks with faithful but limited honest realization may be evaluated as merely sophisticated or pleasurable while lacking emotional depth. Such artworks may appear overly playful or less serious in their treatment of human concerns. Artworks with honest but limited faithful realization may be evaluated as unintelligible. If artworks irresponsibly present uncomfortable or conflicting aspects of human experience without sufficient artistic organization, they may appear merely chaotic and difficult to interpret meaningfully.

When aesthetic transparency is realized through honest and faithful realization, artworks often invite appreciators to evaluate their truthfulness by rendering meaningful human concerns intelligible. Honest realization contributes by disclosing vulnerability, fragility, or other troubling dimensions of human experience without concealing them. Such disclosure encourages interpretive reflection on the artwork by leading appreciators to understand the conflicting elements. Faithful realization contributes by organizing artistic elements in ways

¹⁸ However, I couldn't specify what exactly makes those artistic elements faithful. It is still possible that someone might not think that Hopper is not revealing one's loneliness properly for some reason. One possibility was a kind of coherent description of an object. Again, however, the meaning of coherence is a difficult concept to conceptualize, considering artwork experience also depends on one's imaginative process.

that meaningfully embody those concerns. When an artwork's themes become accessible in this manner, appreciators can reflect on how artworks realize meaningful human concerns sincerely and accurately. In this sense, intelligibility becomes important because it makes possible the evaluative appreciation of an artwork's truthful realization. Through this process, truthfulness may become salient in experiences of being moved.

To sum up, aesthetic transparency is proposed as an aesthetic virtue that makes meaningful human concerns intelligible and accessible through artistic organization. Honest realization discloses crucial human concerns without concealing their troubling or uncomfortable dimensions, while faithful realization meaningfully embodies them through artistic organization. These truthful artistic realizations attract appreciators to engage interpretively and evaluatively with how truthfully artworks realize meaningful human concerns. In this way, the truthfulness of an artwork can become salient. In the following section, I illustrate this account through several examples of more and less transparent artworks.

4.2 Aesthetic Transparency in Artwork Experience

In this section, I apply my account to a paradigmatic example, namely *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's novel illustrates both honest realization and faithful realization through its revelation and aesthetic embodiment of aspiration, vulnerability, and the desire for social recognition. Afterwards, in order to clarify the concept of aesthetic transparency more sharply, I briefly discuss a less readily transparent artwork, namely Carl Andre's *Bent Pipe Run* (1969). Unlike *The Great Gatsby*, the thematic concerns realized through Andre's minimalist artistic organization may appear less immediately intelligible to appreciators, thereby requiring more demanding interpretive engagement.

A representative example of aesthetic transparency is *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925). The novel illustrates honest realization through its disclosure of aspiration, vulnerability, and the desire for social recognition without concealing their moral ambiguity or emotional instability. Gatsby acquires wealth through illegal bootlegging while simultaneously longing for love, recognition, and acceptance within upper-class society. His extravagant parties appear superficial and ostentatious, yet they also express his desperate desire to regain Daisy's love and reconstruct his identity. Fitzgerald does not merely idealize

Gatsby's dream but also reveals its illusion, fragility, and eventual collapse. Readers may therefore interpret Gatsby not merely as admirable or morally corrupt, but as a tragic figure whose longing for recognition confronts the superficiality of the social world surrounding him.

The novel also illustrates faithful realization through its artistic organization. Through Nick Carraway's retrospective narration and the gradual revelation of Gatsby's character, Fitzgerald meaningfully embodies the tensions between aspiration, illusion, vulnerability, and social recognition within the narrative itself. Gatsby shows his simultaneously admirable, artificial, mysterious, and fragile characteristics throughout the novel. These conflicting elements become intelligible not as isolated traits, but as part of a systematic structure of the novel.¹⁹ In this sense, the novel's artistic organization enables appreciators to engage interpretively and evaluatively with the truthful realization of meaningful human concerns. Through both honest realization and faithful realization, truthfulness becomes salient in experiences of being moved by the novel.

Nevertheless, not every artwork achieves aesthetic transparency to the same degree. Certain artworks may contain complex or conflicting elements while remaining less immediately intelligible to appreciators. For example, Carl Andre's *Bent Piper Run* (1969)²⁰ employs minimalist artistic organization that provides relatively little thematic orientation concerning how its formal elements relate to meaningful human concerns. Although the work may still invite interpretation and potentially embody meaningful concerns through its spatial and material organization, appreciators may nevertheless struggle to establish a clear interpretive engagement with it. In such cases, honest and faithful realization may become less readily accessible through aesthetic experience. Consequently, the possibility of being moved may become reduced, since appreciators encounter greater difficulty in evaluating how the artwork organizes its elements into an intelligible thematic realization. This does not imply that such artworks lack artistic value or truthful realization altogether, but rather that their truthful realization may remain more interpretively demanding and less immediately

¹⁹ Especially, the green light that Gatsby always looks at seems to be an object of interpretation.

²⁰ National Gallery of Art website, "4 Bent Pipe Run," accessed May 17, 2026, <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/78100-4-bent-pipe-run>

accessible to appreciators.

To sum up, I have described aesthetic transparency as an aesthetic virtue that facilitates experiences of being moved by artworks. By aesthetic transparency, I mean the capacity of artworks to make meaningful human concerns intelligible and accessible through artistic organization. Artworks exhibiting aesthetic transparency do not solely contain conflicting or complex elements, but also organize them into an intelligible way of unity through honest and faithful realization. In this way, appreciators can engage interpretively and evaluatively with how artworks disclose and embody meaningful aspects of human experience. Through examples such as *The Great Gatsby* and *Bent Pipe Runs*, I have argued that aesthetic transparency contributes to the salience of truthfulness by enabling evaluative engagement with the artwork's realization of meaningful human concerns. In this sense, aesthetic transparency helps explain how experiences of being moved function as aesthetic experiences.

5. Addressing Potential Concerns

The goal of this chapter is to address several potential concerns regarding my account of being moved as an aesthetic emotion. I focus on three issues: (1) the sappy film case, (2) conceptual conflation, and (3) the over-intellectualization of being moved. These concerns raise questions about whether my account adequately explains the evaluative, psychological, and interpretive dimensions of being moved in artwork contexts. More specifically, they concern: first, whether experiences of being moved necessarily involve positive aesthetic evaluation; second, whether my account captures the psychologically nuanced character of being moved beyond merely “welling up”; and third, whether interpretation plays too central a role in my explanation of artwork appreciation, thereby over-intellectualizing experiences of being moved. In response, I argue that: (1) experiences of being moved nevertheless tend to involve positive aesthetic evaluation; (2) being moved in artwork contexts can encompass psychologically nuanced feelings beyond merely “welling up”; and (3) although interpretation is not always necessary for being moved, interpretive engagement provides a more stable basis for aesthetic evaluation and helps avoid certain misfiring cases.

5.1. Sappy Film Cases

While Prinz and Fingerhut argue that wonder qualifies as an aesthetic emotion (2018), they remain skeptical that being moved can properly function as an emotion of aesthetic appreciation. They write:

“In disaster movies, melodramas, or even soap operas, we might be deeply moved and might watch them for this reason. Yet audiences that find them moving do not necessarily think they are good works of art. An artwork’s being moving, therefore, does not per se seem to be a sufficient condition for its positive assessments as art” (2018, 115).

Based on this concern, they conclude that being moved is neither necessary nor sufficient for aesthetically appreciative emotion.

My response generally aligns with the conclusion of Menninghaus et al., namely that experiences of being moved nevertheless tend to accompany positive aesthetic evaluation. The existence of sappy films does not show that being moved lacks any evaluative dimension whatsoever. Rather, it shows only that being moved does not guarantee a positive aesthetic

judgment in every case. What Menninghaus et al.'s empirical studies suggest is that experiences of being moved are positively associated with favorable evaluations of artworks.

Furthermore, many of the evaluative qualities emphasized by Prinz and Fingerhut themselves, such as originality, expressive quality, or technical achievement, are precisely the kinds of features through which appreciators may feel moved. We also may feel moved by the expressive qualities of the apple painting discussed earlier, or by the originality and tragic structure of *Oedipus*. In such cases, being moved does not appear separate from aesthetic evaluation, since judging artworks to disclose and embody meaningful human concerns truthfully already involves a positive evaluative response toward the artwork.

I also cautiously maintain that experiences of being moved remain connected to artistic quality itself. If being moved involves evaluative engagement with how artworks reveal and embody meaningful human concerns, then it would be too strong to claim that being moved is entirely unrelated to aesthetic value. Appreciators may therefore positively evaluate works such as *Oedipus* or *The Great Gatsby* because they effectively present complex aspects of human experience through artistic organization. In this respect, experiences of being moved still tend to predict positive aesthetic evaluation, even if such evaluation is neither guaranteed nor universal.

5.2. Conceptual Conflation

A second concern questions whether my account encompasses too broad a psychological range under the concept of being moved. Traditionally, being moved is often associated with emotional responses such as welling up or crying, accompanied by a positive emotional tone. However, many of the artwork experiences discussed throughout this thesis involve feelings such as sadness, shock, discomfort, or existential uneasiness. If so, one might argue that I am conflating distinct emotional phenomena under a single concept.

In response, I suggest that ordinary experiences of being moved already encompass a psychologically nuanced range of emotional reactions beyond merely crying or emotional uplift. Imagine, for example, a coworker with whom I rarely speak. I may even suspect that he dislikes me. One day, while suffering from a severe headache and preparing for a meeting,

I discovered that he had quietly left painkillers on my desk while I was away. In such a case, I may feel speechless, emotionally struck, or deeply reflective rather than tearful. Part of the emotional experience involves attempting to understand the meaning of his action and reassessing my previous assumptions about him. Although this example concerns an ordinary rather than aesthetic case, experiences of being moved by artworks frequently involve similarly nuanced emotional structures.

Cova and Deonna themselves leave room for such complexity, since they do not reduce being moved to either joy or sadness alone. Their account, therefore, allows for emotionally mixed and psychologically complex experiences of being moved, especially in artwork contexts. Artworks may evoke wonder, discomfort, despair, shock, disgust, admiration, or existential uneasiness while nevertheless moving appreciators deeply.

Consider *Motion Picture Soundtrack* by Radiohead. The song maintains a depressive atmosphere and strongly suggests emotional despair. Nevertheless, it is entirely plausible that appreciators may feel deeply moved by it. Such cases become difficult to explain if experiences of being moved are restricted narrowly to emotional uplift or conventionally positive emotional states. A more plausible explanation is that appreciators respond meaningfully to the disclosure of despair, vulnerability, or emotional suffering within the artwork. In such cases, appreciators may feel emotionally unsettled while nevertheless regarding the experience as aesthetically meaningful. Thus, experiences of being moved should not be restricted narrowly to tears or emotional uplift, but may encompass psychologically nuanced and emotionally mixed responses.

5.3. Over-Intellectualization

A third concern is that my account may excessively intellectualize being moved by introducing interpretation into artwork appreciation. This concern arises because appreciators often feel moved immediately, without engaging in explicit reflection about the artwork's meaning. A melody, a visual image, or a single poetic line may move appreciators prior to any deliberate interpretive engagement. Thus, even if one accepts that interpretation helps explain the evaluative dimension of artwork experience, one may still object that my account places excessive emphasis on reflective activity in experiences of being moved.

I agree that interpretation is not always necessary for being moved immediately. When viewing the apple painting discussed earlier, appreciators may initially feel moved by its visual qualities alone. Likewise, a piece of classical music may move listeners immediately through melody or atmosphere. However, I nevertheless maintain that interpretive engagement can provide a more stable basis for evaluative appreciation by helping appreciators understand how artworks relate their elements to meaningful human concerns. In this sense, interpretation should not be understood as replacing immediate emotional response, but as potentially deepening and stabilizing aesthetic evaluation. It is for this reason that interpretation becomes relevant to my account.

Experiences of being moved can remain open to misunderstanding or incomplete appreciation. Imagine listening to the “Dance of the Seven Veils” from Richard Strauss’s opera *Salome*. Initially, I may feel moved by its solemn and dreamlike musical atmosphere. Later, however, I may learn that the piece accompanies Salome’s obsessive declaration to the severed head of John the Baptist. If I approach the work from a Catholic perspective, I may then recognize that my earlier appreciation of the piece was significantly incomplete.

This does not imply that the initial experience of being moved lacked aesthetic value altogether. The beauty of the music may still genuinely appeal to me. However, the case illustrates how experiences of being moved may partially misfire when appreciators lack sufficient understanding of an artwork’s thematic context. Since this thesis is primarily concerned with aesthetically valuable experiences of being moved, interpretive engagement becomes important insofar as it helps appreciators develop a more stable evaluative understanding of how artworks disclose and embody meaningful human concerns. In this sense, interpretation does not replace immediate emotional response, but may deepen and stabilize aesthetic appreciation.

Conclusion

Concluding this thesis, I have argued that being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion when artworks make truthfulness salient through aesthetic transparency. I proposed aesthetic transparency as an aesthetic virtue through which artworks organize conflicting aspects of human experience into intelligible thematic unities by means of honest realization and faithful realization. In this sense, artworks move appreciators not merely by representing significant values such as love or life, but by disclosing and embodying meaningful human concerns through artistic organization.

Throughout this thesis, I explored the nature of being moved, especially what makes it an aesthetic emotion and how it operates within artwork experiences. In Chapters 1 and 2, I examined the general account of being moved proposed by Florian Cova and Julien Deonna, as well as the account of aesthetic emotion proposed by Winfried Menninghaus et al. My aim was to prepare the theoretical ground for an account of being moved that could explain its role specifically within aesthetic experience.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I proposed that truthfulness functions as a central evaluative concern in experiences of being moved by artworks. In Chapter 3, I argued that truthfulness can explain why artworks representing negative or personally irrelevant values are nevertheless capable of moving appreciators. In this context, interpretation suggests that artwork experiences often involve evaluative concern with truthfulness. Appreciators interpret artworks not merely to identify meanings, but often also to evaluate how artworks disclose and embody meaningful human concerns through artistic organization. With this process, I proposed that being moved by an artwork can function while truthfulness stands out as a core positive value.

Based on the claim that truthfulness functions as a central evaluative concern in experiences of being moved, in Chapter 4, I proposed aesthetic transparency as a relevant aesthetic virtue. By aesthetic transparency, I mean the capacity of artworks to make meaningful aspects of human experience intelligible and accessible through honest realization and faithful realization. Transparent artworks display conflicting aspects of human experience without concealing their troubling or unsettling dimensions, and organize them into intelligible unities through which appreciators can engage interpretively and evaluatively with

meaningful human concerns. To clarify this concept, I employed examples such as *The Great Gatsby* as a paradigmatic case of aesthetic transparency, alongside Carl Andre's *Bent Long Pipe Run* as an example of a less readily transparent artwork.

In Chapter 5, I addressed several potential objections to this account. First, I discussed so-called "sappy" artworks and argued that experiences of being moved nevertheless tend to accompany positive aesthetic evaluation when artworks meaningfully realize their thematic concerns. Second, I addressed the concern that my account conflates being moved with other emotional phenomena such as sadness, shock, or existential uneasiness. In response, I argued that ordinary experiences of being moved already involve emotionally mixed and psychologically complex structures, and that Cova and Deonna's account itself allows for such emotional complexity when core positive values become salient. Third, I discussed the concern that my account excessively intellectualizes experiences of being moved. In response, I argued that interpretation should not be understood as detached theoretical analysis, but rather as a form of reflective engagement that can deepen and stabilize evaluative appreciation by helping appreciators understand how artworks disclose and embody meaningful human concerns.

Nevertheless, several important questions remain open. One unresolved issue concerns whether truthfulness is the only evaluative concern involved in experiences of being moved by artworks. For example, it seems plausible that appreciators may also feel moved directly by beauty itself. Rejecting such cases entirely would appear counterintuitive. My own intuition remains that truthfulness continues to play an important role even in experiences where beauty becomes salient, since artworks are still evaluated in terms of how they disclose and embody an aesthetic vision regarding beauty. However, it also seems possible that appreciators may feel moved simply through admiration for artistic form, without engaging substantially with thematic concerns. Nevertheless, since theories of beauty have developed across highly diverse aesthetic traditions, I leave this issue open for future research.

Another unresolved issue concerns the precise relationship between interpretation and truthfulness. In this thesis, I limited the role of interpretation primarily to suggesting evaluative concern with truthfulness in artwork experiences. Although I suggested that

interpretive engagement often involves evaluating how artworks disclose and embody meaningful human concerns, I did not fully develop a theory explaining how interpretation relates to judgments of truthfulness. This raises further philosophical questions concerning the nature of interpretation and the criteria by which artworks may be evaluated as truthful.

Finishing this thesis, one of the most important lessons emerging from this research concerns the significance of truthfulness in artworks. When artists present experiences honestly, appreciators often respond positively to that honesty, even when artworks depict weakness, ugliness, discomfort, or moral imperfection. However, unsettling or conflicting elements alone are not sufficient to move appreciators aesthetically. Such elements must also be organized and realized in ways that make them appear meaningful, convincing, and appropriately expressed within the artwork itself. Although the precise nature of truthfulness still remains philosophically difficult to define, this vagueness does not disqualify being moved as an indicator of aesthetic value. Rather, artworks often receive genuinely positive evaluations because they disclose and embody difficult or conflicting aspects of human experience meaningfully and without concealment.

I have often felt moved by the fragile voice of Bob Dylan, the distorted guitar sounds in “About You” by The 1975, the distorted figures in works by Pablo Picasso, the unsettling atmosphere of stories by Roald Dahl, the morally awkward behavior of Michael Scott in *The Office*, or the bittersweet emotional structure of *La La Land*. These works move me not only because they are aesthetically sophisticated, but also because they honestly disclose and faithfully embody complex aspects of human life through artistic organization.

References

1. Cova, Florian & Julien A. Deonna (2014), “Being Moved”, *Philosophical Studies*, Volume 169, pages 447–466
2. Fingerhut, Joerg & Jesse J. Prinz (2018), “Wonder, appreciation, and the value of art”, *Progress in Brain Research*, Volume 237, 107-128
3. Fingerhut, Joerg & Jesse J. Prinz (2020), “Aesthetic Emotion Reconsidered”, *The Monist*, Volume 103, Issue 2, 223–239
4. Fitzgerald, Scott F. (2025). *The Great Gatsby*. Penguin Classic / Penguin Books Ltd. (Original work published 1925)
5. Lamarque, Peter (2014), “Literature and Truth”, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, (Pre-publication text from Peter Lamarque)
6. Menninghaus, Winfried, Wagner, Valentin, Wassiliwizky, Eugen, Schindler, Ines, Hanich, Julian, Jacobsen, Thomas, Koelsch, Stefan (2019), “What Are Aesthetic Emotions”, *Psychological Review*, Vol 126(2), 171-195
7. Muth, Claudia, Hesslinger, Vera M., Carbon, Claus-Christian (2015), “The appeal of challenge in the perception of art: How ambiguity, solvability of ambiguity, and the opportunity for insight affect appreciation”, *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, Vol 9(3), 206-216
8. Robinson, Jenefer (2020), “Aesthetic Emotions”, *The Monist*, April 2020, Vol. 103, No. 2, 205-222

Abstract:

This thesis investigates the nature of being moved as an aesthetic emotion. Although being moved is frequently regarded as an aesthetic emotion, the grounds for this classification have rarely been fully explained. Drawing on the accounts of Florian Cova and Julien Deonna (2014) and Winfried Menninghaus et al. (2018), I argue that truthfulness functions as a central evaluative concern in experiences of being moved by artworks. By truthfulness, I mean the evaluative concern through which appreciators assess how artworks disclose and embody meaningful human concerns through artistic organization. To develop this claim, I introduce the concept of aesthetic transparency as an aesthetic virtue related to experiences of being moved, understood as the capacity of artworks to make complex or conflicting aspects of human experience intelligible through honest realization and faithful realization. Finally, I address several potential objections to this account, including sappy film cases, conceptual conflation, and the concern that my account over-intellectualizes experiences of being moved.

Annotation

Conclusion: This thesis concludes that being moved can function as an aesthetic emotion when the truthfulness of an artwork becomes salient, and that aesthetic transparency is one of the aesthetic virtues responsive to being moved in artwork experiences. When the truthfulness of an artwork is evaluated and is salient as the main positive value with a proper aesthetic virtue, especially aesthetic transparency, being moved can operate as an aesthetic emotion.

Keywords: Being moved, aesthetic emotion, truthfulness, aesthetic transparency

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce the thesis and make the thesis public

I, MyungHoon Jeong ,
(author's name)

1. grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to

reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the digital archives of the University of Tartu until the expiry of the term of copyright, my thesis

What Makes the Emotion of Being Moved an Aesthetic Emotion ,
(title of thesis)

supervised by Riin Sirkel and Uku Tooming ;
(supervisor's name)

2. grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the thesis specified in point 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the digital archives, under the Creative Commons licence CC BY NC ND 4.0, which allows, by giving appropriate credit to the author, to reproduce, distribute the work and communicate it to the public, and prohibits the creation of derivative works and any commercial use of the work until the expiry of the term of copyright;
3. am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in points 1 and 2;
4. confirm that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons' intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

MyungHoon Jeong

18/05/2026