

## Aesthetic Emotions, Feelings and Modes of Action Readiness

Contribution for Ronnie de Sousa's *Festschrift*

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**Abstract** De Sousa has argued that aesthetic emotions lack a motivational dimension, unlike practical, garden-variety emotions. In this article, I first try to understand what aesthetic emotions are, and then explore de Sousa's reasons for proposing that aesthetic emotions are for feeling rather than for doing. I argue that, on the contrary, aesthetic emotions have a great many bodily and mental modes of action readiness associated with them. At the same time, I share de Sousa's view that there is something special about the nature of aesthetic experience, namely a type of 'savoring' which allows us to indulge in the details of the artwork and in the satisfaction it gives us. This experiential savoring is shaped by the conative dimension of aesthetic emotions rather than being disconnected from it. I conclude by rejecting the existence of a difference in kind between practical and aesthetic emotions with respect to the modes of action readiness they involve.

### De Sousa on Practical Emotions vs. Polychrome Emotions<sup>1</sup>

De Sousa (2011, 108) draws a distinction between two types of emotions which is 'based on the roles they play in our lives'. I refer to the two proposed emotion types as the *practical emotions*,<sup>2</sup> and the *polychrome emotions*. De Sousa tells us that the distinction between them is 'nonexclusive and somewhat vaguely defined' (108), but also that it is important. He proposes two main differences between the two classes of emotions.

First, the practical emotions are tools for doing, whereas the polychrome emotions are tools for feeling. The practical emotions are associated with action tendencies and their point is to predispose us to act in particular ways. Examples may include fear of a bear appearing in the distance, which predisposes us to freeze, or anger at a reviewer who describes our recently published book as rubbish, which predisposes us to strike back in some way. Polychrome emotions are for De Sousa not associated with action tendencies, and their point 'lies not in what they dispose us to do, but in what they enable us to feel' (108). As a result of their lack of connection to action and centrality of experience for its own sake, the polychrome emotions 'play little part in preserving or reproducing life, [but] are those most likely to make it worth living' (118).

Polychrome emotions often emerge from our exposure to art. For example, the wonder I experience at Picasso's *Guernica* enables me to feel the greatness of its artistic achievement, and

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Christine Tappolet and Jessica Berry for very helpful comments on the previous draft.

<sup>2</sup> De Sousa (2011) at times refers to what I call the practical emotions as the black-and-white emotions.

the experience of being moved by the sacrifice of Di Caprio's character in *Titanic* enables me to feel the depth of his love for Winslet's character. But polychrome emotions can also occur in other domains. De Sousa endorses Mayeroff's suggestion that human lives contain 'quiet experiences', characterized by 'lack of purpose, lack of doing and manipulating, lack of sharing, and lack of the immediately practical and social' (Mayeroff 1963, 146). Mayeroff proposes as examples of quiet experiences listening to raindrops, watching snowflakes come down or looking at the sea, none of which need be an aesthetic experience.

Second, De Sousa tells us that whereas there is a limited number of practical emotions, there is an infinite number of polychrome emotions: 'there are no practical limits to the number of distinct emotions that can be experienced, any more than there are limits to the number of thoughts one can have' (108). Polychrome emotions are fundamentally experiences of 'multi-dimensional axiological perception' (108), i.e. perception of values, and there are infinite possible combinations of such dimensions.

De Sousa interprets the dimensions of emotions along the lines of Scherer's (2005, 2009) version of appraisal theory, according to which emotions are effects of a roster of appraisals along the main dimensions of relevance, consequences, coping potential, and normative significance, each of which contains further sub-dimensions of appraisal. On Scherer's model, each appraisal output has an independent impact on autonomic physiological changes, action tendencies, motor expressions, and subjective feelings. An emotion is instantiated when 'most' of these systems – the appraisal system, the neurophysiological system, the motivational system, the motor expression system, and the feeling system – manifest synchronized changes. Since there are a great many profiles of appraisal that can lead to synchronized configurations of continuously changing components, the number of potential emotions far exceeds the number of lexicalized emotion terms.

Scherer suggests that the terms we commonly use – e.g. 'anger', 'sadness', 'disgust' and so on – correspond to patterns of appraisal that are especially common in the life of organisms due to recurring challenges and opportunities. Scherer (2005) proposes to call these frequently occurring emotions *modal emotions*. De Sousa similarly argues that the emotions coded in language are those 'elicited by paradigmatic life-situations of greatest significance to our life concerns' (116). He

concludes that pragmatic emotions are the most likely emotions to be lexicalized, which leaves an infinite number of polychrome emotions nameless.

The purpose of this *Festschrift* contribution is to assess de Sousa's proposal that there is an important, although elusive, distinction between practical emotions and the type of polychrome emotions de Sousa focuses on primarily, namely aesthetic emotions. I first consider how de Sousa characterizes aesthetic emotions, offering a taxonomic proposal of my own. I then evaluate the claim that aesthetic emotions lack distinctive modes of action readiness. Although I ultimately disagree with de Sousa both on how to characterize aesthetic emotions and on their alleged lack of connection to action, I think de Sousa is right to consider aesthetic emotions special with respect to the nature of their experiences. I aim to capture de Sousa's insights on aesthetic experience within a modified framework which gives pride of place to action readiness in the aesthetic domain.

### **What Are Aesthetic Emotions?**

De Sousa draws most of his examples of aesthetic emotions from the consumption of art, but aesthetic experiences also occur in other domains – they may have as their target athletic feats like scoring a goal in soccer from 40 meters, intellectual achievements like writing Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, natural phenomena like a gorgeous sunset, or artifacts like the iconic Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman. Nevertheless, I follow de Sousa in focusing on the aesthetic emotions associated with art – if these sorts of polychrome emotions do not differ fundamentally from practical emotions, the distinction de Sousa seeks to draw becomes much less promising because it loses its paradigm case.

Understanding whether aesthetic emotions differ from practical emotions requires first explaining what aesthetic emotions are. This is where we face our first major obstacle, because there is no consensus on how to think of aesthetic emotions, or even on whether aesthetic emotions exist (see e.g. Robinson 2020; Schindler et al. 2017; Fingerhut and Prinz 2020; Menninghaus et al. 2019; Skov and Nadal 2020; Todd, Forthcoming). De Sousa (2011) spends quite a bit of time telling us what he thinks aesthetic emotions *are not*, but he has less to say about what he thinks aesthetic emotions *are*, relying mostly on an intuitive understanding of the notion. Since the notion is highly

contentious, I sketch a working definition of aesthetic emotion and rely on it to examine whether aesthetic emotions are for feeling rather than for doing.

De Sousa (2011) rejects two main alternatives concerning the nature of aesthetic emotions: he argues that they are neither garden-variety practical emotions – what he calls ‘great passions’ – nor emotions of ‘unrepeatable individuality’ (109), which would prevent us from organizing them into types. De Sousa’s argument for this two-part conclusion focuses on the roles emotions play in art, more specifically on the emotions *elicited* (or evoked or induced) by art and on the emotions *expressed* (or represented or conveyed) by art.

De Sousa (2011) shifts seamlessly from the language of emotion expression to the language of emotion elicitation, but it is advisable to distinguish them (e.g. Gabrielsson 2002). De Sousa (2011) tells us that ‘the emotions *expressed* by music and dance’ (108, emphasis added) are not garden-variety emotions like ‘anger, fear, love, awe, jealousy, sadness, desire’ (108). The reason is that if ‘art exists merely to *evoke* those emotions’ (108, emphasis added), we could not explain art’s diversity. De Sousa’s assumption here seems to be that there are ‘no significant differences between any two instances of ‘fear,’ or ‘anger,’ or ‘jealousy,’’, from which it follows that it would be inexplicable why ‘works of art in all their diversity should be sustaining our interest for their *representation* of emotion rather than for other reasons’ (108-109, emphasis added). De Sousa is willing to make an exception for ‘wonder’, which is both a garden-variety emotion and a quintessentially aesthetic emotion.

On the other hand, De Sousa thinks it is not the case that art expresses and evokes emotions that are ‘sui generis’ in the sense of having ‘unrepeatable individuality’ (109). This would be hard to reconcile with our practices of comparing artworks in terms of their ability to express emotions: ‘if every piece of art necessarily expresses its correlative emotion, no more and no less, then that seems to remove the possibility that some forms of art might be better or worse at *expressing* emotion’ (109, emphasis added). It would also not make sense of our practices of comparing artworks in terms of ‘the emotions *evoked* by some work of art’ (109, emphasis added), which we commonly do when we suggest that the emotions elicited by a given artwork are ‘more worthwhile, more interesting, more deeply felt, more true or authentic’ (109) than the emotions elicited by another artwork.

The evaluation of this argument requires that we consider separately what the argument says about *expressed* emotions and what it says about *elicited* emotions, for the simple but compelling reason that art can express emotions it does not elicit, and it can elicit emotions it does not express. Although common language and scientific research often blur the distinction between expression and elicitation, it is important that we keep them distinct.

For the purposes of this paper, I assume that whether art elicits emotions is a matter of counterfactual or probabilistic dependency (Menzies and Beebe 2020). To wit, artwork A elicits emotion E in consumer C just in case consumer C would not have experienced E, or would have been unlikely to experience E, at a particular time had she not been exposed to A at that time. Picasso's *Guernica* elicits wonder in me whenever I look at it or imagine it at time t, in the sense that had I not looked at it or imagined it at time t, I would have been unlikely to experience wonder at time t.

I further assume that whether art expresses emotions is a matter of evidentiary dependency. Artwork A expresses emotion E to art consumer C just in case it provides art consumer C with evidence for E, for example by resembling facial expressions or vocal and postural changes or behaviors typical of E or by manifesting other features that justify inferring E (Tormey 1971; Davis 1988; Matravers 2013).

Picasso's *Guernica* expresses dread to me because it portrays scattered remnants of dying human and animal bodies with faces torn by pain in the aftermath of a bombing during the Spanish civil war. It does not express wonder despite eliciting it in me and in many other art consumers.<sup>3</sup>

Now, I agree with de Sousa that our evaluative practices with respect to art are hard to reconcile with the view that art elicits or expresses *only* emotions of unrepeatable individuality. We often compare artworks in terms of the emotions they elicit – we may describe Mozart's *Requiem* as

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<sup>3</sup> In other cases, the emotions *expressed* and the emotions *elicited* correspond – music that expresses sadness may also elicit sadness. The point is that we have at this stage no reason to think that there is a systematic and predictable relationship between emotions expressed and emotions elicited – this demands that we distinguish what we say about emotion expression from what we say about emotion elicitation.

evoking in us a more worthwhile, more interesting, more deeply felt, more true or authentic emotion than Madonna's *Like a Virgin*. We also often compare artworks in terms of their ability to express a given emotion – we may describe Munch's *The Scream* as better at expressing anxiety than Rothko's *Rust and Blue*.

These evaluative practices require comparing the emotions elicited or expressed by different artworks, and this prevents artworks from eliciting or expressing emotions which are never commensurable with one another. Each token of an emotion type is in some sense unique, but this is not what worries de Sousa – the emotions expressed by Munch's and Rothko's paintings can be unique in some of their characteristics while still belonging to the emotion type of anxiety with respect to which we compare them.

At the same time, I find it quite plausible that there will be a great many aesthetic emotions which do not fall into any linguistic types, just as there are plenty of unlexicalized emotions of other kinds. Good candidates are aesthetic emotions resulting from somewhat unusual combinations of aesthetic virtues and vices – say an artwork which is ugly and graceless but also intellectually challenging and original. We may well not have a name for the aesthetic emotions that may result from exposure to such artwork.

On the other hand, I disagree with de Sousa that artworks cannot either elicit or express the 'great passions' of 'anger, fear, love, awe, jealousy, sadness, desire' in the art consumer. Awe has been singled out a prime candidate for being habitually elicited by the appreciation of great artwork (Keltner and Haidt 2003). And the desire to possess artwork you admire, or at least artwork relevantly similar to it (e.g. a lithographic copy from the museum shop), is a fairly common sign that you admire it.

Anger, fear, love, jealousy and sadness are perhaps less frequent emotional responses to artwork, but they can and often are elicited by it. We can get angry that an artwork appears to be mocking our religion, horror movies can make us afraid, we may fall in love with an artwork, we can be jealous of an artist's talent, we can be saddened by a movie's ending, and so on. A resistant strain of opposition to the view that artworks can elicit garden-variety emotions concerns instrumental music (Kivy 1990). But even instrumental music has convincingly been argued to elicit 'great

passions' through a variety of mechanisms, including among others rhythmic entrainment, contagion, visual imagery, episodic memory and musical expectancy (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008).

It is even more apparent that art can express 'anger, fear, love, awe, jealousy, sadness, desire' by providing evidence for them (Matravers 2013) – art seems very much in the business of expressing the whole range of human emotions, none barred. For example, the quest for revenge of the protagonist of Scott's *Gladiator* expresses anger, the musical theme from Spielberg's *Jaws* expresses fear, Klimt's *The Kiss* expresses love, and so on. What is less clear is *whose* emotions the emotions being expressed are. Several proposals have been offered, suggesting for instance that they are the emotions of the art creator, or the emotions of the art performer or the emotions of an imaginary 'persona' (Robinson 2005).

This theoretical puzzle does not stand in the way of a significant degree of agreement as to which emotions are being expressed. This is true even for artworks of purely instrumental music, once again a particularly challenging case. As reported by Gabrielsson (2002, 126), a wide body of research since the 1930s has found substantial listener agreement on the question of whether a particular piece of instrumental music expresses positive emotions like 'gaiety, happiness, joyfulness, triumph' or negative emotions like 'grief, melancholy, mournfulness, sadness, despair' (126).

What are we to make of de Sousa's (2011) worry that art's diversity would be inexplicable if art elicited or expressed the great passions because there would be 'no significant differences between any two instances of 'fear,' or 'anger,' or 'jealousy'' (108)? De Sousa adds a telling remark on horror movies which can help us better understand his concerns. He says that 'once you've seen one scary alien-invasion movie, you've seen them all' (109). What I take him to mean is that scary alien invasion movies tend to have a formulaic plot, which involves fear always having the same elicitor (scary aliens!), always being very intense, always leading to frantic attempts to escape, always involving lots of blood-curdling screaming, and so, predictably, on and on.

If this is the problem with scary alien movies, it is on them, not on fear. Artists are certainly capable of producing strikingly original takes on fear, anger or jealousy, with each garden variety emotion being portrayed as having vastly different elicitors, varying intensity levels, and subtle and

unexpected manifestations in the form of distinctive combinations of emotion components. Accounting for art's diversity, as de Sousa demands that we do, requires realizing that art does not just aim to express and elicit garden-variety emotions – it aims to express and elicit such emotions in ways that contribute to artistic value. And these value-conferring emotions cannot be understood as all unrepeatably unique, because if they were, we could not account for our habits of comparing artworks in terms of their ability to express and elicit emotions of artistic value.

We have so far explored what aesthetic emotions are not, but what *are* they? First, I take aesthetic emotions to be emotions elicited rather than expressed by artworks (for a similar taxonomic choice, see Schindler et al. 2017). Whatever emotion an artwork expresses is not going to qualify as an aesthetic emotion – aesthetic emotions are the emotions experienced by art consumers. This is of course compatible with the emotions experienced by art consumers being crucially connected to the emotions expressed by the artwork, as when we respond to music that expresses joy by becoming joyful. Since de Sousa thinks that aesthetic emotions are experiences, I believe he would agree with this proposed regimentation of the notion of aesthetic emotion.

Second, not every emotion elicited by an artwork is an aesthetic emotion. This is what I am willing to retain of de Sousa's dismissal of the 'great passions' in aesthetics – merely producing a garden variety emotion does not an aesthetic emotion make. I refer to any emotions produced by an artwork as *art-elicited emotions* (the term comes from Menninghaus et al. 2019). I distinguish two types of art-elicited emotions which are not aesthetic: *incidental art-elicited emotions* and *target-focused art-elicited emotions* (see Figure 1 below).

Incidental art-elicited emotions are produced by artworks through deviant causal chains. I may experience fear as I watch a comedy about someone winning the lottery and losing the ticket because the protagonist of the movie shares a name with a threatening stalker of mine who just violated a restraining order. This episode of fear, although caused by exposure to art, is not caused by exposure to art in the right way for the resulting emotion to qualify as aesthetic. An incidental art-elicited emotion is neither about the artwork nor about targets that the artwork evokes in the proper way.

*Target-focused art-elicited emotions* have targets properly evoked by the artwork by virtue of its content or form. Examples of such targets include characters described in novels or movies, creatures portrayed in paintings, sculpted or photographed subjects, imagined musical personas, situations hinted at by the artwork, etc. Targets differ in terms of whether they are real or fictional, and in terms of how broad they are. For example, Kubrick's movie *The Shining* elicits target-focused fear when it leads me to feel fear on behalf of the wife hunted by her crazed axe-wielding husband in a remote mountain resort, a target which is both specific and fictional. On the other hand, Bigelow's movie *The Hurt Locker* may elicit target-focused sympathy for soldiers involved in wars abroad (Friend 2010), a target which is both real and unspecific.

When the target of target-focused art-elicited emotions is fictional, the so-called *paradox of fiction* emerges, which arises when we experience emotions towards characters or situations we know not to exist. This is paradoxical because our emotions in domains other than art appear to be highly sensitive to the knowledge of whether their targets exist (Radford 1975; for an overview of solutions to the paradox of fiction, see Cova and Friend, Forthcoming).

The category of target-focused art-elicited emotions is meant to include emotional responses to the emotions expressed by the artwork. The painting *Dance* by Matisse expresses joy and it may elicit target-focused joy in me by entraining me to join in with the graceful dancers. Similarly, Albinoni's *Adagio* expresses sadness and it may elicit target-focused sadness in me as I resonate with the movements and sounds of an imaginary sad persona. Although the category of target-focused art-elicited emotions is intended to be a capacious category – it includes all art-elicited emotions which are not incidental and which do not have the artwork itself as their object – there may be puzzle cases in which it is not clear whether the artwork evokes any real, fictional, specific or broad target, as in some cases of abstract art, conceptual art or instrumental music.

*Artwork-focused art-elicited emotions* have the artwork itself as a target – they are *about* the artwork on account of its form or content or both.<sup>4</sup> These are the only art-elicited emotions I

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<sup>4</sup> Frijda (1986, 356) has similarly distinguished between *complementing emotions* and *responding emotions*, the former elicited by the 'depicted characters' fate' and the latter elicited by 'the structure of the work of art as such'. It is not solely the structure of the artwork, however, which produces artwork-focused art-elicited emotions - art consumers respond to non-structural features of the artwork as well, for example its ability to elicit aesthetically valuable emotions in them. Furthermore, some complementing emotions are elicited by the emotions expressed by the artwork rather than the fate of the depicted characters.

consider to be genuinely aesthetic emotions. Note that, unlike target-focused art-elicited emotions, which often have fictional targets, artwork-focused art-elicited emotions always have real targets, namely any physical object or performance that qualifies as an artwork. The awe I experience at the book *Anna Karenina* is not about Anna Karenina, the fictional heroine described by Tolstoy, but about the actual aesthetic properties of the book. Sometimes the target of my aesthetic emotions is not the artwork as a whole, but a specific aspect of it. I can experience the beauty of the painting *Dance*, and I can experientially grasp Matisse's skill in painting it.<sup>5</sup> Aesthetic emotions that have artworks as their target can also be negative.<sup>6</sup> I can experience boredom or even contempt at an artwork that miserably fails at what it tries to achieve. And I can feel its utter ugliness and lack of originality.

To sum up, aesthetic emotions will be understood in what follows as emotional responses to appraisals of the aesthetic properties of an artwork.<sup>7</sup> Such properties cannot be described exhaustively, because too many factors can in principle underlie a positive or negative evaluation of artistic value. This being said, the following aesthetic properties appear especially common and significant: the presence or absence of beauty, grace, elegance, intellectual challenge, formal complexity and coherence, ability to convey complex meanings, ability to express emotions, ability to elicit target-focused emotions, originality, creativity, skillfulness and so on.<sup>8</sup> *Global artwork-focused aesthetic emotions* involve appraisals of the whole roster of aesthetic properties

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<sup>5</sup> The idea that I can have feelings associated with specific aesthetic virtues and vices was inspired by Menninghaus et al. (2019) discussion of a class of aesthetic emotions whose 'key semantic constituent is not an emotion term, but a term that primarily designates an object's aesthetic virtue, with beauty being the most significant example' (176). They introduced in this context the feeling of beauty, the feeling of the sublime, the feeling of vividness, and the feeling of groove.

<sup>6</sup> Some authors assume that aesthetic emotions must be tied to a positive aesthetic evaluation of the artwork. For example, Robinson (2020) describes aesthetic emotions as 'emotions of appreciation' which 'literally embody the satisfaction that a positive aesthetic experience can provide, and simultaneously provide evidence (although not overpowering evidence) for the aesthetic value of the artwork' (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Note that an emotion-eliciting appraisal that an artwork has a certain aesthetic property differs from a reflective aesthetic judgment that an artwork has such property. There are bound to be cases of recalcitrance even in the aesthetic domain, in which emotional appraisals coexist with reflective judgments that contradict them. At a minimum, aesthetic emotions should provide evidence to be considered in forming an aesthetic judgment about the presence or absence of a given aesthetic property in an artwork.

<sup>8</sup> These are some of the key properties Gaut (2000) singles out in his cluster account of art as conferring artwork status to an object as long as 'enough' of them are instantiated.

of an artwork (e.g. awe), whereas *local artwork-focused aesthetic emotions* involve appraisals of individual aesthetic properties or subgroups of aesthetic properties (feelings of beauty, skill, originality, etc.) (see Figure 1).

The figure below captures the taxonomic distinctions I have introduced so far:

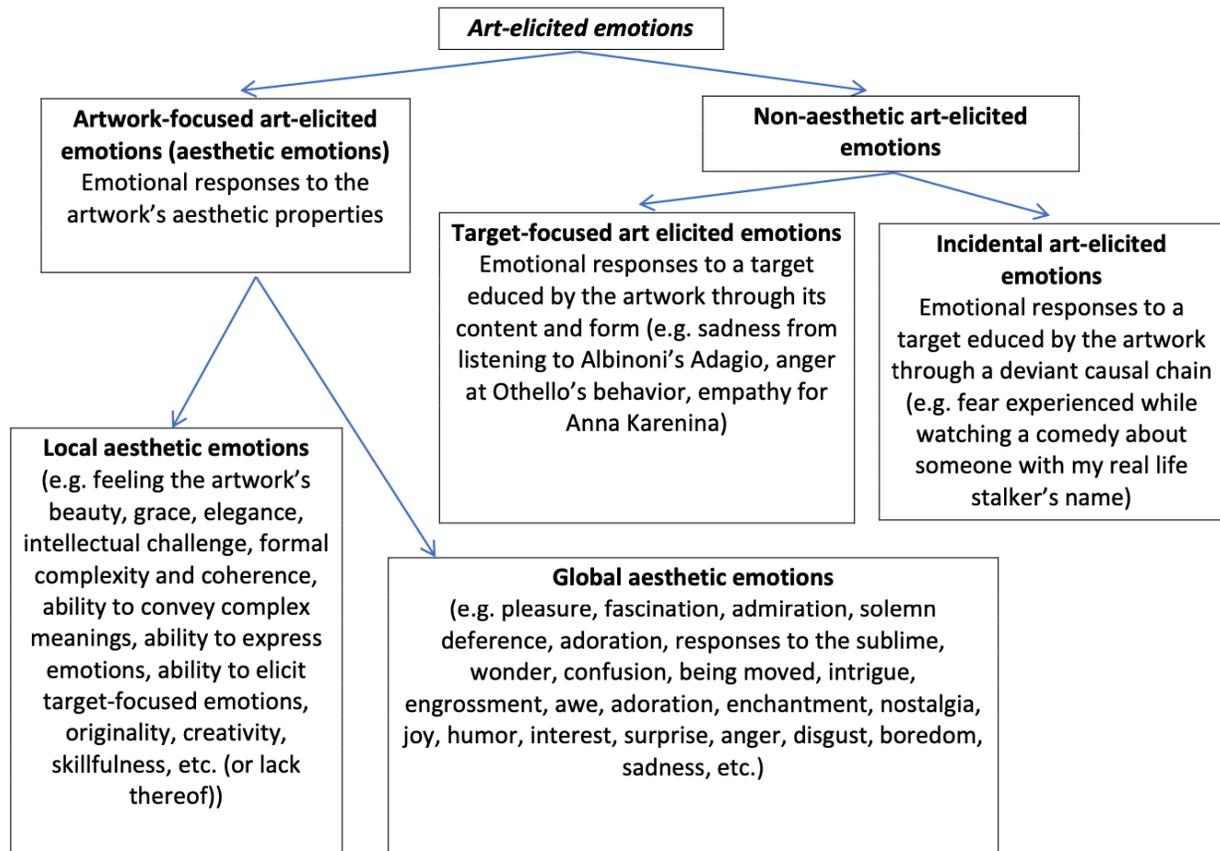


Figure 1: Three types of art-elicited emotions, two types of aesthetic emotions

Artwork-focused and target-focused emotions are essentially connected. Whether and how an artwork produces emotions toward the targets it evokes through its content and/or form plays a key role in determining what artwork-focused aesthetic emotions we experience, if any. I may experience target-focused fear as I watch a scary alien movie, but find the plot hackneyed and unadventurous, and ultimately become annoyed at the movie because of the cheap and predictable way it makes me experience fear.

Conversely, I may experience target-focused fear as I watch *The Shining*, and come to admire the movie because its narrative adeptness at portraying an unfolding danger keeps me on the edge of my seat. Notably, the very same emotions can be experienced towards targets evoked by the artwork and towards the artwork itself. I may be moved by the fate of Jesus, portrayed in *La Pietà* by Michelangelo as a lifeless body tenderly held by the Virgin Mary after the crucifixion, and I may be moved by the greatness of the aesthetic achievement the sculpture represents. Finally, it is unclear in some cases whether a given emotion is directed at the evoked target or at the artwork or at both. Suppose I listen to a New Orleans Old Jazz piece and experience joy – am I joyful about the music itself or about the musical persona it evokes or about both?

With this preliminary understanding of aesthetic emotions on hand, we can now ask whether there is a restricted list of aesthetic emotion types we can experience towards an artwork. The answer is negative, because aesthetic properties form a potentially open set and they can combine in uncountably many ways, leading to lots and lots of different affective responses, a great many of which will not be coded in language. At the same time, some aesthetic emotions are much more common than others, so we can make some headway in listing *prototypical* aesthetic emotions.

Schindler et al. (2017) offer a list of 21 prototypical aesthetic emotions which comprises the feeling of beauty/liking, fascination, being moved, awe, enchantment, nostalgia/longing, joy, humor, vitality, energy, relaxation, surprise, interest, intellectual challenge, insight, feeling of ugliness, boredom, confusion, anger, uneasiness, and sadness. Menninghaus et al. (2019) do not provide a full list, but prominently mention joy, amusement, nostalgia, surprise, being moved, being shattered, fascination, boredom, disgust, anger, the feeling of beauty, the feeling of the sublime, the feeling of vividness, the feeling of groove. Fingerhut and Prinz (2020) focus on positive aesthetic emotions, listing pleasure, interest, intrigue or curiosity, engrossment or absorption, (nameless) affective responses to the sublime, awe, wonder, admiration, adoration and solemn deference.

The question before us is: do aesthetic emotions lack modes of action readiness, as de Sousa has proposed?

## Aesthetic Emotions and Their Modes of Action Readiness

To recap, de Sousa's (2011) view is that 'the aesthetic is precisely the domain in which we escape the forced choices imposed on us by the need to act' (86). It is the paradigmatic domain in which polychrome emotions are supposed to operate as tools for feeling rather than doing. The idea that the *aesthetic* contrasts with the *practical* has a long history in philosophy. It finds its most consequential expression in Kant's (2000/1790) theory of disinterested aesthetic pleasure, which continues to reverberate in contemporary aesthetics research. Kant proposed that there is something very special about aesthetic pleasure, namely that it does not come from the satisfaction of our interests, but rather from a place of detached contemplation of the artwork which, in turn, does not lead to any desires to act.

Aesthetic pleasure is in this dual sense 'disinterested': it does not presuppose goals/interests and it does not aim to satisfy goals/interests. As Guyer puts it, aesthetic pleasure arises 'solely from the contemplation of [its] objects without regard to any purposes that can be fulfilled or interests that can be served by their existence' (Guyer 2000, xxviii, as quoted in Robinson 2020). Kant contrasts aesthetic pleasure with 'pleasure in the agreeable', which is instead utilitarian in nature. We take pleasure in a great meal or in an efficient lawnmower because of how they promote our interests and goals. The pleasure we take in Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, on the other hand, is disinterested insofar as it is aesthetic.

The Kantian view has been extended by de Sousa to all aesthetic affective responses elicited by artwork, rather than just to pleasure. On his view, the point of aesthetic emotions cannot be to predispose us to act but rather to allow us to have life-fulfilling experiences. As de Sousa puts it, 'the universal cultivation of art attests to the importance of emotional experience for its own sake. Insofar as we are consumers of art, much of our emotional life is devoted to experiencing emotion in abstraction from action-tendencies' (de Sousa 2007, 386) – aesthetic emotions simply do not trigger any action-tendencies.

De Sousa (2011) is not the only prominent contemporary emotion theorist to see things this way. Scherer (2005) has similarly distinguished between *utilitarian emotions* and *aesthetic emotions*. Utilitarian emotions 'facilitat[e] our adaptation to events that have important consequences for our

wellbeing' (706), whereas aesthetic emotions appear to abstract from the agent's well-being and focus instead on recognizing the intrinsic aesthetic properties of the artwork. Whatever bodily changes may be involved in aesthetic emotions – e.g. goosebumps – they are 'not in the service of behavioral readiness or the preparation of specific, adaptive action tendencies' (Scherer 2005, 706-707).

My view is that, on the contrary, aesthetic emotions presuppose interests/goals and aim to satisfy interests/goals. Let us consider first the idea that when we contemplate art our interests and goals are not at stake. Although it is certainly true that our interests and goals are more pressingly involved when we face a bear in the forest than when we face a bear painting in a museum, it does not follow that no interests and goals of ours are involved in the aesthetic case.

Contemplation of art promotes interests and goals like personal growth, obtaining pleasure, avoiding monotony, meeting like-minded people, cultivating a sophisticated self-image, expanding one's knowledge, seeing one's values affirmed or challenged, experiencing closeness to others, experiencing distinctness from others, sharing reactions to artwork, supporting worthy causes and innumerable others. We would hardly step into a museum or a theatre or a movie hall if none of these interests propelled us in the background.

In addition, the appraisals of the presence or absence of some aesthetic properties presuppose interests – things are often beautiful, or able to convey complex meanings, or capable of eliciting emotions in artistically valuable ways not intrinsically, but relative to our interests. I may find beauty in a movie about protecting democracy because I have an interest in democracy being preserved. I may find a sculpture about Jesus' crucifixion capable of conveying a complex meaning in artistically meritorious ways because I have an interest in religious art. I may find a piece of music capable of producing sadness in me in ways that contribute to its artistic value because my interest in the well-being of others makes me empathize with the 'persona' in the music. And so on.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A critic may retort that we should subscribe to aesthetic formalism, the view that only abstract formal patterns independent of content like spatial relations between lines and colors in a painting qualify as aesthetically relevant. On this view, properties which depend on practical interests are definitionally non-aesthetic. See e.g. Danto (2003) for a rejection of aesthetic formalism.

The fact that the interests/goals served by contemplating artworks rarely instantiate an emergency, or that they are adaptively less important than interests/goals related to survival and reproduction, or that they involve a lower degree of component synchronization does not make them vanish as interests and goals. For this reason, we should think of aesthetic emotions as “differently interested” rather than “disinterested”.

What about the idea that aesthetic emotions do not predispose us to action? De Sousa (2011) and Scherer (2005) have focused primarily on action tendencies, but action tendencies are too narrow a category for exploring the impact aesthetic emotions have on action. Following Frijda, I recommend that we replace *action tendencies* with *modes of action readiness*. For Frijda (1986), ‘[e]motions...can be defined as modes of relational action readiness, either in the form of tendencies to establish, maintain, or disrupt a relationship with the environment or in the form of mode of relational readiness as such’ (71).

Action tendencies are ‘states of readiness to execute a given kind of action’ which is ‘defined by [the] end result aimed at’ (70). We infer the presence of an action tendency when we observe behavior which is flexible, but not randomly so, in the sense that all behaviors pursued share a defining end. For example, Frijda proposes that one can express anger with many different actions, including raising one’s voice, yelling, spitting, insulting, hitting, slandering, reporting, bad mouthing, shooting and innumerable other ways. These actions are all manifestations of the same *agonistic tendency*, in the sense that the actions in question have the same end – they are ways to aggressively remove an obstacle.

The point is that not all emotions involve action tendencies. Joy is an example of what Frijda (1986) calls a mode of relational action readiness as such, more specifically the ‘manifestation of *free activation*’ (38). Sadness is also a mode of relational action readiness as such, but it is the opposite of joy because it is a manifestation of a ‘null state’, namely a state of ‘explicit absence of relational activity’ (22). Frijda concludes that ‘null states, activation modes, and action

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tendencies proper, all are modifications of action tendency in a general sense: they all represent modes of readiness, unreadiness included, for relational action' (71).

Frijda also emphasizes that modes of action readiness involve readiness for mental rather than bodily action. Although the proper way to distinguish between mental and bodily actions is contentious (Peacocke 2021), paradigmatic cases of mental actions are broadly agreed upon. They include *attending, imagining, remembering, calculating, deciding, inferring, and thinking*. At first blush, these are things you do with your mind (plus whatever parts of the body are involved in the workings of the mind) and they do not manifest outward bodily changes (see Levy 2019 for skepticism about the mental/bodily action distinction).

With these clarifications in place, we can further spell out de Sousa's (2011) position, namely that aesthetic emotions do not involve modes of readiness for relational action, either bodily or mental. Since we have listed several prototypical aesthetic emotions, this translates to the disjunctive negative claim that modes of action readiness are not associated with either the feeling of beauty/liking, or fascination, or being moved, or awe, or enchantment, or nostalgia/longing, or joy, or humor, or vitality, or energy, or relaxation, or surprise, or interest, or intellectual challenge, or insight, or the feeling of ugliness, or boredom, or confusion, or anger, or uneasiness, or sadness, or being shattered, or disgust, or the feeling of the sublime, or the feeling of vividness, or the feeling of groove, or aesthetic pleasure, or interest, or intrigue or curiosity, or engrossment or absorption, or (nameless) affective responses to the sublime, or awe, or wonder, or admiration, or adoration or solemn deference.

This would be a surprising outcome, because when these emotions occur in non-aesthetic domains, they do involve modes of action readiness. For example, when I am interested in some X outside the aesthetic domain, this promotes readiness to explore X, readiness to learn about X, and readiness to engage with X (Thoman and Leal, Forthcoming). The types of objects towards which an emotion is directed can affect the degree of control precedence of a mode of action readiness, namely how much it 'clamor[s] for attention and for execution' (Frijda 1986, 70), but no other types of emotions seem to transition from having to not having any associated modes of action readiness depending on their objects.

Notably, it has been argued that when target-focused art-elicited emotions have fictional objects, they lack motivational force. As Walton (1978) famously pointed out, when theater goer Charles experiences what looks like fear of a green slime hurtling on screen towards the audience, he does not flee the theatre. However, this objection does not bite for two reasons. First, lack of actual action does not show that emotions experienced towards fictional objects do not involve modes of action readiness.

The fact that Charles does not flee the theatre is compatible with the presence of a predisposition to do so. What is shown by the absence of actual slime-focused evasive action on Charles' part is that he is properly regulating his fear – he is actively inhibiting a mode of action readiness he realizes does not promote his overall goals, which presumably involve finishing the movie. It is of note that theatre goers who are bad at emotion regulation and experience overwhelmingly intense episodes of fear towards fictional objects occasionally do leave the theatre.

But how do we know that lack of fleeing action is due to inhibition rather than lack of predisposition in the first place? The telltale signs are both phenomenological and physiological. Charles may *feel* readiness to leave the theatre. But even if he does not feel the pull of his action readiness, which is quite possible in low intensity cases, his bodily preparations reveal that his body is in fact preparing to flee. As Walton (1978, 6) himself acknowledges, 'his muscles are tensed, he clutches his chair, his pulse quickens, his adrenalin flows'. These are the very physiological changes characteristic of evasive bodily preparation in episodes of fear directed towards actual rather than fictional objects.

The second reason why the objection does not bite is that artwork-focused art-elicited emotions do not have fictional objects – their objects are real world products of human actions like artifacts or performances. So what de Sousa is in effect implying is that there exists a type of emotion – the aesthetic emotion – which loses all its modes of action readiness when its object is an artwork despite having such modes of action readiness when directed towards *other* real world objects.

I reject this view, and argue instead that aesthetic emotions involve a great many modes of action readiness, both bodily and mental. Some modes of action readiness are shared across aesthetic emotions with the same positive or negative valence. For example, positive aesthetic emotions like admiration, awe, and interest are associated with modes of *bodily action readiness* like readiness to orient towards the artwork, to be exposed to it at length, to take measures to protect it, to seek exposure to similar artworks, to praise the artwork with words and gestures, to smile at the artwork, to emulate the artwork, to take pictures of the artwork, to learn about the artwork, to recommend the artwork to others, to celebrate the artist, to manifest free activation (e.g. excitement), and many others (see Menninghaus et al. 2019).

Positive aesthetic emotions like admiration, awe, and interest are also associated with modes of *mental action readiness* like readiness to attend to the artwork, to contemplate its features, to open up to its message, to fondly remember the artwork at a later time, to desire to possess it, to desire to be exposed to artworks like it, to decide to buy a copy of the artwork, to join in with the artwork's beat (for music), and many others (see Menninghaus et al. 2019).

Conversely, negative aesthetic emotions like disgust, boredom and uneasiness are associated with modes of *bodily action readiness* like readiness to orient away from the artwork, to reduce exposure to it, to not take measures to protect it, to avoid exposure to similar artworks, to blame the artwork with words and gestures, to repudiate the artwork, to mockingly laugh at the artwork, to advise others against the artwork, to badmouth the artist, to manifest free deactivation, and many others (see Menninghaus et al. 2019).

Negative aesthetic emotions like disgust, boredom and uneasiness are also associated with modes of *mental action readiness* like readiness to not attend to the artwork, to skim over its features, to ignore its message, to try and forget the artwork, to desire its removal, to desire to not be exposed to artworks like it, to be out of synch with the artwork's beat (for music), and many others (see Menninghaus et al. 2019).

In addition, each aesthetic emotion has unique modes of action readiness which subtly differ from the modes of action readiness associated with other aesthetic emotions. Fingerhut and Prinz (2020)

provide several examples. They compare awe with wonder, suggesting that awe is associated with an empowering tendency to be receptive to the artwork from a vantage point of comparative smallness but also connection with the greater world around, whereas wonder is associated with a tendency to actively explore an artwork that in some ways perplexes us. As they put it, we are ready to ‘step back in awe but lean in with wonder’ (235).

Affective responses to the sublime, in turn, differ from awe in terms of their modes of action readiness, with responses to the sublime involving readiness to freeze, a tendency in line with the commonly drawn association between the sublime and terror (Burke 1998/1757, Pelowski et al., 2017). Adoration involves on their view readiness to scream and seek physical contact with the adored individual or even with things which have been in physical contact with him or her (they call it ‘positive contagion’). Solemn deference, an emotion ‘no longer prominent in the contemporary West, but prevalent elsewhere’ (Fingerhut and Prinz 2020, 236), involves a readiness to lower oneself vis a vis the master, and imitate the master’s technique.

Although I have so far focused on modes of action readiness focused on the artwork (artwork-focused modes of action readiness), aesthetic emotions also involve modes of action readiness outside of the aesthetic domain (world-focused modes of action readiness). It has been shown for example that the experience of being moved by an artwork involves a readiness to engage in prosocial behavior (Fukui and Toyoshima 2014). And exposure to literary passages has been shown to increase readiness to ascribe intentions, beliefs and emotions to others (theory of mind) (Kidd and Castano 2013).<sup>10</sup>

De Sousa briefly considers the suggestion that aesthetic emotions may involve artwork-focused modes of action readiness of the sort I described. He reports in de Sousa (2003, 12) a personal conversation on this topic with Frijda, who wrote to him as follows (see also Frijda 1986, 1989): ‘In front of art, there are the action tendencies of becoming big and proud (which may make me sing), and becoming small or humble (which may make me weep); of wanting to be the object, or be like it, or fuse with it, or to possess it, or to annihilate its seductive force; of being challenged

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<sup>10</sup> I note in passing how directly these world-focused modes of action readiness can contribute to the solution of adaptive problems. Prosocial behavior, for instance, is clearly useful for solving coordination problems of central importance for species survival. And feelings of, say, beauty towards artworks are an expression of a more general sensitivity to beauty which can play a key role in selecting fit mates for reproduction.

to explore, or of being satisfied with ‘being there’ and contented’. De Sousa finds this response ‘ingenious, but quite compatible with the radical inhibition of all these action-tendencies. For the fact remains that the only action we actually do take in the presence of art is to contemplate it’ (12).

But modes of action readiness do not cease to exist when they are inhibited – unlike reflexes, it is their very point not to lead to action independently of executive control. Inhibited modes of action readiness are still modes of action readiness, just like manifested modes of action readiness are. Furthermore, if we contemplate artworks because of the aesthetic emotions we experience, as de Sousa appears to concede, it would still be true that aesthetic emotions predispose the agent to some actions and that such actions are not always inhibited.

Notably, even Kant accepted that ‘[w]e linger in and extend the observation of beauty, because this observation reinforces and reproduces itself’ (Kant 1790/2001, 107, as quoted in Menninghaus et al. 2019, 184). More importantly, I have denied that aesthetic emotions predispose only to the contemplation of art – I have listed a great many more modes of bodily and mental action readiness associated with aesthetic emotions, some of which apply across aesthetic emotions of the same valence and some of which are associated with individual aesthetic emotions.

A final objection to my argument may be more concessive, starting from the acknowledgement that aesthetic emotions *can* involve modes of action readiness of the sorts I described, but concluding that they do *not need to*. In other words, one may try to reframe de Sousa’s thesis as the thesis that, although aesthetic emotions sometimes (or even most of the time) involve modes of bodily and mental action readiness, they do not necessarily do so.<sup>11</sup>

This would be a major climb down from the initial, Kant-inspired view that all aesthetic emotions differ from practical emotions because they do not predispose us to action. But I am not convinced by the thesis even in its curtailed form, for both empirical and conceptual reasons. My empirical prediction is that aesthetic emotions are likely to mirror fictional emotions, i.e. target-focused art-elicited emotions with non-existent targets, in manifesting bodily preparation for action in a great many cases in which modes of action readiness are not felt.

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<sup>11</sup> I want to thank Christine Tappolet for raising this objection in her comments to a previous draft.

The conceptual point is that many observers – me included – would question the sincerity of an aesthetic emotion instantiated in the absence of *any* of the forms of bodily and mental action readiness I have described. For example, if someone claimed to feel, say, wonder or admiration towards a given artwork, but had no propensity to peruse its details, no propensity to accept a copy of the artwork when offered, no propensity to learn more about the artwork when gifted with a pamphlet about its origins, no propensity to protect it from destruction, no propensity to share its praises, no propensity to be exposed to the artwork again, no propensity to see artworks similar to it in the future, and so on, I would question whether they really feel wonder or admiration towards the artwork.

I may suggest instead that they have a *favorable opinion* of the artwork which does not rise to the level of an aesthetic emotion towards the artwork. To put it otherwise, it is my view that when we ascribe aesthetic emotions we implicitly make assumptions about underlying bodily and mental propensities, as indicated by the fact that we would be inclined to withdraw the feeling ascription in the presence of evidence that the predispositions are in fact completely absent. This is not only true of aesthetic emotions – we commonly question whether someone really loves us when they say they do but fail to display any of the modes of action readiness associated with loving someone.

Although I disagree with de Sousa on the lack of motivational force for aesthetic emotions, I think he is right that there is something distinctive about the experiences associated with aesthetic emotions. This is where my account and his can come together. Positive aesthetic emotions allow for what Frijda & Sundararajan (2007) have labeled experiential ‘savoring’. Experiential savoring is typical of what they call ‘refined emotions’. Aesthetic emotions are refined in the sense that they involve highly focused attention, and come with the awareness that we are having such experiences.

Why is that? As I have argued in an earlier part of this paper, the difference that makes a difference is not that we approach artworks with no personal interests and goals at stake. It is because the interests and goals at stake in art appreciation do not generally involve situations of extreme urgency. As I stare at the bear who may pounce on me, I perceive the world in terms of what it affords to me by way of escape. All details of my experience are relegated in the background

insofar as they do not serve the goal of escaping. And because my escape must take place on an accelerated time scale, I do not have the time to attend to my own experience – I lack second-order awareness.

When I look at the painting of a bear in a museum with wonder, on the other hand, I am aware that I am having this experience, and I indulge in the pleasure it provides, taking in as many experiential details as I can. Far from being independent from action readiness, this savoring experience is essentially shaped by it. It is because my wonder at the painting comes with readiness to attend to it, to contemplate its features, to be open to its message, to recommend it to others, to engage in inquiry about the features of it that perplex me, and so on that my experience of wonder feels the way it does. What I am feeling are, *inter alia*, my impulses to embrace and celebrate the artwork (or to reject it and criticize it in the case of negative aesthetic emotions).

In turn, my feelings shape my motivation, as I aim to see the artwork again at least in part on account of the pleasure I felt while seeing it. Finally, it is worth clarifying that my aesthetic experience is not exhausted by the experience of my action impulses – what I am experiencing are potentially all components of my aesthetic emotion, including the appraisal it involves, the underlying changes in physiology, the facial and postural changes that take place and so on.<sup>12</sup>

The upshot of this discussion is that the dichotomy between practical emotions, which are supposedly for doing, and aesthetic emotions, which are supposedly for feeling, turns out to be spurious. If what I am feeling includes my experience of being ready to do things, then what aesthetic emotions enable me to feel is essentially tied to what they dispose me to do. On the view I have defended, aesthetic experiences have a conative dimension which detaches the emoter from *other* compelling needs to act – what is to be done at the time of art contemplation has the artwork as its primary object. This focus on the artwork, which comes with awareness of having it, makes experiential savoring possible, which de Sousa rightly sees as the hallmark of aesthetic experience.

I conclude that aesthetic emotions, the paradigmatic polychrome emotions for de Sousa, do not differ in kind from practical emotions with respect to their modes of action readiness. Whether

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<sup>12</sup> I thank Christine Tappolet from pressing me on these points.

there exist other polychrome, non-aesthetic emotions which are different in kind from practical emotions in motivational terms remains to be seen.

The following figure summarizes the taxonomic distinctions and substantive claims on the modes of readiness associated with aesthetic emotions I have been sketching in this paper:

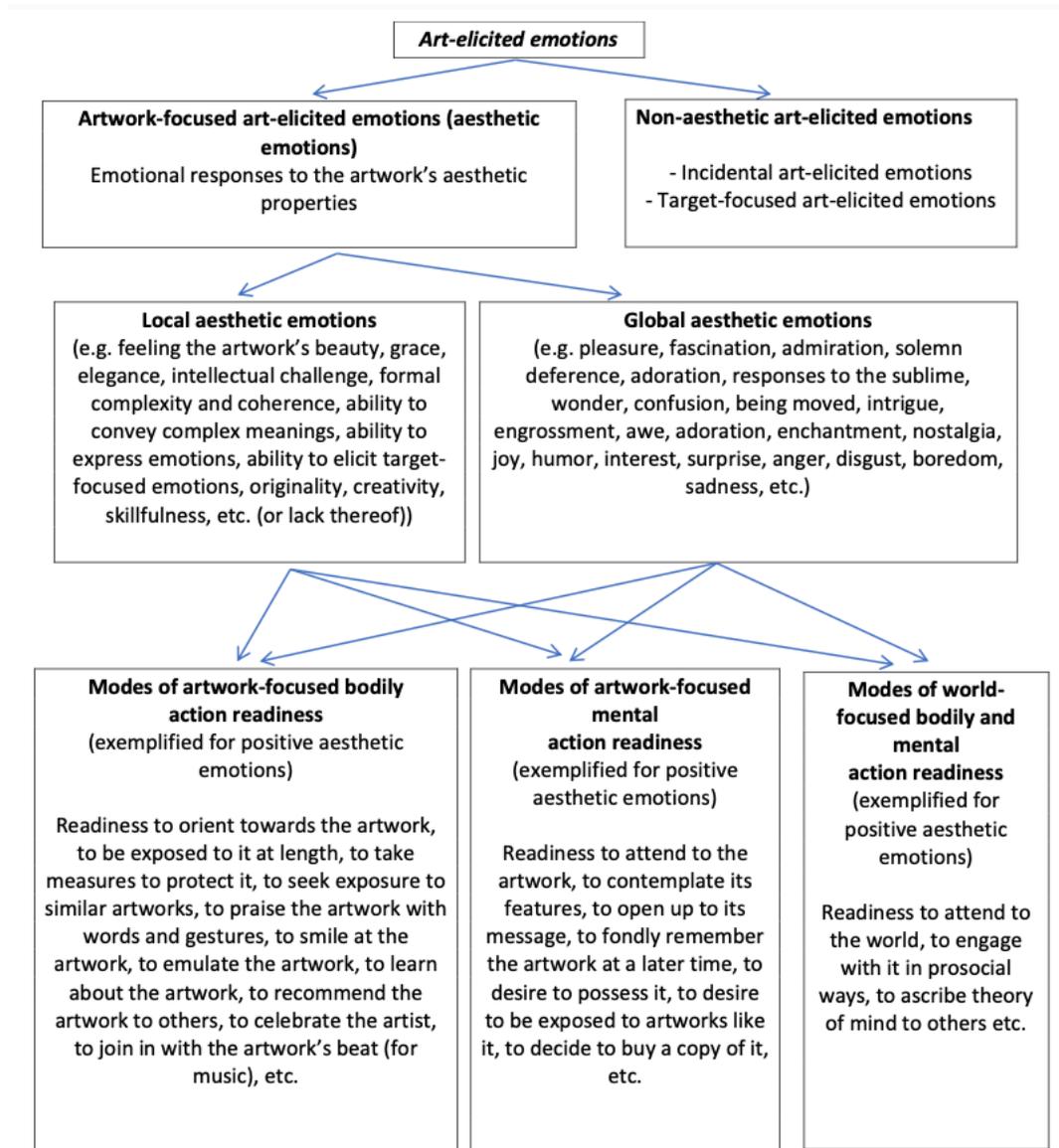


Figure 2: Adding three modes of action readiness to the taxonomy of aesthetic emotions

## Conclusion

I have characterized aesthetic emotions as artwork-focused art-elicited emotions, distinguishing them from other types of artwork-elicited emotions and from emotions expressed by artwork. I have agreed with de Sousa that, although some aesthetic emotions have unrepeatability, not all of them do, because this would be hard to reconcile with our practices of comparing artworks for their ability to elicit and express emotions with artistic value. At the same time, I have parted ways with de Sousa on whether aesthetic emotions can be garden-variety emotions, defending an affirmative answer. Furthermore, I have argued that aesthetic emotions have distinctive modes of action readiness. De Sousa is right when he suggests that aesthetic emotions involve experiences of a special, savoring kind, but I have proposed that this is due in no small part to the nature of their conative dimension. I note that if aesthetic emotions have a conative dimension, other aspects of de Sousa's framework will need to be modified. In particular, de Sousa (2011) has argued that whereas there can be irrational inconsistency between practical emotions, there cannot be irrational inconsistency between aesthetic emotions. This is because only pragmatic emotions have for De Sousa associated modes of action readiness which give rise to inconsistencies between emotions – there cannot be inconsistency between aesthetic emotions if they simply embody conflicting apprehensions of values unassociated with action readiness. If what I have argued in this paper is correct, one implication is that aesthetic emotions will be capable of generating irrational inconsistencies by de Sousa's own lights because of the potentially conflicting modes of action readiness they involve.

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