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Speak Now to Forever Hold Your Piece: On Aesthetic Ownership and Interpretation

by
Spencer Joseph Heitman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

Oxford
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Approved by

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ABSTRACT

SPENCER JOSEPH HEITMAN: *Speak Now* to Forever Hold Your Piece: On Aesthetic Ownership and Interpretation
(Under the direction of Timothy Yenter)

The primary objectives of this research are to describe ways in the interpretation of art-objects is shaped by their ownership and to endorse fan culture participation as a mechanism through which people might be led to aesthetic value. This analysis shall be grounded in an understanding of trust and shall point the reader toward care, noting that these phenomena positively correlate and help interpreters to receive meaning of more abundance and depth. It will be initially claimed that art interpretation is itself contribution to aesthetic dialogue with artists. This claim is grounded in an understanding of art's communicative capacities and the ways they are deliberately leveraged to invite response. These dialogues are themselves enhanced by the presence of intimacy and trust, which are nurtured by participation in interpretive communities, specifically those constitutive of fan culture. Ownership of art shall be described as itself an aesthetic phenomenon, explaining how and why people respond to it as such. This response will be analyzed through a lens of care, noting that this care gives way to the maximization of extracted aesthetic value. Throughout this analysis, ownership shall be broadly conceived. Synthesis of these sub-discussions shall lead the reader toward the endorsement of fan culture participation as a mechanism for the maximization of aesthetic care, and, in turn, of aesthetic value.

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INTRODUCTION

When one looks toward an art-object, their initial response is often an assessment of its physical or thematic qualities, such as praising its physical beauty or claiming it to have a compelling stance on the importance of suffering. Who owns artwork, however, is traditionally resigned to a secondary question in the interpretive experience, often being put to the side. However, emerging conversations about art and popular culture seem to indicate a tonal shift, as if the role of ownership in the interpretive experience is being recognized for its direct importance. Perhaps the most widely known recent catalyst for this change is Taylor Swift and her ongoing project of re-recording old albums under new contract; this example served as the initial motivator for this project. More specifically, singer-songwriter Taylor Swift has, in recent years, taken to re-recording her older albums and releasing these new recordings—with additional tracks but with generally sparse modifications to pre-existing ones—with their original album titles followed by the words *(Taylor's Version)*. Said project followed a conflict between Swift and her former record label where Swift was left without legal rights to the masters of her initial recordings and, resultingly, received minimal compensation; she owns the masters to all of the re-recorded content. The interpretive public—and particularly fans of Swift—have responded to this project by embracing it, streaming *(Taylor's Version)* albums in record-breaking numbers, and lambasting those who listen to the older recordings owned by Shamrock Holdings.

Ultimately, the goal of this writing is primarily to establish a sound understanding of the reasons the interpretive public cares about art-ownership and secondly to endorse fan culture participation as a worthwhile way of nurturing this care. Because it affords people greater variety and depth in their interpretive responses, this care shall be taken as a good. To establish a sound understanding of these concepts, a number of aesthetic sub-conversations must be resolved; rather than being accepted as operating assumptions, these questions shall be deliberately worked through.

Firstly, this analysis shall be grounded within a dialogic model of aesthetics, accepting that the aesthetic contributions of artists and interpretive responses of owners are themselves contributions to a discourse. This conception is contingent upon the beliefs that art has a communicative capacity, that artists deliberately leverage this to provoke affect, and that affective response is, in turn, a discursive contribution. Intimacy and trust shall be shown as beneficial to this model of aesthetics, noting the ways in which interpretive acts gain saliency when accompanied by perceived intimacy between artists and interpreters.

Secondly, a sound understanding of ownership shall be pursued, preferring to understand not only what ownership means, but what it entails. In the case of art-objects, while the definition of ownership may not change from its meaning in other contexts, one's understanding of it is conceptually incomplete if it does not consider adjacent concepts such as authorship and authenticity. Seemingly, these are often the reasons people evoke for their pursuit of ownership, with their threat thematically underscoring many ownership controversies.

Throughout these analyses, the role of interpretive community cannot be understated. That is, my writing shall consider that interpretation is hardly an individual act, but rather something which is shaped by the dialogic contributions of others within the interpretive landscape as well. These communities retain the ability to interpret, to shape the interpretive contributions of others, to care, to shape the care of others, and so on. As a result, the impact of interpretive care is magnified by the presence of interpretive community.

Through synthesizing these distinct claims, I shall direct the reader toward caring about ownership of art, noting that this care maximizes the interpreter's potential for the extraction of meaning and value. This sense of care is, noteworthily, nurtured by the empowerment of response as a dialogic contribution and by the presence of intimacy and trust. It is further nurtured within particular interpretive communities and fanbases.

I. DIALOGIC AESTHETICS

At the point that a work of art is viewable, it is interpretable. As such, the release of art to the public should be understood as the invitation of an interpretive response. This response might be publicly declared through a speech act, but it remains equally possible that it is confined to the private realm of emotion by an interpreter's experience of bliss, shock, disgust, or some other affective response. The invitation to respond and the according response can exist because of art's communicative capacity: "art can be used as communicative in the sense that it can be employed by an agent (the artist) to *evoke* a certain response in an auditor (the receiving audience member)" (Stroud 7).

This view of art as in possession of a communicative capacity is not without historical root, nor is it without surrounding debate. In his *Art as Experience*, for example, John Dewey takes the hardline stance that artists seek to transmit their experiences directly to the interpreter, provoking them to respond in a way which fundamentally mirrors the circumstances of the artists at the time of the art-object's creation (Dewey 60). However, critiques of this position abound, with some noting that this direct transmission of experience is functionally impossible and others noting that it is incongruent with the declared goals of many artists. After all, it seems that the direct transmission of experience requires that the artist is tremendously familiar with their audience and that their audience is interpretively homogenous enough to uniformly respond. Still, it remains likely that many artists wish to provoke responses which are of a somewhat particular nature, hoping that people respond with a consistent affect—such as joy, sorrow, or awe—informed by

though not entirely synonymous with the artists' experiences. This position is seemingly easier to maintain because it gives room for variety within response; that is, not all experiences of awe must be the same, even if they are all affectively adjacent. Furthermore, this position empowers the interpreter as a participant in the aesthetic exchange, shaping it into a *dialogic experience* (Maarhuis & Rudd 6). Still, some artists might simply wish to provoke any response regardless of its specific nature, believing that response is intrinsically valuable due to its implied judgment of the work as worthy of responding to. Rather than aggrandizing a particular position regarding the extent to which art's communicative capacity shapes the interpretive response, it shall be most fruitful to proceed with the understanding that artists—motivated by distinct, individual goals—leverage art's communicative capacity along an axis of particularity. Artists who do not care whatsoever about the interpretation of their work likely exist, though they shall be seen as largely immaterial to this particular debate.

Regardless of where the responses they wish to provoke fall along the axis of particularity, artists who deliberately leverage art's communicative capacity do so as participants in a relationship between themselves and their interpreters; such a relationship is fostered, largely, by the presence of intimacy and trust within the aesthetic climate. Artists place trust in audiences' interpretive capacities, hoping that they will engage in good-faith explorations of their works and respond accordingly; this is consistent with C. Thi Nguyen's claim that "artists create subtle, complex works, trusting their audiences to discover these works' more esoteric qualities" (Nguyen 23). For example, if a painter were to depict an act of grotesque violence as a criticism of the institutions which made that violence possible, they would be placing trust in their audiences to respond by similarly

condemning violence rather than by lionizing those who propagate it. This holds true not only as it pertains to trust in interpreters' intellectual capacities, but as it pertains to trust in their moral capacities as well. If an artist were to draw upon their own suffering heavily in their work—such as crafting a piece about their own insecurities—they are not only trusting that people respond in a way which comprehends the material, but which empathizes with it as well. As such, betrayals of aesthetic trust can exist in distinct forms, both as mere misinterpretations of works and as morally dubious responses (such as weaponizing an artist's vulnerability against them).

Within the dialogic experience of aesthetic exchange, trust is had not only by the artist in the interpreter, but by the interpreter in the audience as well. This point is explained by painter Anthony G. DeFurio, who notes that "the private realm of responding can only be revealed within a climate of mutual trust and sharing" (DeFurio 9). This is the case because of a simple reciprocation of principles; much like artists trust that interpreters might discover their works' esoteric qualities, interpreters trust that these esoteric qualities do in fact exist. This trust then shapes an interventionist form of interpretation, causing people to look to art with an attunement to and desire for meaning, articulated by Stanley Fish as looking to poetry with "poetry-seeking eyes" (Fish 326).

DeFurio's analysis contains notable overlap with the broader claims of Nguyen and myself, though a particular disagreement must be noted. While DeFurio regards this trust as a component of an intimate relationship between interpreters and *art objects*, I believe it will be more fruitful to reframe this trust as a component of the relationship between interpreters and artists themselves. This reframing is noteworthy for two reasons, with the first being its ability to bolster topicality. Specifically, if claims are being made about why

people care about ownership of art, it should be noted that this is more commonly due to their respect for artists than for particular art objects. This is consistent with the way intellectual property is popularly conceived; it is not something which inherits its importance from a popular reverence for particular owned objects, but rather something which is important because of the reverence people have for ownership and property as institutions. As such, for ownership to matter, these relationships must be viewed through a distinctly interpersonal lens. This departure from DeFurio is secondly important because relationships with objects imply use and control in a way that relationships with individuals do not. That is, at the point that aesthetic relationships are conceived solely as between individuals and objects, they implicitly instrumentalize the artist as a means of spawning work which contains value, understating the value of the artist themselves in shaping the value contained within their works.

In addition to being a relationship predicated on trust, it is further seen that the relationship between interpreters and artists is one which requires familiarity. This much is understood by Marjorie Manifold, whose scholarship on art education reads, "Just as the artist must come to understand the materials of art making in order to be able to mold them into a desired form, and understand her or himself in order to express the self through art making, the artist may come to understand or empathize with others" (Manifold 461). What her work illuminates is that artists must have a degree of familiarity with the way people respond to things if they wish to create things which are responded to in a particular way; it is only through the cultivation of that familiarity that response might be reasonably and accurately anticipated. The parallel drawn between this familiarity and the understanding an artist must have of their medium paints familiarity with the audience as something

which is not only beneficial, but critical. Much like an artist lacking familiarity with their medium might be incapable of effectively communicating through it, an artist lacking familiarity with their audience is incapable of effectively communicating with them. Of course, if artists were to deliberately and wholly modify their works to effectively communicate with particular audiences, this would imply that the only important thing about art is the message received from it; this is of course untrue, as value judgments about art objects are often rooted in at least some components of the works themselves rather than simply in how they are broadly received. This is the case because artists, while arguably propagandists, create objects which do not serve exclusively to propagandize. Nevertheless, the point remains that familiarity with one's aesthetic interlocutor helps to nurture superior communication with them. Given the importance of both trust and familiarity to nurturing the relationship between artist and interpreter, such relationships can be seen as necessarily intimate.

Having clarified the relationship between artist and interpreter as intimate, it is further necessary to denote what, specifically, qualifies one as an interpreter. Generally, mere affective response should be considered sufficient response to a work to constitute interpretation, though the interpretive threshold for relevance to this writing may be higher. On the former, it seems certain that "we must attend to our pre-linguistic sense of what things mean" before meaning might be effectively articulated by an interpreter; undeclared, internal response, then functions as an act of interpretation insofar as it represents willful engagement with the art-object and, in turn, the artist (Polt 69). This represents a departure from a normative position on interpretation which posits that "meaning always arises from a speech act" (Kramer 6).

Despite declared disagreement with more rigid notions of interpretations, it remains possible to bridge gaps with such conceptions, as the threshold for relevance to my particular claims remains higher than any act of interpretation. To clarify, while internal experience of affect—even if unintentional—should be considered an act of interpretation, it is likely not an interpretive act which would correlate to any care about the ownership of a work. Such care, rather, requires a more particular attunement to meaning and to the extratextual circumstances surrounding art-objects. One might look to a Monet painting, Lanthimos film, or Zimmer composition and be taken by their formal beauty without attuning to any thematic content of or circumstances surrounding the works; this is a form of interpretation, but it is unlikely to materialize as care about the variable of ownership. This stance represents the bridging of denotative divides, simultaneously setting a low bar for what constitutes interpretation generally and allowing for the co-opting of scholarship which is more stringent with its definitions.

To be abundantly clear on scope, the breadth with which some aesthetic phenomena must not necessarily correlate with equivalent breadth for all analyses. That is, while it remains possible that nearly all art is in possession of a communicative capacity, it is likely that this capacity is only leveraged sometimes, is only leveraged in particular ways in a smaller set of circumstances and is leveraged in those ways to catalyze specific interpretations in even more narrow sets of circumstances. What this reveals, then, is that claims are likely to narrow as analysis deepens; while the broad claims about dialogic aesthetics are likely to be true in all instances, some of the more particular downstream claims about fan culture might be true in fewer instances, though considerable ones nonetheless.

At this point, the dialogic model of aesthetics which has been advanced has considered numerous variables—namely, trust and familiarity, which themselves combine to create intimacy—which can impact the quality with which art's communicative capacity might be leveraged and the quality of the interpretive relationships established through that communication. However, it has engaged with this dialogue as a merely dyadic phenomenon, effectively understating the complexity of the contributive tapestry in the interest of cleanliness. While this is helpful for an intuitive mapping of interpretive possibility, it nonetheless remains necessary to consider other parties' involvements in the aesthetic exchange. The notion of interpretive community is critical to this consideration, as it simultaneously represents the abundance of interpretive possibilities and a deep-seated challenge to one-dimensional notions of ownership.

II. OWNERSHIP AND ITS POTENTIALITIES

While ownership might be only strictly defined by rigid notions of contract and capital, it is often pursued in the interest of broader phenomena such as authenticity; while these phenomena are not identical, they are interdependently related. In many disputes, the former is of primary relevance, with people being sued for rights and royalties; when works are copied with the intent to deceive or steal, this is widely considered to be the only necessary way of determining ownership and restitution (Schmücker 359). Rather than challenging the criticality of phenomena such as legal right and capital ownership, I seek merely to expand upon them, acknowledging that authenticity is just as important a variable in assigning importance to who owns a work. This explains why an author might refer to their biography with the phrase *my story*, for example. Even if it is owned by an outside entity such as a publishing house, the experiences which inform the work belong most directly to the artist. Notably, this consideration is consistent with the testimony of many artists who have seen their authenticity challenged, such as graphic designers whose talents are regularly sought by corporations as an act of strategy. When interviewed by Joan Mullin, such designers challenged the notion that they owned their work, laughing and "[speaking] often of the lack of creativity afforded to them because they were told to make public, pastiched, borrowed, and derivative art that would sell" (Mullin 109). When considering that many of those artists went on to quit their jobs due to these frustrations, it seems certain that authenticity is a critical phenomenon in governing ownership.

Given that interpretation is not a merely individual act, this bolsters the importance of interpretive communities, which "are made up of those who share interpretive strategies... for constituting [texts'] properties and assigning their intentions" (Fish 171). As empowered, abundant, and conflicting bodies, interpretive communities have the power of determining the popularly conceived meanings of a work, meaning that they pose a fundamental complication to the nature of aesthetic sincerity, bolstering their relevance when ownership controversies are concerned. This power and its ensuing challenges become increasingly relevant when considering fanbases and fan culture, which emerge as a particular—and particularly empowered—subcategory of interpretive community.

Fanbases are an important phenomenon to understanding the relationship between artists and interpreters because they are, by sheer volume, more powerful than the individual interpreter to govern meaning and place interpretive pressure. This pressure can be placed in multiple ways, including on other participants in the fanbase. For example, many *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fans felt pressured to internally canonize romantic relationships which did not explicitly exist due to pressure placed upon them by other fans of the show who declared that these relationships must exist. This same pressure was placed on artists themselves, materializing as a pressure to make these relationships canon. At its core, this instance represents "'fan-tagonisms'—ongoing, competitive struggles between both internal and external institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their respective interests" (Johnson 287). Given this possibility, interpretive communities can be viewed as a dualistic complication of the notion of ownership, simultaneously representing the source of meanings and the canvas onto which meanings are projected by artists. For cogency's sake, it is worth recalling that this power

and complexity exists for the community absent any legal or fiscal right to art-objects. Subsidiarily, one might consider that interpretive communities are not themselves the challenge to ownership, but rather the source of that challenge's exercise. Within the same example, the mere existence of a fanbase did not challenge the narrative, meaning, and ownership of the show. Rather, it was the capitalist incentive to satisfy this fanbase which challenged the narrative, meaning, and ownership of the show; the fanbase itself was merely the body whose existence exacerbated this incentive.

Prior to investigating other possible challenges to ownership, it is worth considering the role interpretive communities have not only in challenging, but in affirming it. In the case of Taylor Swift's fanbase, the collective response to her ongoing project of re-recording her albums under new contract has been one of overwhelming support. Reasons abound as to why this is the case—and these shall be investigated in greater detail later—but it is currently important to clarify this point and to ward off any claims which imply interpretive communities are necessarily antagonistic. This claim comes alongside not only real-world warrant, but theoretical support, with Fish's own writing dictating that interpretive communities are perpetually in disagreement with one another (Fish 173). If there are communities which seek ownership through the governance of interpretation, then, there are some which seek to relinquish their authority to the artist as governor of meaning and, resultantly, of ownership. Of course, the concern persists that this ownership might never be relinquished insofar as this relinquishment is itself an interpretive act, though the sentiment that fan mentalities are disparate remains true.

Considering the interpretive community as a body who renders challenges to authenticity—and, in turn, to ownership—possible, more challenges to such authenticity

and ownership might be considered. One such challenge is that posed by preconception, which can emerge in three distinct ways: through a work, through a world, and through a body of work. Within a work, for example, if a novel were to end with a major plot twist, people would interpretively respond by highlighting the seemingly unlikely nature of the ending. As such, one can conclude that people's interpretations of art-objects are shaped partially by their experiences of those objects' internal components in sequence. Within a world, it seems that this standard only grows in stringency; had the same plot twist come at the end of a seven-volume series rather than of one book, interpretive shock would be both more likely and more intense. The same can be said within a body of work, as the oeuvre possesses its own ability to govern interpretive experiences. If the same artist being discussed had an established reputation for writing rigid, predictable, sequential plots, for example, it seems that interpretive shock would be magnified even more greatly. This is due to the pervasive expectation that artists will continue to produce art-objects which are stylistically and/or thematically similar to those they have previously released. This interpretive ritual is what governs processes such as typecasting, which implies that individuals with a particular skillset are distinctly and exclusively equipped to perform certain roles. Its presence is further reflected in art criticism's tendency to reward consistency across an oeuvre, such as in the auteur theory's canonization of directors with a distinct, discernable style into a directorial pantheon.

A hostile reader might dispute the characterization of criticism henceforth offered, arguing that people reward artists for their variety of talents. This claim is not without warrant, though it would seek primarily to affirm my claims rather than to reject them. On the particular claim that expectation plays a considerable role in governing interpretation

and, in turn, ownership, it remains noteworthy that seeming counterexamples prove this point. Bryan Cranston's non-comedic performance in *Breaking Bad* and Taylor Swift's transition from country to pop stardom, for example, were lauded specifically because of the way they challenged expectations. While these might prove that the weight given to preconception can be applied in accordance with different aesthetic outlooks, it does not reject the existence of that weight; it affirms it. Furthermore, to pose such an objection as a counterargument would be in tension with Fish's theory as it is applied, which specifically considers the multiplicity and tension across interpretive communities as the source of their longevity.

Amid these discussions of communities, corporations, and consistencies, it is critical that ownership not get lost in the analytic weeds. These topics, while independently interesting, do not find their relevance to my claim in their particular intricacies, which could surely be the source of further scholarship. Rather, these topics are critical to the way ownership—and adjacent phenomena such as authorship—is discussed. That is, if such a thing exists that can rightly be called *my* story, it seems necessary that I might be empowered to govern things such as its telling, dissemination, and interpretation. When some process emerges which challenges this authority, it threatens that the label *my* story might be a misnomer. These processes are ritualistically performed by interpretive communities, thereby rendering them a fundamental complication to the notion of ownership; this further renders them a complication to the dialogic model of aesthetics, which was previously discussed as a seemingly dyadic phenomenon. Nonetheless, it would be brash to claim that the mere existence of interpretive communities and the standards embedded therein poses an existential threat to artists' ownerships of their works. Rather,

they are merely a source of complexity; works might be owned by artists to a certain extent, even wholly, while other entities pose a challenge to the legitimacy of or authority granted to that ownership. That is, ownership is a phenomenon which might not be fully discerned or defined in all instances; endeavoring to do so would invariably result in a series of one-off objections which hinder further development of a claim. As such, it seems most fruitful—with these possibilities of ownership being mapped—to proceed with an understanding of ownership which is sufficiently fluid to allow for further analysis. So, ownership is complicated. Who cares?

III. CARING ABOUT OWNERSHIP

Regardless of the extent to which an artist might be understood to own their work, people only seem to care about artists as owners in particular instances. For instance, if an average interpreter were to view a work on the wall in a museum, analyze its content, and then see an index card mounted beside it which states it is on loan from a private collector, it seems unlikely that any meaningful interpretive change would arise. In short, they would not care. However, this apathy is not generalizable. Rather, it shall be found that people are often led to care about the ownership of artworks due to particular things about them. In some cases, these reasons find their bases in the internal contents of the art-objects being interpreted, but it is frequently true that people care about ownership for reasons separate from the art-objects themselves. Essentially, this section operates under the assumption that people often do not care about the ownership of art-objects, seeking to understand why, in some cases, they do.

One of the most salient reasons people care about ownership of art-objects is provocation by their creators. While this provocation is sometimes subtle, it is often the result of nothing more than a direct declaration that people should care. For example, when Taylor Swift sought to re-record her old albums under new contract, she took to social media and blogging website Tumblr to lambast the manager who acquired the masters to her old work, Scooter Braun. This move was calculated, done with an awareness that her fans would support her endeavor with the sort "'militant religiosity'" which "[blocks] any reconciliation between faith and knowledge" (Hellings 166). What this instance makes

evident is that people's tendency to care about ownership of an artwork is often directly attributable to provocations made by the artist. Knowing that she had a fanbase which would respond in overwhelming support of her cause, Swift leveraged her position atop a fan-text-artist hierarchy to galvanize them in support of her ownership.

Another way in which people are led to care about the ownership of artworks is through modifications to the way works are discussed, which are again able to be shaped by the artists' provocations. In the case of Swift, naming her new albums with the words *(Taylor's Version)* was no coincidence. Rather, this choice deliberately constructed a binary between the albums which belonged to Taylor, and those which did not; between those fans who supported Taylor, and those who did not. Given that people, especially fans, have a tendency toward support of artists when challenges are presented to them, it is no surprise that the response to this action was supportive. This titling was particularly effective because its provocative impacts were exponentially magnified as people discussed the work further; the change to the title meant a change to the art-objects' signifiers. This move was reliant upon the understanding that people would be talking about the works rather than merely listening to them, thereby being compelled to evoke the ownership controversy with every utterance. This creation of a clear conversational reference point functionally invites conversation and speculation about the ownership controversy, motivating people to care about conversations which are traditionally relegated to boardrooms and corporate offices.

The idea that fan speculation and care might be invited by an artist is explained well through a cross-application of Matt Hills' notion of *hyperdiegesis*. In his work on fandom, Hills coins the term *hyperdiegesis* to describe the phenomenon whereby coherent, complex

worlds are previewed in media to establish unexplored narrative possibilities which "cohere overall as ontologically secure worlds" (Hills 138).This notion is used to explain how the inclusion of maps on the inside cover of *Lord of the Rings* books, mentioning of extratextual media such as *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* in the *Harry Potter* franchise, and other such previews might give way to further fan speculation about the narrative possibilities within these worlds. Swift's retitling of her works is not drastically different from these examples, as it represented the broadening of discursive possibilities for conversations surrounding her works. The questions invited might include whether Swift was manipulated into signing a disadvantageous contract, whether her record label had her best interest in mind, and similar moral and factual queries. These are of course different than questions of whether dragons can canonically breathe fire, but these examples are nonetheless similar insofar as they are concerned with the truths of worlds. That is, Swift's retitling of her work shares with Hills' examples that it invites people to speculate about truths central to her work and the circumstances which surround it.

Another way in which people might be led to care about who owns art is through the scene of interpretation itself being something which nurtures that care. For example, many scenes of art interpretation strive to make that care—and the intimacy which allows it to materialize—possible. Live music venues, even of immense size, create elongated stages which extend in multiple directions so that as many people as possible might have the front-row experience. Movie theatres are designed in a stair-stepped manner so that as many people as possible might have an unimpeded view of the screen. Art on walls is often placed against a sterile backdrop so that people might directly engage with it absent things which distract and detract from that intimate engagement. If a person were to witness work

in an environment such as those described above, and the work they witnessed was later discovered to have been stolen by a corporate entity, they would likely respond with immense frustration. If the same person witnessed these works in an environment which was designed more ambivalently—absent the seemingly reverent attitude toward art which aesthetic spaces seek to nurture—their frustration could be less palpable.

It seems to be established that aesthetic environments tend to nurture intimacy between interpreters and artists, but perhaps more convincing than mere intuition is needed to justify the claim that this intimacy translates into care. At this point, the claim becomes narrower in scope. If one were to imagine that the intimacy cultivated by a space and the care had for artists as owners of their work were each quantifiable phenomena, there would be no compelling reason to believe that they exist in a positive, causal, and one-to-one relationship. If this were the case, there would likely be outcry every time a label stated, as described earlier, that work was on loan from a collector or is part of a museum's permanent collection. Despite this mitigatory claim, though, there is still sufficient reason to believe that there is a positive, correlative relationship between these phenomena, described aptly by Nguyen in his discussion of sincerity:

> Trust in aesthetic sincerity... has a special character—one that is quite distinctive from the way we trust in moral and epistemic spheres. I suggest this is because of our distinctive goals in aesthetic life. We ask for sincerity, rather than kindliness, cooperativeness, or reliability, because we are trying to nurture creativity and originality, and because we are hoping to encourage a very particular form of shared experience (Nguyen 24).

For Nguyen's analysis to successfully prove that intimate experiences of artists lead people to care about them, one must assume the existence of two positive relationships: firstly between intimacy and sincerity, and secondly between trust and care. The first finds its warrant in the fact that people are more sincere with those with whom they have intimate connections. The second is also true, as people tend to care more about those whom they trust, much like an inverted version of the understood relationship between distrust and disdain. As such, those artist-interpreter relationships which are rooted in more intimate connection—itself established at least partially through spatial design—are more likely to feature sincere work and trusting, caring response. While this merely proves that intimacy causes people to have a general care for artists and not a particular care for artists as owners of their work, that is the only endeavor which this analysis must accomplish. Presumably, there is at least some positive relationship between this general sense of care and its particular materialization in the case of ownership controversies. Furthermore, this care is a dynamic phenomenon the compounding of which is uniquely more likely alongside other galvanizations toward care, such as the provocations mentioned earlier.

On the point of spatial design, one might further consider how scenes independent from art objects themselves might still be shaped in a way which is attached to the affective experience shaping interpretation. Matt Hills' work on cult fandom declares that "the fan-text affective relationship cannot be separated from spatial concerns and categories," considering how fans of a television series might visit locations where it was filmed, how fans of an artist might visit their childhood homes, or other such phenomena (Hills 145). While his argument does concede that those participating in cult geographic pilgrimage are already such fans of artists on whose behalf they make pilgrimage, it nonetheless points to

the existence of a relationship between aesthetic attitudes and wholly extratextual landscapes. As a result, one might understand that a fan of Elvis who made a pilgrimage to Graceland is more likely to care about Elvis' right to ownership, revenue, and authenticity than is a casual fan. While this relationship is not entirely causal, and it is highly likely that such a fan would have already cared, it remains possible that an increased care might be had as a result of the pilgrimage itself.

In addition to the already illuminated concerns, one might consider how groups, legacies, and traditions to which artists, art-objects, and interpreters belong might shape peoples' care about ownership. For example, The British Museum is "often regarded as embodying the essence of imperialism and empire and an ongoing symbol of dispossession as a legacy of the colonial past" (Sculthorpe 79-80). Given its legacy, people are often particularly attuned to questions of ownership of works which are housed in its permanent collection, much of which was stolen from other countries during eras of British occupation and colonialism. In recent years, activist groups have advocated that the museum return works to the nations in which they were created, believing them to be the rightful homes of these cultural artifacts. On a less direct level, people consider the question of theft in other instances; for example, the video game Fortnite contains animations whereby characters perform particular dance moves. These dance moves were eventually discovered to have been created by black teenagers on video platform TikTok, causing people to advocate for things such as the removal of the dances from the game and the compensation of the teenagers who created them. These examples certainly indicate that people are more attuned to the facts of ownership when controversies surrounding it are raised, though that point largely mirrors the point about provocation discussed earlier. This galvanization to

care becomes more complex when it spills into conversations which are not necessarily about theft. For example, scholars with backgrounds in colonial studies often raise questions about the ownership of art-objects created by colonized peoples, noting that it is often linked to legacies of theft, not only of art by museums, but of land by colonizers, governments by Kings, and cultures by hegemons. This points to the tendency of interpretive communities to not only care about questions of ownership when they are raised explicitly, but also to raise these questions themselves when they suspect the demographics, group memberships, or other components of the artists the indicate the relevance of ownership as a variable.

For the most part, the examples brought thus far regarding why people might care about the ownership of art-objects have been external to the objects themselves, referencing instead the surrounding phenomena which contribute to and shape the aesthetic experience. Seemingly equally important, however, are the reasons housed within the art-objects themselves, such as their thematic contents. For example, if an author, reflecting on struggles within the writing industry, wrote a piece of fiction about having their work claimed and fame accrued by someone else, people would likely respond with sympathy. If it were later found that a publisher were using that text in contexts or places where the author did not approve of its use, those who read the book would likely be angered and would react strongly as a result. This is the case because art which evokes a value often is responded do by interpreters granting increased devotion to said value. Resultantly, people who have read the book from this example would likely be more likely to care about the ownership of art in general upon their reading. However, I also maintain that they would be uniquely attuned to questions of ownership when they are raised about the particular

art-object being discussed, as the irony of its misuse would be particularly attention-getting. This is largely similar to how people might be more attuned to the romantic struggles of someone known to write love songs or romance novels; when there is a noteworthy disconnect between the thematic content of art-objects and the circumstances in which their creators are found, people often attune themselves to the particular controversies which caused the disconnect to materialize.

In addition to the thematic content of the work, people are potentially more likely to care about the ownership of works of art in some forms of media than in others. Specifically, it is likely that people are more inclined to care about the ownership of works which are conventionally understood as being created by one individual. It is no coincidence that the example which catalyzed this writing and has underscored it throughout was Taylor Swift, whose main artistic output is solo singer-songwriter music. When someone buys a Taylor Swift album at a record store, it remains possible that they will read names credited for production, sound engineering, backup vocals, and a myriad of other contributions, but they will likely maintain that the album is decidedly the output of Taylor Swift. Even in the case of bands, it remains the case that a band—as a composite of multiple musicians—is often understood as a singular entity, so the same analysis can be cross-applied. This points toward the fact that people understand music, with some exceptions, as a generally individual medium. Per contra, references to film throughout this writing have been rather sparse, and they have been similarly sparse in my detected public increase in care for artists as owners. This is likely the case because film, as it is conventionally understood, is more embraced as a collaborative medium than is music. Collaborative media render questions about ownership less straightforward, thereby

making them less likely to be raised. Whereas a challenge posed to a singer's ownership of their song clearly threatens to compromise the ownership relation, the same cannot be said for adjacent conflicts in film; whether credit for ownership goes to a screenwriter, director, production studio, lead actor, or some other entity feels much less straightforward than whether credit for a song goes to a singer-songwriter.

Thus far, the enumerated criteria for what makes people likely to care about ownership of artworks by artists have spanned extratexual and textual means, with particular attention being given to provocation by artists, scenes of interpretation, group memberships and legacies, thematic content, and medium-specific outlooks. Two things must still be clarified about these criteria in order for a reader to have sufficient understanding of them, though. The first is that they are unexhaustive; there are infinite possible reasons that people might care about ownership of art, as these reasons are ultimately determined by the individual interpreter and the interpretive communities to which they belong. The second is that, while labels of *internal* and *external* have been used, these motivators, at their core, resist categorization. With the earlier example of Taylor Swift modifying her albums' titles, for example, that move was certainly a modification to the art-objects on some level; any understanding which divorces titles from meaning would be damning to the work of Marcel Duchamp, for example. That said, it was also a modification to the discursive landscape the work occupied, and it was also a form of provocation on some level. It was none of these things exclusively, and it was none of them wholly either. This consideration of nuance should underscore analyses of all of the reasons people might care about ownership, leading one to a rather simple conclusion: the reasons people might care about ownership of art are abundant and coexisting.

IV. CARE AS INTERPRETIVE STRATEGY

Given the analysis that the reasons people care about art-object ownership are highly contextual, varying across cultures, art-types, and interpretive communities, it may seem peculiar that such abundance and contradiction could generate a cross-applicable claim about the nature of the aesthetic experience. That is, there is no mathematic formula one might apply to an artwork to explain why or how much person X—or people more generally—might care who owns it. Nothing about interpretation is categorical. Nonetheless, there are relative consistencies which reflect aesthetic attitudes, and those have been discussed at length in the description of reasons people might care about the ownership of art-objects. Ultimately, the goal of this section is to resolve that fan culture participation is a worthwhile endeavor in the pursuit of aesthetic meaning; embedded within this shall be a synthesis of previous sections, noting the ways in which a dialogic model of aesthetics and a broad conception of ownership reinforce this claim.

It is pre-emptively worthwhile to acknowledge that fan culture participation, like all pursuits, is not a universal good. That is, there exist examples of fan cultures which have antagonized the artists they claim to revere, with participants engaging in murky parasocial relationships. This claim is evinced even within the fandoms who galvanized this project, as Taylor Swift fan forums and social media accounts have engaged in speculation regarding her sexuality, romantic interests, and more for years. Rather than seeking to defend this behavior, I respond to it by clarifying scope: fan culture participation has the capacity to produce goods, though it is not the good in itself.

On fan culture, the fact that it nurtures care about art-ownership is sufficiently established, though an explanation of this care's benefit is still in order. To warrant this, attention should be directed to Nguyen's description of aesthetic trust's role in shaping interpretation, describing "this richer form of trust that gives rise to a wider variety of complex affective responses... [and] puts us in the world of praise, blame, and betrayal" (Nguyen 30). This claim reveals the central role of aesthetic trust—previously established to be adjacent to and influenced by intimacy—in governing the variety of interpretive responses which people are afforded, characterizing the relationship between trust and meaning to be positive. That is, in the presence of deeper trust, the potential exists for a greater variety and intensity of affective interpretive responses. Insofar as fan culture is a vehicle through which this trust might be spurred, these feelings of intimacy might be nurtured, and these horizons of meaning might be unlocked, participation within is a worthwhile pursuit. Being a fan enhances the aesthetic experience, rendering fandom worthwhile. Of course, this claim is contingent upon the premise that the expansion of possible responses—in both scope and magnitude—is an aesthetic good. This claim is not without warrant, though it shall at the moment be regarded as an operating assumption.

While the above analysis reveals that fan culture participation is good because it enables people to experience art-objects and art culture more richly, uniquely, and abundantly, it is further necessary to show how this relates to the phenomenon of ownership. For explanation, one could look to the earlier declaration that people respond to the phenomenon of ownership as a component of their aesthetic experience. More specifically, people consider factors external to art-objects in their interpretations thereof, and ownership is a particularly salient consideration when controversies surrounding it are

presented. With regards to fan communities, it remains true that they interpretively respond to these presentations with more haste and fervor than average interpreters, as their members are often particularly devoted to upholding the status of the artists they enjoy. As such, fan culture participation is worthwhile not only insofar as it grants people a wider variety and greater intensity of aesthetic responses, but more specifically because it gives them the ability to respond to art-object ownership with this same affect.

Having argued that fan culture participation is worthwhile for its ability to produce response to both to art-object ownership and to art-objects generally, my remaining endeavor is to synthesize this advocacy with the previous sections, seeing it as a proof of both topicality and depth. Upon completion of the first section, readers should see that art-making and art interpretation are both participations within an aesthetic dialogue, inviting response from one's aesthetic interlocutor. This description is critical to my argument, as it grants interpretation unique importance as part of the aesthetic experience; notably, this counters any belief which views the aesthetic dimension as wholly contained within art-objects' interiors. Furthermore, it lays the groundwork for how aesthetic care—particularly that nurtured by fan communities—is mechanized into interpretive change.

One should additionally view the broad conception of ownership as indispensable to my argument, as it affords people the greatest possibility of trust, care, and intimacy. For example, when people view an artists' ownership of their work as being threatened, this view is seldom spurred by particular knowledge of legal proceedings surrounding copyright, though these may be evoked. Rather, interpretive care is most directly and initially galvanized by the belief that an artist's authenticity or integrity is under threat; often times, fan reference to more particular legal matters is reserved for after their care

has been provoked by these broader appeals. An understanding of ownership in its broadest sense, then, renders my analysis of fan communities as incubators of care truer. Specifically, one should view ownership not as a binary phenomenon, but as one of scale; it is often not that an artist does or does not own their work, but rather that their ownership is being partially undermined. Additionally, one should view ownership as something which is shaped by both legal right and abstract authenticity; this description is consistent with the challenges evoked throughout my analysis, and it is most in line with the tendencies of interpretive minds.

Care is an interpretive strategy, and it affords people both variety and depth of interpretive response. Accordingly, it is a strategy worth employing. Insofar as fan culture participation is a way of nurturing this care and affirming it as interpretive strategy, it too is a worthwhile pursuit. This claim is enhanced by the endorsed notions of dialogic aesthetics, aesthetic intimacy and trust, and broad conceptions of ownership. To summarize this interrelatedness: Artists and fans interact dialogically to nurture intimacy, thereby rendering fans more likely to care about ownership of art, and in turn fueling a cycle of continually deepening and expanding aesthetic response. Through employing the interpretive strategy of care, one can get to know art all too well.

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