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**The Dangers of "Pure Feeling":
A Warning to Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer**

Abstract

By analyzing the feminist debates on Hans-Georg Gadamer, the author shows that feminist critics point to the need either to supplement or to replace Gadamer's philosophy with a greater sensitivity to the historical implications of women's experience. Thus, they are of the view either that Gadamer's philosophy has yet to come to terms with specific historical situations or that Gadamer's philosophy cannot come to terms with historical situatedness per se. The author contends that Gadamer's feminist critics do not locate the source of his residual transcendentalism where it should be located: in the account of aesthetic judgment as a "pure feeling" that underpins his entire philosophy. This has the effect, of appearing to preserve aesthetic judgment as "pure feeling" as an apparently innocent remedy, to which some of his feminist critics actually appeal in opposition to his transcendentalism. The author argues, to the contrary, that aesthetic judgment, as a "pure feeling," is at once too complicit in the tradition that feminists seek to engage with, traditionally too insubstantial to make a rich resource for a feminist critique of that tradition, and ultimately too traditionally male-centered to be easily coopted by a feminist philosopher.

Keywords: Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutics, feelings, transcendentalism, aesthetic judgement, history, feminist critique

The debate over Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of "effective history," (*Wirkungsgeschichte* (Gadamer 1989), has been largely shared out by those, like Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 1987, who regard Gadamer's emphasis on tradition – that frame of pregiven purposes or prejudices with "only" historical justification within which understanding is always, though dialectically, embedded – as a premature dismissal of an Enlightenment-type capacity for "pure," "rational" (in the sense of transcendental) reflection, and those, like Gianni Vattimo (Vattimo 1988), for whom Gadamer's account of understanding and tradition is an overly-devotional refusal to countenance the possibility that a form of "pure," "non-rational" (in the sense of non-cognitive) experience, once freed of the constraints of

both Enlightenment reason and hermeneutical interpretation, can generate a "feel" for that which is other, that which operates beyond pregiven structures and thereby disrupts the reasons and the readings those structures sustain.

But there is a second, and so far more subdued, debate on the merit of Gadamer's account of "effective history," that, in my view, poses a much more serious challenge than the traditional "purist" outrage, because it is not made by reasserting abstract assumptions regarding the conditions necessary for a general enlightenment (conceived of in terms of progression or disruption), but by teasing out the implications of his insistence on history in the absence, now, of any "pure," ahistorical ground for the norms or standards to which we might finally appeal in support of our choices and decisions. This debate, only now beginning to really emerge, is being conducted between Gadamer and his feminist critics, and key aspects of it have recently been collected in a volume of feminist interpretations of Gadamer edited by Lorraine Code (Code 2003).

In general, feminist criticism has tended to set itself up in the context of, and often in explicit opposition to, the claims to "purity" that characterize the first round of the Gadamer debate, famously pointing to women's exclusion from the "purist" tradition on the strength of a stereotypical designation, and then a systematic denigration, of their embodied, emotional, interrelational, in short "impure," versions of understanding. And yet, neither have feminists straightforwardly embraced the value of tradition over an abstract reason, having all too many historical reasons to be suspicious of a tradition that would claim authority over thought and action. Feminists have, therefore, sometimes aligned themselves with a postmodern-type disruption of metanarratives of enlightenment *and* tradition; and yet the danger of a postmodern "levelling out" of difference, such that no one sense of grievance or injustice can claim any greater pertinence than any other, has also led feminists to adopt a more critical stance and allow for the possibility of transcending particular traditions and practices in order to reflect on the value of their claims. Thus, a feminist criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics, while conducted for the most part at the level of practical resolution and sufficiency conditions rather than abstract resolution and necessary conditions, does also have implications for central features of the more established Gadamer debate.

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The feminist responses to Gadamer in Code's collection vary from enthusiastic approbation to severe disapprobation, with all the shades of critical perspective in between. Sometimes enamored of his critique of Enlightenment scientism, sometimes oppressed by his attendant emphasis on tradition; sometimes enthused by his ideal of openness, some-

times disappointed at its disempowering imprecision: the main trends of these women's criticisms of Gadamer nonetheless unite to highlight an important problem, for Gadamer *and* his feminist critics, surrounding the role that aesthetic judgment as a "pure" feeling is expected, by *both*, to play.

In their pertinent commentaries on his work, Gadamer's feminist critics in this volume point to the need either to *supplement* or to *replace* his philosophy with a greater sensitivity to the historical implications of women's experience. In other words, taken together, they are of the view either that Gadamer's philosophy has *yet* to come to terms with specific historical situations or that Gadamer's philosophy *cannot* come to terms with historical situatedness *per se*. While acknowledging the value of the former, more charitable, interpretation, I regard the latter interpretation – that Gadamer's account is, from the outset, a perpetrator of the very indifference to history that he identifies and criticizes in the Enlightenment tradition and its contemporary proponents – to turn up something really interesting, specifically in the feminists' analysis of the *source* of Gadamer's alleged indifference (astonishing as it must be in a philosophy that claims to acknowledge the priority of history and its effects) and in the *remedy* they propose that will not be guilty of such indifference. In fact, I contend that Gadamer's feminist critics do not locate the source of his residual transcendentalism where it should be located: in the account of aesthetic judgment as a "pure feeling" that underpins his entire philosophy. And this has the effect, I further contend, of appearing to preserve aesthetic judgment as "pure feeling" as an apparently innocent remedy, to which some of his feminist critics actually appeal in opposition to his transcendentalism. I would suggest, to the contrary, that aesthetic judgment, as a "pure feeling," is at once too complicit in the tradition that feminists seek to engage with, traditionally too insubstantial to make a rich resource for a feminist critique of that tradition, and ultimately too traditionally male-centered to be easily coopted by a feminist philosopher.

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Gadamer's enthusiasts, in Code's collection, focus almost exclusively on the value of his hermeneutics as a sustained critique of traditional epistemology. Hoffman, for instance, calls Gadamer's philosophy "a fruitful resource for the articulation of feminist projects" because its foremost aim is to overthrow "the false universalism of the natural sciences" and the tradition of philosophizing for which they function as a paradigm. (Hoffmann 2003, 81) Gadamer begins his most important work, *Truth and Method*, with a considered criticism of the scientific account of understanding that would take the determinate categories and inductive procedures of modern science as the ideal. According to Gadamer, the scien-

tistic distinction between the object and the methodology of its analysis, "between history and the knowledge of it", (Gadamer 1989) is of secondary importance in any account of understanding, an abstraction from the fundamental unity of "method" and "object" that makes all understanding of a situated, or "historically-effected" kind. Understanding, for Gadamer, is not something one achieves primarily through the conscious and careful application of fixed rules. It is rather an event that happens to one. (ibid., 300) It always involves an element – history or "tradition" – that is beyond one's total control because it is already in operation before one begins.

Thus, some of these feminist philosophers embrace Gadamer's account of effective history, appreciative of its sensitivity to the inevitable situatedness of the knowledge seeker and of its capacity to challenge the reductive, universalizing tendencies of traditional, canonizing truths. Another of Gadamer's admirers in this collection, Feudenberger identifies five reasons for her feminist advocacy of Gadamer's philosophy (Feudenberger 2003, 261-262): it rejects the primacy of propositional knowledge of the methods and ideals of modern science; it demands a true recognition of other perspectives by not subjecting others to one's own absolute standards; it opposes the heuristic value of a god's eye view, emphasizing instead the positive value of partiality and historical situatedness; it does not view the coexistence of different interpretations as a weakness, arbitrary and meaningless, because it acknowledges that each interpretation carries a wealth of traditional justification; and it encourages us to put ourselves and our own assumptions at risk on the grounds that our reasons, like those of everybody else, may not be sufficient to sustain our own views in the face of alternatives. The very manner of philosophizing that Gadamer's theory suggests – characterized by a questioning and openness that undermines the adversarial method, typical of the tradition of Gadamer-criticism I identified at the outset and bolstered by the assumption that we rest on pure grounds when we do "good" philosophy – is much more supportive of a feminist critique of traditional, male-centered "reason," in which the aim is not to eradicate bad philosophy with good philosophy and thereby redeem the Truth, but to account for both "good" and "bad" philosophy in terms of its social causes and contexts, and make truth into a procedural feature of situated, historical inquiry.

And yet, as Code recognizes, Gadamer's is no unthinking rejection of the tradition of modern philosophy and the (at times beneficial) methods and ideals of science, no simple opposition of "science or art". (Code 2003a, 31) Gadamer is not recommending one single, hermeneutic method at the expense of other (for example, scientific) methods, as if he had a transcendent measure to finally eradicate the influence of science even if he wanted to. His account of effective history is meant to affect our practices of understanding at most indirectly, he tells us, intended not to influence *what* we think and do but *how we understand*

what and how we think and do. Hence, in his account of medical practice, in *The Enigma of Health*, Gadamer, though bent on giving a rendition of diagnostic procedures as an illustration of the hermeneutical nature of medical practice, is yet interested in what contribution the science of medicine can make to this practice. (Gadamer 1996, 129; Code 2003a, 31) Accordingly, the statistics that Code uses in her introduction to support her claim that female doctors, in contrast to their male counterparts, tend to practice medicine more as an art than a science testify to the, at times more thorough, emphasis of female medics on their scientific resources: female doctors actually do more tests on their patients, while also spending more time interpreting the results of those tests as they pertain to the particularity of their patients' histories. Furthermore, while Gadamer's hermeneutics questions the viability of an absolute or "pure" ground for the justification of our truth claims and practices, testifying to the forces of culture and subjectivity that make this enterprise implausible, he does not at the same time reduce philosophy to a mere "play" as some postmodern theorists are apt to do. Instead, as Hekman argues here, Gadamer's "tradition" furnishes us with a kind of Wittgensteinian "riverbed" of justificatory evidence that operates as a ground (albeit shifting) with which to confer value on our claims. (Hekman 2003, 191) Hence, *both* for its sustained critique of traditional scientific epistemology *and* for its refusal to simply abandon this tradition and all its potential strengths, some critics in this collection consider Gadamer to be an unwitting friend. As Hoffmann observes, "there is nothing in philosophical hermeneutics" account of understanding that is inimical to the feminist goals of ending oppressive methodologies". (Hoffmann 2003, 86) Praise indeed from a feminist perspective that, all too often, has reason to bemoan the oppressive myopia of philosophical practices.

But not all of Gadamer's feminist readers in this volume are equally approving of his hermeneutic approach. Others, like Vasterling, acknowledge the benefits of a feminist appropriation of such ideals as openness, such practices as dialogue, and such arbiters as tradition or history, but remain suspicious of the sometimes sweeping nature of Gadamer's statements and their failure to accommodate aspects other than the mainstream tradition. (Vasterling 2003, 149-180) Hence, Vasterling, though tentatively approving of Gadamer's account of understanding as dialogue, also wonders whether that dialogue must always yield a *result*, whether understanding must always entail agreement, as Gadamer seems to think it must. On Gadamer's account, understanding always takes the form of a dialogue, in that I never approach the "object" to be understood with no idea at all in respect to it, but always with some preconception – some "prejudice" – that already determines the slant or direction that I will take towards it. Thus, I begin the encounter that will lead to understanding, not from some "pure" foundational base, but with a question that opens up a particular horizon of possibility and does not, to that extent, leave the possibilities for understanding

absolutely open. But, Gadamer continues, the "object" too has a question to ask; it too brings with it a plethora of assumptions that determine the content or direction of the conversation. And it is in coming to an accommodation between these two projections of meaning – what Gadamer calls "horizons" – that understanding occurs as a "fusion of horizons". (Gadamer 1989, 306) It is thus that dialogue as a model for understanding gives rise to the kind of "speculative" philosophy that Gadamer recommends, in which what is at stake is the interplay of hypothetical ideas rather than the logical analysis of statements with which we associate philosophical critique.

However, and this is Vasterling's worry, speculative philosophy is so bent on hypothesizing about possible results, possible accommodations between different horizons, that it tends to efface the possibility that some horizons just cannot be fused without actual distortion. If that is that case, has understanding occurred? Gadamer would say no, but Vasterling wants to say yes. For Gadamer, unless we begin to recognize ourselves in the other participant in the dialogue, we do not understand the other. But, for Vasterling, this is a far too uncritical impulse; recognizing ourselves in the other allows us "to stay comfortably at home in the world as we know it". (Vasterling 2003, 167) Unless we recognize the otherness of the other, *at the expense* perhaps of recognizing ourselves in her, we have not understood the other, she objects. Concerned at Gadamer's insistence that understanding presupposes agreement, she proposes instead that understanding be separated from agreement, such that understanding is required in order to find out whether or not we agree with our partner in dialogue. Dialogue, in this case, would compel us into a critical reflection on our horizon rather than always pin its hopes on a successful broadening of our horizon to incorporate the other. Hence, in this critique of Gadamer's account of dialogue as in other commentaries on his uncritical version of a particularly homogenous tradition, feminist enthusiasm for Gadamer's work is diluted by a suspicion of his "harmonizing and universalizing tendencies". (ibid., 178)

But it gets worse. A number of contributors to this collection are downright dismissive of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Fleming, for instance, claims that it is "a grave mistake to think of Gadamer as a potential friend". (Fleming 2003, 110) She goes beyond Vasterling's reservations about the hermeneutical emphasis on dialogue, and claims that Gadamer's supposed courting of the other is purely instrumental. According to Gadamer, consciousness of our historical situatedness – what he calls "historically-effected consciousness" (Gadamer 1989, 301) – generates the never-ending task of bringing into the open those prejudices that silently determine our understandings. But this foregrounding of our background cannot take place from any "pure," transcendent perspective; therefore, it requires an encounter with someone or something else from a different background to bring

into relief those presuppositions of which we were, until then, unaware. Hence, the encounter with an other, in Gadamer's view, has the effect of defamiliarizing certain of our prejudices and makes it possible for us to be critical of our own perspective. But, as Fleming shows, for all Gadamer's talk of the other, there is a sinister sense in which the other's otherness or difference is not taken on board in its own right but used merely as an instrument in my desire to gain a greater sense or understanding of myself. Gadamer cavils against those who claim that, in order to understand another person or text, we must place ourselves in her shoes, so to speak. This is merely an extension of the scientific prejudice, which assumes that we can efface ourselves and our perspectives in the pursuit of understanding. (ibid., 305) But, Fleming argues, in this utter refusal to take the other's perspective into account, Gadamer is left with a solitary self, seeking to promote his sense of self by erasing the other's concrete identity. Hence, what Fleming calls Gadamer's "unity project" (Fleming 2003, 130) is premised upon the eradication of difference.

This feminist refusal to be won over by Gadamer's apparently inclusive categories is shared by Fiumara, who will not be placated by Gadamer's practice of entering into dialogue by asking questions. (Fiumara 2003, 133-148) According to Fiumara, the question is one of the most coercive figures of language, and typical of a tradition of philosophizing that operates within rigid, self-imposed frameworks without being bothered by that which lies beyond the frame. True to its etymological roots in "*ad rogare*" (which means "to approach with a question" but also "arrogance"), to begin a dialogue with a question, on Fiumara's account, is to refuse from the outset to give voice to certain possibilities. (ibid., 136) Fiumara's point is well taken, I think, and might profitably be illustrated by an interpretation that Readings gives of the Herzog film *Where the Green Ant's Dream* in which an Aboriginal tribe contests the rights of a mining company to drill on a particular area of land which the natives consider to be sacred. (Readings 1992, 168-169) The court, set up to arbitrate on the case, renders the issue around the question of ownership. "Who owns this land?" the court asks. But the Aboriginals have no concept of land ownership, and so, from the outset, their claim on the court and on the mining company is effaced. The question with which the court begins erases the Aboriginals' claim and no amount of openness in its wake can redress the initial injustice. Hence Fiumara's criticism of the priority of the question in Gadamerian dialogue. Hermeneutic purposes would be far better served, in her view, by a practice that is certainly secondary in Gadamer's account: the practice of listening. Only by listening to the other, and not by asking the other a series of questions that will allow for my establishing a common ground between myself and the other, will I avoid the kind of instrumentalist attitude to the other that Fleming recognizes in Gadamer's work.

Thus, though Gadamer-enthusiast Hoffmann speaks of the "bosom" of a Gadamerian "tradition," in which discourse is "held and nourished," (Hoffmann 2003, 90) feminist critics like Fleming and Fiumara feel utterly cast aside by the homogenizing and instrumentalist effects of Gadamer's hermeneutics. However, while they conclude from this that it would, as Fleming declares, be "a grave mistake" for feminists "to think of Gadamer as a potential friend," (Fleming 2003, 110) and while the "problem of the other" certainly poses a challenge to Gadamer's hermeneutics, to play out this problem in terms of a binary opposition between the critical possibilities inherent in the "other" context (and available in the "unfused" horizons of listening) and the purported lack of critical potential available in the "same" context (and available only to the fused horizon of questioning) is in danger of retaining an account of historical situatedness that assumes the absolute division between contexts, which is one of the prevailing myths that Gadamer's theory of the shifting and provisional nature of any context seeks to belie. There is a sense, therefore, in which these feminist criticisms of Gadamer, though pertinent, must be careful that they are not operating with too rigid an account of the distinct and critical potential of the "other" perspective in opposition to what they identify as Gadamer's too uncritical account of the "same" perspective.

However, given that these feminist criticisms of Gadamer are, with some reservations, to the point, it is now time to ask the question: what do they suggest instead? What is it, in their view, that Gadamer is missing from his account of historical understanding? While neither Fleming nor Fiumara replies to this question in any detail, each does give a brief, almost unnoticeable, indication of a response that, I suggest, is highly significant. Fleming, at the opening of her essay, and propaedeutic to her severe criticism of Gadamer's version of dialogue, identifies the demise of Gadamer's hermeneutics in its attempt to "assimilate" or "absorb" (ibid, 110) the *aesthetic* and its potential for "rupture" (ibid., 113) into an ethics of continuity in which rupture is no longer possible. Though Fleming says no more than this, the indication is that the disruptive potential (which Fleming does not explore in any detail) of the *aesthetic* would offer an antidote to Gadamer's "unity project" (ibid., 130). Likewise, Fiumara, though again only in passing, points to the positive value of undercutting the primacy of Gadamer's questions with what she calls "originary fantasies" (Fiumara 2003, 147); as a prologue to conversation, these fantasies would somehow open up a space in which there are no vested interests to oppress the other and remove her freedom to speak and be heard. While the main thrust of both Fiumara's and Fleming's essays is to undermine Gadamer's influence without pretending to offer any replacement, their joint cursory appeal to the critical possibilities inherent in aesthetic judgments of feeling is a telling indicator of the extent to which Gadamer's feminist critics do not *connect* his neglect

of history with his appeal to the aesthetic, but rather persist in identifying the aesthetic – rendered as a "pure," pre-interpretative feeling, an "originary fantasy" – as the most promising resource for *redressing* his neglect of history. However, on a certain reading of one aspect of the introductory and concluding chapters of this collection, this appeal to the aesthetic can be shown to be *itself* too uncritical and, as uncritical, not so promising as these feminist philosophers appear to think.

One essay that is included in this volume, an essay by Robin May Schott entitled "Gender, Nazism, and Hermeneutics," (Schott 2003, 325-334) is also included in an collection of essays on Gadamer's philosophy, published in 1997 (Hahn 1997, 499-507), in which Gadamer gives a response to each of the contributors (Gadamer 1997, 508). Schott's essay is critical of Gadamer, and particularly of Gadamer's persistent refusal to comment on how his own historical circumstances – varied and significant as they must have been, for a man who lived in Germany during the entire of the twentieth century – informed his philosophical views. Schott refers, in illustration of this point, to Gadamer's autobiographical *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, in which Gadamer devotes but a few short and opaque pages to his life before university and the entire remainder of the book to the various philosophical figures – Natorp, Heidegger and others – by whom he was influenced. (Gadamer 1985) Gadamer, Schott maintains, constructs his tradition in a very deliberate manner, abstracting Gadamer-the-canonical-philosopher from all those other aspects of Gadamer's history and experiences that must, if his own account of effective history is pertinent, have informed his philosophy. If, as Gadamer claims, everything that can be experienced is experienced in language and language is a fundamentally historical phenomenon¹, still it seems, Schott implies, as if there are many experiences – of home life, family, childhood, etc. – for which Gadamer has no words (Schott 2003, 329). What is interesting here, however, is that the response that Gadamer gives to Schott's essay in the 1997 publication, in which he claims that Ms. Schott has "wasted her time" (Gadamer 1997, 508) in trying to offer a critique of his philosophy via a reading of his autobiography, is excluded by Code from this collection. Why? Because, Code claims in her introduction, it is brief and dismissive of Scott's concerns and, most significantly, this brevity and dismissal is "not representative" of Gadamer's general openness and willingness to engage in dialogue. (Code 2003a, 25) However, as some of the essays in this collection show so well, this tendency of Gadamer to summarily dismiss a certain level of historical experience as irrelevant for philosophy *is* representative of a very worrying trend in his hermeneutics, and is in fact, as *none* of the essays in this

¹ "The linguisticity of understanding is *the concretion of historically effected consciousness*," Gadamer says (Gadamer 1989, 389).

collection seem to realize but as I will indicate now, carefully built into his philosophy via the very account of aesthetic judgment as a "pure" feeling that some of his feminist opponents call upon as their ally. Hence, the narrowness of which Schott is the victim and that Code laments in her introduction is secured by Gadamer's account of the aesthetic as pure feeling; feminists critics who would temper his narrow universalism with a greater historical sensitivity had better, therefore, be very careful about appealing to the supposedly "disruptive" capacity of aesthetic judgment in their support!

My claim, in warning to Gadamer's feminist critics, is that Gadamer's opening account of aesthetic judgment as a powerful means of undercutting certain prevailing, scientific assumptions about the nature of judgment is actually a *culprit* in the tensions that pervade Gadamer's work between a commitment to other traditions, persons etc., and a tendency to enclose understanding within a framework of prejudice that undermines this commitment, between an explicit dedication to diversity and contingency in judgment and an implicit, and increasingly influential, reliance on ahistorical criteria to reduce the impact of diversity and contingency in judgment. In the space allowed here, I can but give the bare bones of this tension, suggest its possible source as I see it and indicate those places in his work where support for this suggestion is to be found.

Two aspects of his philosophical tradition bear down upon Gadamer in ways he does not expect, given his broad commitments to effective history and its implications for the nature of understanding. They are: Kant's account of aesthetic judgment and the Classical tradition of Plato and Aristotle. Early on in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer enters into a detailed discussion of Kant's account of taste, placing his own rendition of aesthetic judgment both within, and in opposition to, this influential account. Gadamer accepts the "purity" (in the sense of non-objective disinterestedness) of Kant's version of taste, and regards this as the main attraction of Kant's account for any attempt to overcome the primacy given to scientific objectivism in the contemporary climate. (This is why, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer follows his initial criticism of the natural sciences model with a discussion of the Kantian aesthetic, which is to be the partial source of his alternative). But Gadamer also *rejects* the "purity" (in the sense of purely formal disinterestedness) of Kant's version of taste, unimpressed by the very limited range of aesthetic "object" (only what is *purposeless*: natural objects and the design features in art) then available to this potentially powerful antidote to science. (Gadamer 1989, 42) Thus, from Kant, Gadamer adopts the dual task of delineating a capacity for aesthetic judgment that is "pure" of the objectivist practice of applying pregiven categories to individual instances thereof, and that is yet concerned with establishing the substance or significance, and not merely the formal possibilities, of its "objects."

Now, combine this equivocal attitude to his Kantian inheritance with his similarly equivocal attitude to his Classical inheritance. Gadamer points us to the Classical tradition as having provided us with an *example* of the kind of "pure" (non-objective) yet "impure" (not purely formal) aesthetic judgment that he wants to fashion into an alternative to scientific judgment and a way of acknowledging the historical nature of understanding. The Classical tradition in art refers, of course, to a specific time and place, to the aesthetic values of ancient Greece and Rome and to the rejuvenation of those values in eighteenth-century Europe. And yet, the term "classical" is also used as a normative term, to designate a certain status to an artwork, of any period or type, that is sufficiently impressive as to have significance across time and place, beyond the bounds of its historical conditions. In this manner, Gadamer argues, the Classical is a perfect example of the kind of aesthetic judgment that he wants to derive from Kant's third critique and use against the prevailing account of judgment that takes understanding within the natural sciences as its paradigm: it enjoys normative power, such that a "classical" artwork possesses a set of broad characteristics that demand to be understood by anyone anywhere as implying a certain *significance*; and yet that normative weight relies on no one identifiable set of specific characteristics that operate across contexts to *determine* the classical artwork *objectively*. A judgment about the classical, while always *substantial* (when we call an artwork "classical," we do not make an empty, purely formal, claim but predicate certain features, such as permanence and good "balance" or symmetry, of the work), is never *objectivist* (those features – permanence, balance, etc – do not make the task of judging an artwork to be a "classic" into a matter of merely subsuming it under a set of determining criteria; for there are as many ways to achieve permanence and balance as there are historical conditions for doing so). Thus, as Gadamer puts it, "we might say that the classical is a truly historical category, precisely in that it is more than a concept of a period or an historical stylistic one and that yet it does not seek to be a suprahistorical concept of value" (Gadamer 1989, 225); it confers a *significance* that is transcontextual, and yet it does not determine which *objects* are to enjoy this significance.

Taken as a whole, however, Gadamer's Kantian-Classical tradition ends in contradicting key aspects of his commitment to history and difference. From Kant, Gadamer takes his conviction in the *distinctness* of aesthetic judgment and in the division between thought (which leads to objective knowledge and involves the application of concepts) and feeling (which generates "purely" aesthetic conclusions that are not determined by any prior concepts) on which this distinctness relies. Gadamer thereby secures for himself a version of understanding that does not do what science says we must do, that relies on a common *sense* or feeling and that yet arrives at conclusions whose validity is binding in a manner

that a purely subjective or purely "relative" judgment would not be. But Gadamer then departs from what he identifies as the ahistorical, unacceptably "purist," aspect of Kant's aesthetic – its determination to make common sense into a *universal* sense by giving its conclusions a purely formal, and not substantial, significance – by rendering this common sense as a sense for the significance of an artwork's *content* and not just of its *form*: judgments of taste extend to the tradition from which the artwork comes, to its subject matter, to its use of colour, to the emotions it communicates etc., and not just to those design features that make us think of it as if it were without a purpose or agenda and therefore impossible to *interpret* but only to appreciate. However, his choice of the Classical as an example of a substantial judgment of taste is an unhappy one, since the values that the Classical exports and that constitute the substance of its sense of taste are those very values that Kant held to be most important to the aesthetic and that Gadamer initially rejects as too limiting on the interruptive potential of the aesthetic: the values of purity, objectivity, restraint and a strict adherence to form. Thus, the example that Gadamer uses to temper the Kantian insistence on the purely formal nature of taste, and as illustration of the manner in which a non-formal sense of taste offers an alternative to the primacy of the scientific, objectivist model, actually ends in reinscribing formality and objectivity within the terms of his aesthetic once more!

Matters get even worse, however, when it becomes clear that Gadamer no longer relies on the Classical tradition as an *example of a* tradition within which a sense of taste that is neither objectifying nor purely subjective is possible, but begins to use it as *the* tradition within which taste is possible. Though he denies that the Classical functions as a "supra-historical concept," in fact it ends in fulfilling precisely this role for Gadamer; its values, he ends in claiming, are "timeless" (Gadamer 1989, 256) – a strange claim for a philosopher so explicitly concerned with the effects of time – and the sense of taste that was to have offered an antidote to the manner in which science determines its conclusions with concepts that are not held up for question becomes itself determined by Classical values that are not held up for question. Hence, Gadamer ends in pointing us to the genre of lyric poetry, and particularly to the "pure poetry" of Mallarmé as the archetypal artform, which exhibits features that are characteristic of (appropriate) aesthetic judgments everywhere. (see Gadamer 1986) And what are these features? They include a commitment to spontaneity or "naturalness" over artificiality (the lyric is typically set up as a spontaneous emotive response to an external stimulus) and a related proximity to the "truth" about things that defies any elaborate interpretations (Mallarmé's lyrics are almost hermetic in style, not so much in opposition to the assumption that there is a meaning to be derived from an artwork but in an attempt to recreate in the work a world that reflects the "true" world of Ideal Forms in

which Mallarmé, after Plato, vehemently believed). Thus, the lyric, which is to be the art-form against which every artwork is to be measured according to Gadamer, installs into Gadamer's aesthetic *both* a Kantian elevation of the natural over the artificial (with all the restrictions that brings to the art of interpretation) and a Classical belief in the existence of a single, coherent truth (with all the restrictions that brings to a theory of understanding that would promote a process of ongoing and tolerant dialogue on different, perhaps incommensurable, perspectives). And all of this is smuggled into Gadamer's account of judgment via his initial acceptance of the faculty for "pure" feeling that Kant describes as a common sense of taste and whose alleged "purity" or innocence Gadamer never suspects but rather seizes upon as an antidote to the compromised, always ideological, nature of the model inscribed by natural science.

In a surprising passage from *Truth and Method*, an entire third of which is devoted to an account of language as the universal medium of experience, Gadamer writes that "Of course, the fundamental linguisticity of understanding cannot possibly mean that all experiencing of the world takes place only as language and in language. All too well known are those prelinguistic and metalinguistic dawns, dumbnesses, and silences in which the immediate meeting with the world expresses itself". (Gadamer 1989, 179) An apparently throwaway comment in its context, in fact Gadamer uses this notion of a "prelinguistic dawning," this "immediate meeting with the world," as a deliberate and carefully-crafted, aesthetic, means of importing a "pure" ground into his theory of effective history so that he does not have to come to terms with the implications for understanding of only having "historical, and not "pure," justifications for thought and action. And, while the feminist contributors to Code's collection have been alive to the homogenizing, terrorizing implications of this partial refusal of history, they have not identified its source in the aesthetic of "pure" feeling that Gadamer constructs. So much so that they continue, sporadically, to appeal to this "pure" feeling as a means of supplementing, and even opposing, Gadamer's abstract recommendations and universalizing tendencies.

The final, and least critical or effective, essay in this volume is by Kaplan, who attempts to explain the strategies that she has used to apply Gadamer's hermeneutics to effect a reconciliation between her faith, her feminism and her philosophy. (Kaplan 2003, 367-376) In a relatively short account, she tells us that she has used Gadamer's notion of "fusion of horizons" in a "playful" manner, allowing a series of "pre-interpretive," "poetic moments" (ibid., 368) to determine her engagement with her religious and philosophical tradition. The "poetic moment" she describes as a "bridge," a "spark that illuminates a reading" (ibid., 370); it "seizes" her, (ibid.) "arrests" her, (ibid., 368) "enwraps" her "in a new and surprising vision"(ibid., 369). Certainly, in this essay, such an account of hermeneutical

understanding does neither harm nor good; it merely results in a pretty impotent "interpretation," achieving nothing above and beyond a "play" on (which amounts to a mere repetition of) Gadamer's concept of "fusion." But, in the light of Gadamer's employing these very "pure," "poetic" moments to mobilize a certain disabling and homogenizing tradition, I suggest that the appeal to the disruptive possibilities of such aesthetic "moments" is so embroiled in the tradition that excludes her, and traditionally so exclusive of female aesthetic activity, that it is not the resource that Kaplan and others seem to think it.

Without wanting to give a definitive account of "women and art," it is possible to observe that the kind of aesthetic model of which Gadamer's favorite, the lyric poem, is exemplary presupposes a very specific aesthetic practice that has, traditionally, tended to *exclude* female creativity. Harold Bloom, an infamous contemporary proponent of the lyric-model and a lover of Western canons, at the suggestion that there might be an alternative – not quite so agonistic and solitary – account of aesthetic activity to his own model, once responded with contempt at the idea that any aesthetic tradition could be modelled on a bunch of women "lovingly cooperating with each other like quiltmakers"! (Bloom 1995, 482) And, though not all proponents of the model of art-as-pure-feeling have resorted to such name calling, certainly it has not been at all friendly to the manner in which women, traditionally, have aesthetically engaged; this, to take Bloom's example of quiltmaking as our makeshift paradigm, has often been characterized by its combination with utility, which does not accord with the idealization of "purity" or disinterestedness," and a level of cooperative activity that does not accord with the idealization of the single creator and *his* original point of view. Thus, though quilts often exhibit the kind of intricate designs that are actually compatible with the "purist" art-for-art's-sake tradition, they and their creators have been systematically excluded from the canon because they foreground a model of aesthetic production that does not conform to the ideals embodied by the lyric. Hence, as Lauter observes in an essay on feminist interventions in the theory of art, in a catalogue for a 1971 exhibition of pieced quilts, the curator claimed that the quilts were merely "imitative" of certain modern artworks, dismissed their rich expressiveness as merely "decorative," and denied the quilts the status of art because the women who made them did not think of themselves (small wonder!) as artists. (Lauter 1993, 24) Thus, as the case of quilts suggests, feminists must be careful when appealing to a disinterested or "pure" feeling as characteristic of aesthetic appreciation and productive of critical disruption; it is not the innocent or "pure" resource the tradition has tended to advertise it as and they have tended to think it.

Not only, however, do women's aesthetic practices offer a challenge to the dominant and "purist" model from *without*, they can also and effectively mount that challenge from *within*. Gadamer's conception of art is coloured by his own particular bias in favor of Clas-

sical art. This bias is further elaborated by his preference for poetry as the artform that provides the standard by which all other artforms are measured. Not only this, within the poetic, it is the lyric that is exemplary of the aesthetic in general, in Gadamer's view. All of these moves serve to narrow the scope of Gadamer's aesthetic so that, in the end, it is only a very particular tradition that corresponds to his account of art. But even this very specific tradition – the tradition of lyric poetry – can sometimes defy the rigidity of his focus. I have in mind here the lyrics of Emily Dickinson, who worked very much within the dominant genre of her time – enacting that sense of enclosure not only in her writing but in her living too – but succeeded in questioning its prevailing assumptions. For example, Dickinson's lyrics, while often conceding to the tradition by taking the form of an emotive response to an external stimulus, carefully undercut the assumption of spontaneity or "naturalness" of which the lyric is supposed to be exemplary; her poems are punctured by apparently random and disruptive blanks, foregrounding that which haunts the myth of creative spontaneity: the blank page. But these blanks are not ellipses. There is no gap in the sense of the words, nothing to make us think that there was a whole thought of which we are only getting snippets. For what we are presented with makes sense, only that we cannot deny that there were/are other possibilities. The blanks insist upon the artificiality, the constructedness, of the work. And in all of this, we are aware of the deliberate nature of representation, not as a spontaneous illumination of meaning, but as a slanted perspective that might have been otherwise. Thus, both from without Gadamer's canonical account of aesthetic judgment and from within its supposedly "pure" artforms, certain female aesthetic practices can work to undermine the dominant tradition that would elevate an isolated creativity operating on a "pure feeling" as the paradigm for aesthetic engagement.

All of which might inspire another volume of feminist interpretations of Gadamer, one that might supplement the valuable indications that Code's contributors provide of the weaknesses in Gadamer's work with a greater commitment to locating the source of, and applying a remedy to, these weaknesses and a consequent refusal to perpetuate Gadamer's mistakes by continuing to appeal to a capacity for pure feeling as the best way to acknowledge the principle of "effective history" and its implications for understanding.

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