In his thoughtful paper, Paul Guyer is right to say that, historically, emotions have been thought to play an important role in how people experience art. He is also correct in claiming that Kant apparently excludes emotions from what Guyer calls “aesthetic experience” and what Kant himself discusses in terms of “aesthetic judgment” (and, more specifically, the judgments of taste and taste as the capacity to make such judgments). Yet I think we need to be careful here to distinguish between “aesthetic experience,” on the one hand, and how people experience art, on the other. At least this is so if, as I argue in my books, art is multidimensional, and the aesthetic is only one dimension, albeit a crucial dimension, of art.

To keep these matters distinct, let me introduce the term “art experience” to indicate all the multidimensional ways in which people experience art, both as art makers and as art interpreters. Art experience includes the aesthetic way of experiencing art, the way that I summarize with my concept of imagination. But it includes much more: economic ways, political ways, logical ways, etc. One of Guyer’s legitimate worries about my book *Artistic Truth*, in my own terms, is that, by zeroing in on the aesthetic way of experiencing art, I seem to leave aside other ways—specifically, the emotional way. This specific worry could also apply to my book *Art in Public* where, for example, I talk about the economic and political and technological dimensions of art and art experience but say very little about the role of feelings and emotions in all this. I shall return to this worry in a moment.

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But there is another way to understand Guyer’s concern, and that has to do with aesthetic experience, as distinct from art experience. Like Kant, although in my own terms, I consider the aesthetic dimension, which I describe as intersubjective processes of imagination, to be ubiquitous in life and culture, at least within modern differentiated societies such as our own. This means the aesthetic is not simply a dimension of art and the practices of art making and art interpretation. It shows up in many different social institutions and cultural practices that are not artistic.

For example, as I said in a lecture here in February, a public ceremony, such as the inauguration of a country’s President or a wedding celebration, can be regarded as an aesthetic sign. The lighting, the sound system, the tone of the speeches, the sequence of ceremonial actions, the pacing of the event—all contribute to our exploration, presentation, and interpretation of the event’s meaning. Obviously such events are more than aesthetic signs—the inauguration is primarily a political event, cementing a transfer or continuation of administrative power; and a wedding ceremony might be primarily a familial event, officially sealing an intimate partnership that interweaves distinct families and personal histories. Yet public ceremonies are events where we carry out the intersubjective process of imagination, where together we engage in exploration, presentation, and creative interpretation. To that extent, they are aesthetic events. Or, to say it more carefully, they are events that have an important aesthetic dimension.

They also are events where we engage in aesthetic evaluation, where we consider the aesthetic merits of what we experience. Why do people dress up when they go to a wedding? Why do they sit or stand where they do and when they do? At more traditional weddings in North America, why do vows get said and rings get exchanged? There are many ways to address
such questions. One way is in terms of aesthetic considerations: people dress and gesture and act as they do because they are contributing to the imaginative character of this event. Moreover, they know when a wedding ceremony is aesthetically flawed—if it takes too long, for example, or if the costumes, flowers, and ambience do not hang together, or if the tone of the spoken remarks is inapt, or if the whole event is pretentious or trivial or downright boring. Although we often voice such concerns as praise or criticism of the people in charge, they really are evaluations of the event itself—an event in which all who attend are participants.

Guyer’s worry in this connection, if I may reformulate it, is that, by focusing primarily on the aesthetic dimension and how it helps people find cultural orientation, I seem to ignore the dimension of feelings and emotions that obviously inform our experience of such events. On this score, I must simply plead guilty as charged. Yet the reason for omitting the dimension of feelings and emotions is not that I think these are unimportant within human experience in general or within art experience in particular. Rather, the reason is that I consider the aesthetic dimension—i.e., imagination—to be the most crucial one for circumscribing what art is, what roles it plays in society, and how it is capable of artistic truth—and those were the main topics of my book Artistic Truth. So I thank Professor Guyer for pointing out this omission, and I wish to use the limited time remaining in my response to make up for it in a preliminary way.

Now let me introduce one more term, the term “felt experience.” I shall use this term to indicate a dimension within human experience of feelings and emotions that, while distinct from aesthetic experience as such, nevertheless underlies aesthetic experience and plays a vital role in art experience—in the experience we have as makers and interpreters of art.

As someone who sings semi-professionally, I am keenly aware of how prominent felt experience is in our composing, performing, and listening to music. Sometimes our feelings and
emotions are so strong that they make performing difficult or prevent any attempt to make aesthetic judgments: we are completely overwhelmed, such that the trained singer’s careful calibration of one’s voice or the good listener’s devoted attention to the music’s formal qualities is simply shattered. When things are going well, however, our felt experience enriches the overall experience, both supporting and enlivening the performing and the listening.

At the same time, performing a piece of vocal music or listening to it can attune us to our felt experience in new ways, making us more acutely aware of feelings and emotions we already have, giving us occasion to experience them even more deeply, or even surprising us with an awareness of feelings and emotions we did not know we have. This, I take it, is what Collingwood had in mind when he said the task of “art proper” is to clarify our emotions.

Although I would not restrict this task to “art proper,” and I would not make it the task that defines art as such, I think Collingwood is perfectly correct to say, for example, that “it is not her ability to weep real tears that would mark out a good actress; it is her ability to make it clear to herself and her audience what the tears are about.”

Notice, however, that Collingwood introduces the little word “about”—“what the tears are about.” This is crucial, it seems to me. For Collingwood’s point, in my own terms, is that the task of art is not to arouse emotions (contra Aristotle, on one perhaps mistaken reading) or to convey or transmit feelings (contra Tolstoy) or directly to express emotions (although Collingwood does speak of art proper as “expressing” emotion, in distinction from “betraying” emotion). Rather, the task of art, or at least one task, is to help us interpret our feelings and emotions—in Collingwood’s terms, to “clarify” what they or their corporeal manifestations (such as tears) are “about.”

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If this is so, then we need to ask what kind of interpretation this is. Like Collingwood, I would want to say it is an imaginative interpretation: i.e., an aesthetic interpretation. For it to be an imaginative interpretation, a performance or the piece being performed must function as an aesthetic sign, as something that can sustain discovery, acquire nuances of meaning, and call forth creative interpretation. Moreover, if the performance and the piece are indeed artistic, then, within the holistic context of our multidimensional experience of art, the question of artistic truth cannot be held at bay. We expect the art we are experiencing, including felt experience, to be authentic: i.e., to be true with respect to the art maker’s experience, including the artist’s felt experience, but by no means limited to that. And we expect the art we experience, including felt experience, to be significant: i.e., to be true with respect to an audience’s interpretative needs, including its felt needs, but by no means limited to that. Further, such art experience can strengthen through attunement feelings and emotions that are crucial in a democratic societal context, such as the feeling of empathy, without which we would lack psychological motivation to practice solidarity with other people, or indignation, without which many pursuits of public justice would not get off the ground.

Perhaps this is the place at which I can turn to the congenial remarks by Richard Eldridge. Eldridge derives two main points from his dialogue with the texts by Martin Seel and me. The first is that “the most important art” clarifies “significant oppositions in human life … so that we see and feel more clearly where we are.” The second is that “some works of art are vehicles of the achievement of expressive freedom.”

Eldridge understands “expressive freedom” as involving “originality blended with sense, unburdening and clarification blended with

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representation” (11).\(^4\) Interestingly, he appeals to two concepts that, in a different context, Collingwood puts to prominent use in his account of “art proper,” namely, clarification and expression. Now what are getting clarified by “the most important art” are not emotions, however, but “significant oppositions in human life”—what Adorno, in a more overtly Hegelian Marxist vocabulary, might have called the fundamental contradictions of society. And what are getting expressed appear to be something like authentic commitments to the possibilities of “freer and fuller life.”\(^5\)

I find Eldridge’s emphases congenial, and they seem quite compatible with my own understanding of artistic truth as a dynamic correlation between imaginative disclosure and imaginative cogency: among other matters, art can disclose in an imaginative fashion the fundamental tensions within which we live, whether those tensions be personal, institutional, or society-wide and, in doing so, art can direct us toward ways to live that would make for a higher degree of human flourishing.

Yet the ghost of Adorno does not let me rest here. For all of this raises a question about the point to art’s disclosing or clarifying fundamental tensions and the point to art’s directing us toward better possibilities. If the point were simply to help us cope with our mundane circumstances without really addressing them or to give us temporary release so that, for a few art-infused moments, we can escape our personal and societal troubles, then what would prevent art, including “the most important art,” from being one grand illusion and one great reinforcer of illusions? What would prevent artistic truth from being fundamentally false, indeed from being the worst form of ideology—sophisticated ideology, perhaps, yet ideology nonetheless that, in

\(^4\) Eldridge, 1, quoting from Richard Eldridge, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.
\(^5\) Eldridge, 2.
lives and institutions and a society which need to change, never does more than dispense compensation?

To call up yet another ghost, one who haunted not only Adorno but also Derrida, let me put my questions as a provocative reformulation of Karl Marx’s famous Thesis Eleven on Feuerbach: Art and aesthetics have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point [however] is to change it. Is that the point? If it is, how should that point inform our conceptions of art and artistic truth and expressive freedom?

I do not know whether I have an adequate response to this concern, although my book Art in Public makes some effort in this direction. Yet the ghosts of Adorno and Marx compel me to raise it. I look forward to hearing what others have to say!

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