By Ole Martin Skilleås

Introduction

The notion of aesthetic expertise is highly controversial. This in itself is reason enough to explore it, which Professor Douglas Burnham and I did for wine in “Taste and Expertise in Wine” which was Chapter Five of our book The Aesthetics of Wine (2012). Now we are writing a whole book about it, Aesthetic Expertise for Lexington Books (Rowman and Littlefield), which we still hope might appear in 2020. Here I shall first provide a taxonomy of aesthetic competence and expertise, and then argue that aesthetic expertise worth its salt is narrow in scope, and that for one kind of expertise there is a way to determine the quality of expertise. Finally, I shall give two models for how and why experts may go beyond their expertise with a degree of confidence.

I shall take for granted that aesthetic expertise exists, and that it is exercised in a wide range of roles in the arts and beyond. Philosophical discussion has, from the time of Hume’s essay “Of the standard of taste” from 1757 centred round the eminent critics (or “true judges” in Hume’s words), but aesthetic expertise is exercised by practitioners (artists and performers), auxiliary staff, intermediaries and instructors. We will keep this in mind, but focus the discussion on critics and instructors—those who are in an advisory role.

“The question of taste” is one where our daily lives meet philosophical enquiry head on, and while many repeat the old saying that there’s no debating about taste—the debates about taste go on and on. While each and every one of us is an authority on what we like, we believe there is competence, and at the pinnacle of competence expertise, about aesthetic matters. This is a position I will not spend time establishing here; interested parties can consult our wine book referred to above. However, if we grant that there is aesthetic competence and expertise, the question comes up of its reach and depth.

Jerrold Levinson calls it a “shibboleth of aesthetic defeatism” to believe that aesthetic expertise is narrow in nature, and that anyone can only pronounce on the artistic worth of a narrow range of artistic endeavour in an art or a kind of aesthetic object (2010, 228). However, we think we have reason to believe that expertise is, where it is worthy of the name, has a narrow and not a wide range. This has consequences for how we should think about the standard of taste and aesthetic justification. Expertise does, in many cases, depend on talents that are quite specific to an artform (such as musicality) or a kind of aesthetic object (such as wine), and is thus not easily transferrable to other art forms.

Yet, here are comprehensive art critics, advisors of the recommending variety in our terminology, who act as if they were of the “true judge” variety even if their expertise—according to our criteria—cannot be sufficiently comprehensive. What can make it legitimate for those to judge beyond their area of proper expertise?

The key, as ever, is trust. Trust, however, is a rather basic notion. It does not easily factor into constituent parts that can be analysed and evaluated. The important aspect of trust for us is that it is transferable. By this we mean that trust generated in one area can, by analogy, be transferred to another area. Briefly put, we are going to argue that the intimate relationship between the aesthetic expert and the canon or sub-set of the canon within the field of expertise generates, through analogy, trust in the relationship between the expertise of other aesthetic experts and the canon in their field.

This, of course, means that there are different kinds
of beliefs and different kinds of knowledge at play in the operations of the true judges who take it upon themselves to judge about aesthetic merits across arts and aesthetic objects. There is the close acquaintance with the aesthetic objects of expertise, where the expert can justify judgements of value in detail, and guide perception. Then there are the judgements based on trust in the relationship between expertise and judgement in other areas—where the familiarity with objects and genres may vary, but where the level of competence is far lower. This is knowledge of a different kind, and the ability to back up these pronouncements with perceptual guidance or other kinds of justification is far more limited than for objects within the area of expertise.

The depth of justification is the crucial difference. We use “depth of justification” as a measure of how well someone can back up judgements. What is required in the discussions about aesthetic expertise is a way of distinguishing between different kinds of judgements, based on the degree by which judgements can be backed up by genuine knowledge, experience and “delicacy of taste”—to use some of Hume’s terminology.

**The kinds of aesthetic experts**

The power and authority of aesthetic experts to pronounce upon the standard of taste has been a contentious issue in aesthetics since Hume’s essay, and in the general public for much longer. While almost all discussion in philosophical aesthetics has been centred on critics, there are many more roles in which aesthetic competence and expertise plays a major part, and it is time the discussion about taste and expertise took this into account.

First, there are the practitioners, such as artists or performers. Artistic creation is often shrouded in mystery. Where does it all come from? While this may still be beyond our grasp, we know that artists and creators of aesthetic objects evaluate their own work. Artists, authors, composers, and to some degree makers of aesthetic objects make aesthetic judgments and attributions as part of the creative process. This they do at all stages of the creative activity, but for sure when it is complete. Many works of whatever kind have been amended, deleted, destroyed, re-conceived, or put to one side never to be considered again. The project of self-evaluation at the end of the creative process is close to that of the critic, however, so to the degree that artists differ substantially from critics it is through the aesthetic competence or expertise at work in the creative process itself.

To help us in writing the book about aesthetic expertise, we recruited a series of informers since our combined expertise, if any, is only in literary criticism and wine criticism. One of our informers, a composer, writes that she always makes aesthetic judgments while composing, and that the aesthetic sensitivity is always there in the process of composition. Decisions along the way are often aesthetic in kind. “For example: how far can this part go before it becomes uninteresting? What kind of room for interpretation opens up if I use these elements together? What aural ‘aura’ occurs if I use the organ in the regular register? Can it be avoided that the organ sounds ‘religious’ by using it in another register, and with what playing techniques?”

Aesthetic judgment as an integral part of the creative process has gone under the radar, possibly because these aesthetic judgments tend not be communicated. For some projects of artistic creation, the measure of success is just getting it right, and the rightness or otherwise is often hard to formulate in words—or it is unnecessary to do so. An anecdote has it that Ron Wood explained how it was to record with The Rolling Stones the first times. Keith Richards, his image notwithstanding, is an obsessive perfectionist in the recording studio. They would do take after take, but suddenly he noticed an exchange of glances between Richards and Charlie Watts. Then Bill Wyman would bring up the neck of his bass to make it vertical. Wood came to recognise that these were the signs that they had reached the point where they would do the take that went on the master tape. It was right, and no further justification or discussion was necessary.

In this case artists and the performers are one and the same, although Richards could well be the sole composer present, but this should not keep us from seeing that the projects of the artist and the performer are different. The taste and aesthetic sensibility of the performer is crucially to do with making judgments, but doing so on the directions of the artist—be they manifest in the score or the words on the page of the play or the prompt-book, or any other medium. There is an added emphasis on correctness here, although the artist would also want to get it “right”, while the project of the critic is to understand and evaluate the work or the aesthetic object for a public.

The creative process may be both private and inscrutable, but the artist is likely to want to get it right—whether this is according to a pre-conceived idea (more or less specific) or according to what is likely to function within the context of the work or the project as a whole. An exchange of glances and the way a bass guitar is held are also modes of communication. The established members of The Stones didn’t need to share words about why one had
reached the point where the master take was within reach. Years of sharing a stage and a studio had established this common ground. Afterwards in the mixing suite listening to all the takes, it is often entirely obvious why precisely that take was the one. Books on bands and albums are full of discussion and critically informed speculation as to why the music was mixed in such and such a way, and why this take was chosen ahead of eight others, so it is not as if these judgements and decisions are beyond the reach of critical discussion and perceptual guidance.

Performers, whether musician, dancer, actor or any other kind, also exercise aesthetic competence and expertise in their practice. The expertise of a concert pianist, for instance, is crucially aesthetic. Just how allegro is allegro? However, the performer also wants to make the necessary interpretation the best possible—and this often just means the one that is, in the context of the work, the most profound, elegant, deep, poignant—and so on. The performers need their skill and talent in the practice involved but that practice is suffused with aesthetic judgments of their own performance. In a way, the position adopted is close to that of an instructor—and the best performers are also quite often in demand as instructors. One individual may perform several roles that require aesthetic expertise.

Whether the ranks of the practitioners also include roles such as the record producer, or whether they belong in the next category along is debatable. Some record producers certainly make their presence felt (or heard), while others are happy to cede control to the artists and performers. As our performer informer, a musician, says: “The most important work in the recording studio, even for the key musician, is done in the mixing suite where taste and fine aesthetic judgment obviously are at a premium.” Similarly crucial, but not directly participatory, roles are found in other arts, such as that of the director of films and theatre productions. Film directors are sometimes also auteurs—really the creative centre of the whole undertaking, so this title may cover various roles.

The key roles in artistic creation and performance are, as we have seen here, no strangers to aesthetic judgment. However, the projects of creators and performers are different from those of critics and to some degree instructors. There is a focus on “getting it right” in one way or another, and less on communication.

While artists and performers are the stars of the artistic world, and the producers of objects of aesthetic interest often have their names on the finished products, there are others who perform their roles more in the shadows and are thus easily forgotten.

Second, we have to keep in mind that the auxiliary positions also perform roles where aesthetic competence and expertise matters. There are myriads of aesthetic judgements made before the critics and the general public meet artworks and aesthetic objects of other kinds. This fact alerts us to the need to differentiate more in what we take aesthetic experts to perform, and thus also in how we are to evaluate criteria for expertise. This group includes roles such as sound engineers, casting directors, costume makers, camera operators and others. The impact of the aesthetic judgments made by these people will vary according to the autonomy they are given by those in charge, but some are indeed crucial to the success of the work. A notable example is Sven Nykvist—Ingmar Bergman’s cinematographer of choice from the early 1960s. Noted for his poetic use of light, his taste and judgment may serve as a reminder of the importance of the class of roles usually seen as subservient to the creative genius of artists and their ilk.

There are other roles worth mentioning, intermediaries such as gallerist, curator, caveist, and others like them. However, in the interest of saving space we should perhaps get right on to the advisors. They cover roles such as recommending and instructing, and as mentioned earlier the philosophical discussions of the question of taste has focused almost exclusively on the critic.

Teachers and instructors in the arts (it is unclear what their counterparts in the production of aesthetic objects outside the arts might be) help develop skills and competencies in the production and performance of different kinds of fine arts. They are teachers of painting, dance, the playing of an instrument or any other of the various skills necessary for the creation and performance of fine arts. Budding actors, dancers, composers and violinists—to again name but some—need to have feedback on what they do in order to improve. Doing this, the teachers and instructors are chiefly advisors—advisors who have to come to judgments about the performance and development of their pupils. Our informant, the musician, is also a sought-after instructor. He confessed that in the last teaching session he had, he almost exclusively said “no”. This is a very limited vocabulary, it must be said, but it can only be understood in the context of the situation he and the tutee were in at the time. A series of “no” to a series of attempts at playing a particular passage can add up to a “yes” by narrowing the range of options.

More importantly, however, instructors may have to unpick the efforts of their tutees and see and present ways of improving. This requires not only skill and competence.
in the relevant art, but taste. Teachers and instructors are therefore the key roles where aesthetic expertise is necessary, and they are in a key position to develop taste and aesthetic judgment in their pupils. They are concerned with pupils getting it right, but also to make pupils understand what is right and what is not, and what to do in order to improve and develop. Passing aesthetic judgment is therefore only a part of the instructor’s rich communicative process, but the exercise of taste and aesthetic sensibility is essential for all of it. Directing and developing the aesthetic perception of the pupil, not only the performance of the art, is a key to successful tutelage. Thus, the teacher/instructor role is a central one in understanding aesthetic expertise, how it is developed, and its function within the arts and aesthetics. The roles of the teacher and instructor are also central in understanding the concept of aesthetic dependence—more about this later.

Finally, we arrive where most others who discuss aesthetic competence and expertise begin and end—the critics. Just as for the other kinds of aesthetic expert we have covered so far, there is nothing to stop critics covering roles such as advisors or even artists. Even as critics they may cover different roles and operate in different contexts, drawing on diverse competencies and fulfilling different objectives. Critics may be making recommendations to a large and diversified public—such as in newspaper reviews, or they may be addressing a limited and highly competent public such as in specialised journals. They may reach their publics through mass media, such as in the previous examples, or be able to communicate dynamically with a more limited group of people in a room together. All these factors, and many more, influence the practice and projects of a critic. We think our taxonomy of aesthetic expertise will nuance and differentiate the perennial discussions about taste, and hopefully provide some clarity.

What is clear, is that aesthetic expertise like almost all other kinds of expertise draws on both explicit and tacit knowledge—the expertise that is expressible in words and the one that depends on practical skill and immersion in a practice. Surgeons, for example, do not qualify just by sitting some exams. They need to wield the scalpel under the tutelage of someone experienced for quite some time before they are allowed to practice on their own. Studies show quite conclusively that the accumulated experience of the surgeons correlates positively with the success of procedures in the operating theatre (Maruthappu et al. 2015).

Surgery and critical practice are obviously rather different from each other, but one aspect of interactive critical practice can substantiate the importance of practice and tacit knowledge. Crucial to justifying judgment and attribution is perceptual guidance. Challenged as to why the object is elegant, profound or whatever, the critic can draw attention to objective features, show connections, draw on models and analogies and any other conceivable means to make the public share the experience of seeing-as or seeing-in. Perceptual guidance is also a key element in the development of aesthetic competence and expertise, and where the roles of critic and instructor (more or less deliberately) come close.

The process of perceptual guidance is not available to the critic communicating one-way. The mass media critic is probably the one that comes to mind as the paradigmatic aesthetic expert, our taxonomy up to this point notwithstanding. However, the fast-evolving mass media of the twenty-first century have given us all a voice that can be heard by any number of others. The gate keeper editors of the mass media have been replaced by the free-for-all of the interactive internet, and “everyone is a critic”. This altogether new situation puts a premium on the meta-level expertise of figuring out who to trust—how do you know who has the expertise to be “a true judge” and who is just faking it?

“Meta expertises are expertises to judge other expertises,” as the expertise experts Collins and Evans put it (2007, 45). One form of this expertise is ubiquitous expertise—and the one most of us will have to rely on. Ubiquitous expertise, like speaking a language, at the meta level of expertise is the ability to judge someone else to have expertise, which is based on the quite sophisticated ability to determine if someone is a fake, which is again based on our ability to navigate the social life of an individual. It is ubiquitous discrimination. It is not specific knowledge that leads you to dismiss all the seemingly good arguments that the moon landings in 1969 were fake, for example, but the life experience that tells you that it would be impossible for the tens of thousands of people involved to keep quiet about a hoax like this, not to mention the Soviets, in the depth of the Cold War, exploiting it for propaganda purposes.

The more specific meta-level expertise requires a fairly high knowledge of the area of expertise. It takes a lot of skill, and a fair bit of effort, to determine if a critic on, say, CellarTracker™ knows her stuff. This site allows you to upload information about your wine cellar, and among a lot of other features it also gives ample space for you and everybody else on the site to review wines. The danger when “everyone is a critic”, is that it is easier to mimic the language of properly trained and experienced critics than
to gain the necessary expertise. In the case of online wine critics, it is often advice on when a cellared wine might be reaching its optimum drinking window that is of interest to others. The very real danger is that the online verdicts may appear well considered, written in a way that makes it appear as if the poster is an insider, but they are to a high degree just ill informed. One way to smoke out the imposters is to see if a critic drinks a wine way too early without commenting on this. Obviously, you need to know what the expected drinking window is for this wine or this kind of wine. In other words: a fairly high degree of expertise is needed in order to judge the expertise of others in a case like this. One has to arrive at a reasonably high level of competence in order to decide who is an expert. Unless there are others who can do it for you.

Having given a taxonomy of aesthetic expertise, and having identified some basic components of expertise, we are in a better position to address some of the questions I raised earlier—how wide is the scope of aesthetic expertise, and how can experts be justified in going beyond their areas of expertise?

The scope of expertise

For an instructor or a critic—the guardians of the standard of taste in Hume’s perspective—it is essential to be able to communicate well and to justify attributions and judgements. The characteristics exhibited by Hume’s true judges are “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice”, and “can alone entitle critics to this valuable character [of true judge in the finer arts]” (1987, 241). But are the judges really true judges in all the finer arts—or beyond? What is the scope of their expertise?

Jerrold Levinson clearly thinks there can be true judges covering all the fine arts. As we saw earlier, he calls it a “shibboleth of aesthetic defeatism” to believe that aesthetic expertise is narrow (2010, 228). While agreeing that making comparisons of action-guiding force across art-forms and genres requires a comprehensive, rather than a restricted, ideal critic, he still thinks this idealization can be realized to a large extent in actual individuals (Ibid.). This opens up for ideal critics being more well-rounded than “the insular audio or video store clerk” who’s an expert in something very narrow and exotic, and who can appreciate that “artistic worth can be achieved in many different ways” and who is also “able to make comparative judgements across genres and art forms” (Ibid.). My take on Levinson’s dismissive comment about the staff in video and audio stores is that he attributes only explicit knowledge to them.

I think considerations of what is required of aesthetic experts, such as what we have seen in the taxonomy above, suggest the skills involved are quite specific. Hume’s strong sense and delicate sentiment may seem remarkable as requirements, but what does “delicate sentiment” actually signify? Most of us have some idea of what this might be, and we may even think of people who are in possession of this to an unusual degree. Your image of delicate sentiment may involve being able to pick out something from an art object or performance, or other aesthetic phenomenon such as a wine, that is not noticed or given any significance by most of us. Delicate sentiment may even give someone the power to change other people’s perception or evaluation of the aesthetic object.

In most cases of very “delicate sentiment” it is a quality or skill quite hard to pin down, an ability manifested in ways hard to measure with any degree of accuracy. But is this a single capacity, or several? Is all “delicate sentiment” the same skill or quality in all true judges or aesthetic experts? If the term covers a range of different abilities, are these capacities diverse manifestations of an underlying ability one may have to differing degrees—somewhat on the model of intelligence being the supposed substratum powering a range of more specific abilities like memory, verbal acuity, problem solving skills and so on?

In order to get a handle on this issue, I think it is useful to turn to an art form that is indisputably an art form, and which also involves specific skills or abilities. Music fits the bill perfectly, and the required ability is musicality. It is an ability, innate or not, that makes a difference in the ability to read, perform and appreciate music. It has a perceptive side, and a creative side. In the case of critics, it is the perceptive side that is more interesting, but we should not be blind (or deaf?) to the aesthetic expertise of performing musicians or composers. Musicality is an ability that is present to different degrees in different people, and it is arguably possible to train the ability—at least to some extent. There are long established ways of determining musicality, but they tend to be based on musical performance ability. There are several elements to musicality, some of which can now be separated into different components for the purposes of testing (Law and Zentner 2012). The “Profile of Music Perception Skills” (PROMS) measures perceptual musical skills across multiple domains: tonal (melody, pitch), qualitative (timbre, tuning), temporal (rhythm, rhythm-to-melody, accent, tempo), and dynamic (loudness).

Not all of us are on this spectrum. Some declare them-
selves tone deaf. Amusia, akin to anosmia (and not to be confused with amusement), is supposed to affect about four per cent of the population (Margulis 2015). Most people who declare themselves to be tone deaf are perhaps not afflicted, but the range of musical ability is quite wide, and there is nothing to suggest that people who score in the lower range of musical ability cannot have ‘delicate sentiment’ in appreciating the plastic arts or literature, let alone have outstanding delicacy in appreciating wine. It should be clear, I think, that people with a high degree of musicality are better candidates for being “true judges” of musical standards of taste than those who are tone deaf. Moreover, having seen the various roles involving aesthetic competence and expertise, it is even more obvious that composers, performers and instructors need to have a high degree of musicality in order to perform their roles to good effect. And this is the sticking point in this discussion—the abilities involved in the sensibility to different art forms and different aesthetic objects are so diverse that they make a high degree of sensibility across genres and art forms unlikely, and thus make comparative judgements more difficult though perhaps not impossible.

These abilities—the perceptive skills, with subtle detections and fine-grained distinctions, are necessary to be an aesthetic expert and a true judge of an art, such as music, or a kind of aesthetic object, such as wine. The time and effort involved in developing expertise in one area—such as modern jazz or post-impressionist painting—is also considerable. The Humean task—to set a standard of taste—requires no less than expertise, and some of the crucial skills involved are specific to an art or for a kind of object. We have established that these skills do not transfer easily between arts or aesthetic objects. A Master of Wine has little use for her ability to detect and assess small nuances in the aroma of an aged Sauternes when confronted with a lyric poem, or with a piece of modern jazz—certainly not if she also happens not to have any musicality to speak of. Even for those with no impediments such as anosmia or amusia, the chances of having the abilities, training and the inclination to spend a lot of time with other arts or objects of aesthetic appreciation which is necessary to develop expertise near the level of their area of expertise, is fairly low.

**Depth of justification**

In line with what I have been saying about the narrowness of expertise, and the willingness for non-experts to pronounce upon the value of aesthetic objects beyond the reach of their deep competence, we need a way to evaluate the validity and quality of aesthetic judgements. My suggested means of doing this, is through justification. It is tempting to use the depth-metaphor and say that a criterion of expertise is the depth of justification forthcoming for the judgements and attributions made. Clearly, it is the advisors—those who communicate aesthetic attributions and judgements—who fill the roles where communication of aesthetic attributions and judgements are at a premium, and in most cases it is in their practice that depth of justification can be applied as a criterion of expertise. The depth of justification can distinguish between judgements and attributions that are based on expertise from those that are not. Or put more precisely: the quality of the justification for any aesthetic pronouncement determines the level of expertise on which it is based.

“Depth of justification” is easily explained as the ability to come up with perceptual, comparative and evaluative reasons for a particular attribution or judgement of an aesthetic nature. The further the chains of support go, the deeper the justification. You should expect from an expert in the role of instructor or critic that he or she guides your perception to the salient elements that support a particular judgement or attribution, that relevant comparisons are forthcoming and that judgements of merit or demerit are based on not only the aesthetically most rewarding and successful examples, but also a host of less excellent ones. Having a good background in the novels of Joseph Conrad, and deep studies of his *Heart of Darkness* (Skilleås 1995), I should be able to support my judgements about it in some depth. Lesser experts or non-experts have less to draw on, their reasons are likely to be less good, and they may come up short in trying to communicate the salient features that support their judgements. In other words—they are more likely to arrive more quickly at the point where there is nothing more to say in support, hence the metaphor of depth. The well of reasons, experience and comparisons, as it were, runs dry much faster.

If aesthetic expertise is narrow in character, and those who show great depth of expertise are out of their depth in other aesthetic fields and practices, how can anyone compare and contrast and—not least—judge across aesthetic objects in the manner Levinson is so confident about? I suggest that there are two aspects to this: why and how individuals feel validated in venturing beyond their fields of competence, and how the institutional or systematic nature of aesthetic practices builds trust. Both deserve a full discussion, but that will have to be reserved for the book as I don’t have the space to do more than gesture towards a solution here.
Transferable aesthetic skills

These considerations provide a strong case for “true judges” to be experts within fairly narrow fields, but Levinson’s statements about the ability to make comparative judgements across genres and art forms are not taken out of thin air. Both true judges—experts in certain areas—and not so true judges (most of us) are happy to make pronouncements with little or no expertise to speak of. Having established that those who do make up the standard of taste (assuming here the Humean perspective and task of the true judges) have rather narrow expertise—what are we to make of these other pronouncements about artistic or aesthetic merit?

I suggest two routes going forward. One is to focus on the competence of the individual, and see what might fortify the confidence to move outside an area of familiarity or expertise and to make judgements in “unfamiliar aesthetic territory” (art forms or kinds of aesthetic object). The other route is to examine the systemic or institutional route, and ask how people come to defer to aesthetic expertise. As one might expect, these are not completely insulated from each other, and a key to both is confidence and trust. An interesting aspect of this is how aesthetic attributions and judgements are supported or justified. How can we know or determine that someone is an aesthetic expert—or in other words “what is meta-expertise”?

There are several transferable aspects of being an expert, or even only just confident, within one art form or with one kind of aesthetic object. The art specific, or object specific, skills are often of little use in understanding and appreciating a different art form or interacting with a different kind of object. Not all arts, however, or kinds of objects, are unrelated to one another. Absolute music has much in common with ballet or opera, for instance, and a skill with wine may, perhaps, help you some of the way into appreciating other liquids as aesthetic objects.

However, I believe there are transferable aesthetic skills. A facility and familiarity with aesthetic concepts and attributions in one area or context may carry over into other contexts and areas. There is also a general level, we think, covering the confidence that comes from interacting with an art or aesthetic object. This, obviously, is hard to specify into any particular skill or set of skills, but may well be manifest as more of a general experience and the confidence that comes with it—we may want to call it an aesthetic habituation (well aware of the Bourdieu connotations that come with it). To be part of a community that cares about an art form or a kind of aesthetic object generates a basic confidence that carries over into encounters with new or less well-known art forms or aesthetic objects.

More specific is the facility to deal with the aesthetic vocabulary and make judgements that communicate with others. This vocabulary, and the conditions for making judgements, are to a certain degree shared between art forms and kinds of aesthetic objects. While the grounds for finding elegance in architecture and in a wine are different, there is likely to be some shared features or conditions. In this context we should not forget that art and life share some features. For instance, life or chance offers situations or even series of events (I hesitate to call it narratives) that are poignant. In crafted narratives such as novels, drama or an operatic libretto, the poignancy becomes an aesthetic feature. So, it is not as if it is only within aesthetic practice that we can gain knowledge about the identification of aesthetic features, but the key in this discussion is that a facility with general aesthetic terminology and kinds of reasoning and judgement facilitates a transfer between art forms and kinds of aesthetic object.

So, while in practice they will be hard to prise apart, there are art or object specific skills contributing to expertise, but there are also aesthetic skills—abilities to form and justify the attribution of aesthetic concepts and judgements. The confidence to move outside an area of expertise, or for most of us: one of greater familiarity, is fortified by this general ability and the more basic familiarity that dwelling in an aesthetic field gives you.

These are some reasons why both experts and lesser mortals feel emboldened to move out of areas of confidence or expertise, and venture both attributions and judgements on more shaky foundations. They, or we, are hardly “true judges” in these situations. We cannot pretend to be guardians of the standard of taste, but neither are we in the position of castaways or aliens when we are going into less familiar territory.

Trust in aesthetic practice

According to John Donne’s poem, “no man is an island” (1999), and this holds true also in aesthetic practice. While confidence in an area of competence may embolden you to take your aesthetic skills into new areas, from where comes the trust in the verdicts of aesthetic experts? How can this be justified?

If we apply the test of the “depth of justification” gauge to statements that are not based on personal acquaintance with an aesthetic object, we have to face up to the fact that reasons put forward cannot go into sensory aspects at all. Much traditional aesthetics will dismiss any kind of aesthetic knowledge or belief not based on the acquain-
tance principle, but we have to take account of the fact that aesthetics is a practice where you learn both about the art form or aesthetic practice and its specifics, and also to identify aesthetic properties and justify your verdicts. You’re thus within a practice, communicating with others who are, and thus already far away from the solitary first person perspective assumed by much traditional aesthetics. I think there is a place for “aesthetic dependence” just as there is for “epistemic dependence” (Hardwig 2006). Epistemic dependence can be defined as the position that a good reason for believing something is to have good reasons for believing others having good reasons for believing it. A trust in expertise, in other words. In this case, and this case covers a lot of what we might call most people’s scientific world view, reasons for belief do not constitute evidence for a proposition. Likewise, there can be good reasons for aesthetic beliefs that are not based on first-hand experiences.

This does not mean that personal experience, pure aesthetic delight, has nothing to do with it. Far from it, but we have to understand its place in the full context of aesthetic practice to appreciate how it is possible to judge and compare more widely without being an expert. It is by building on the relationship between one’s own competence or expertise within a field, and the judgements and valuations done, that one builds trust in experts in other fields. Trust in aesthetic expertise as such is built on one’s own competence, so a classical pianist may have a high level of trust in the judgements of jazz musicians—to the degree that she feels confident in putting them forward in her own right.

Obviously, there are kinds of judgement and degrees of commitment here that we need to nuance, but let us not forget that no matter how long ago an expert or just a normally competent person learnt to appreciate music, literature, wine or whatever—there was a trust built in someone—or a group of people—more competent. In this way aesthetic knowledge is not all that different from normal scientific or sub-scientific knowledge. Much of what we know, or claim to know, is far from our experience. We trust experts, and if we can provide a cogent set of reasons for something, it only adds support to it.

However, true aesthetic expertise of the instructor or critic kinds can be gauged by the depth of justification method. Confidence and trust in expertise, and in the general verdicts of aesthetic practices, is built on becoming part of the aesthetic practice in question. To disagree, and to try to stand out, is also part and parcel of such practices. But we do well to remember the norms, and not only the attempts to change or break them.

**Conclusion**

Aesthetic expertise—even the very notion—is highly controversial, so this little essay can only provide some coverage of a select few of the most important discussions. I have expanded the range of the classical discussion by providing a rough taxonomy of various roles where aesthetic competence and expertise is manifest and important. This, as far as I know, has not been done before, and it provides a useful background to my discussion of the scope of aesthetic competence and expertise. The case of music shows, at the very least, that some aesthetic expertise must be narrow in scope. I have also provided two ways in which narrow aesthetic expertise opens up to the wider community of aesthetic appreciation, but here—as in the rest of my essay—there are many more avenues and arguments worth exploring. In our forthcoming book we continue and expand this exploration.
LITERATURE

NOTES
1 Of these 51 studies, 44 found that increased case volume was associated with significantly improved health outcomes.
2 “Seeing-as” is best exemplified by the famous duck/rabbit drawing known from Wittgenstein. You either see the drawing as a duck, or as a rabbit. “Seeing-in”, best known from Richard Wollheim’s work, is the perception of patterns and structures in a complex whole. “Seeing-in” relies on contextually informed competencies. We explain the differences between these two concepts in our book from 2012 (pp. 108-109.)
3 Levinson, who I happen to know, is a rare renaissance man with wide artistic abilities—not least in playing the piano.