

The Phenomenology of Mood and its Epistemic Significance for  
the Space of Reasons

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**I. Introduction: The Dualism of Reason and Nature**

The principle aim of John McDowell's work Mind and World is to present his epistemological thought as a curative for "characteristic anxieties" of modern analytic philosophy that emerge from a presumptive dualism between reason and nature. McDowell diagnoses this dualism as arising from the thought that our sense organs belong to the realm of nature and the domain of natural science whereas our thoughts belong to the realm of spontaneity, or the Sellarsian logical space of reasons. Our spontaneity, technically defined as the capacity to conceptually organize bare sensory material in accordance with reputed rational linkages, stands in opposition to nature and is thus non-natural. Understood as the natural scientific realm of law, nature stands in sharp contrast with the justificatory norms pertaining to reason that predicate the possibility of formulating a judgment, following a rule, or being motivated to choose some course of action on the basis of perceptual experience. That is to say that nature, reduced to the activity of laws by natural science, cannot provide normative reasons that serve as a justificatory basis for an ethical judgment or action. Moreover, the freedom of the subject is challenged by a disenchanting image of nature insofar as human action is debarred from having reasons for behaving in some way or another.

McDowell finds himself faced with an untenable antagonism between the space of reasons as a realm of norms as to which concept may be appropriately applied to a thing and the world, conceived by natural science as the realm of causal laws. The philosophical means by

which he attempts to dissolve this dualism is the naturalization of rational thinking by conceiving of the space of reasons as being an outgrowth of nature in humanity. Drawing on aspects Aristotle's virtue ethics and social-psychological notions from the German Idealist tradition, McDowell argues for a realist perspective that grasps rational thought and human phenomena as an abstracted "second nature," a realm of particularly human experience entirely distinct from first nature, yet not in any way extra-natural. McDowell invokes the German concept of *Bildung* to describe the process of self-development by which the individual becomes familiar with second nature and appreciates how meaning is structured in relation to the ideals and practices of one's cultural tradition.

In the context of McDowell's thought, *Bildung* offers a perspective on human intellectual and ethical activity establishing that a subject must be conceived as existing within a cultural world understood as a offshoot of the natural world. *Bildung* describes the process of self-development whereby the subject is endowed with the capacity to grasp reasons as concepts by way of initiation into the social space of reasons. This process is bound up with McDowell's appropriation of Aristotle's conception of the subject as a rational animal, thereby allowing for this process of cultural and personal self-development to be a naturalistic operation. For McDowell, *Bildung* is understood as naturalistic because it seems to involve the actualization of the real potentialities of the human organism, yet he is not explicit about what this means. The sort of naturalism McDowell argues for does not collapse reason entirely into first nature, but instead demonstrates, in neo-Kantian spirit, that reason must be considered as operating freely within its own sphere without neglecting its proper location within nature. In turn, McDowell combines this notion with the Aristotelian concept of the rational animal to argue that the natural

state of being for the human is experience “permeated with rationality.”<sup>1</sup> The result is an argument for a “naturalism of second nature” that situates humanity within the natural world while simultaneously expanding a conception of nature that goes beyond being merely the operation of calculable laws by way of accommodating rationality as a secondary upshot of first nature.

Through his interpretation of *Bildung*, McDowell aims to erase two opposing tendencies latent in contemporary epistemology: (1) to relegate reason to a space that is wholly extra-natural (i.e. what McDowell calls “rampant Platonism”), or (2) to make reason another feature of the natural realm of law (i.e. “bald naturalism”). The rampant Platonist preserves the Kantian insight into the irreducibility of concepts for knowledge but by risking the total detachment of reason from any contact with the empirical realm outside of it.<sup>2</sup> While this view purports to do justice to reason’s extra-natural sovereignty and its active role in perception, it does so at the price of opening up an unbridgeable lacuna between the mind and the material of the world where thought is not assured of its empirical content or verifiability such that we can tell whether a thought is true or false.<sup>3</sup> Rampant Platonism threatens to divest reason of any truth claims by not allowing it any interaction with a world independent of the mind, thus debarring the subject from its passive involvement with a world. On the other hand, the bald naturalist jeopardizes the Kantian truth of reason’s self-determination by making the operation of rationality entirely subject to the first nature, understood as the realm of law.<sup>4</sup> This position ensures that thought

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<sup>1</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, (Macmillan: London, 1929).

<sup>3</sup> By “empirical content” or “empirical verifiability” I mean only to acknowledge that a necessary condition for meaningful thought and language is that concepts and words hook onto the world, and that they do subject to Frege’s constraint. [See Donald Davidson, “Truth and Meaning,” in *Synthese*, 17: 304-323, 1967) for a detailed contemporary account of Frege’s constraint].

makes direct contact with empirical content but at the cost of having to devalue reason by reducing it to the passive reception of conceptual capacities causally transmitted by the impingement of given empirical contents. In attempting to ground rational judgment in empirical content, the bald naturalist fails to acknowledge thought's determinant role in perception by making it the contingent association of concepts with causal impingements to the senses. In this way, reason is problematically naturalized to first nature as the effect of a causal law.

Neither rampant Platonism nor bald naturalism are satisfactory positions to hold, yet they both suggest a conflict that plagues contemporary epistemology: the paradoxical ambitions to preserve the independence of the rational subject (i.e. freedom from the constraints of natural law) and to ground reason in nature as the actualization of a natural potentiality and not the mystical endowment of an ontological supernaturalism. That the modern philosopher is confronted with the unsavory choice between these two epistemological perspectives is indicative of a particular socio-historical context that generates an impoverished conception of nature. Adopting a critical position introduced by Max Weber, McDowell asserts that modern natural-scientific reasoning 'disenchants' nature by reducing it to the contingent activity of law.<sup>5</sup> This disenchanted picture of nature imperils reason's autonomy, conceived of by McDowell as the free operation of Kantian spontaneity, by disregarding rationality's *sui generis* constitution and collapsing it into the realm of law. In other words, the natural scientific conception of nature threatens to reduce the human subject to an observable and calculable law, debarring any satisfactory possibility for freedom.

McDowell feels himself as tasked with a necessary re-enchantment of nature that discloses a satisfactory reconciliation between the two problematic perspectives by accommodating reason's *sui generis* structure while nonetheless preserving it as an actualization

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<sup>5</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 70.

of a natural fact. The idea of a ‘re-enchantment’ of nature may give the false impression of a reversion to pre-modern, mythic images of nature. Yet, McDowell is conscious of the need to argue for a re-enchantment of nature that justifies thought’s autonomy while preserving the truth of natural-scientific reasoning and first nature. The main objective in McDowell’s proposed re-enchantment is delineating that the sort of meaning proper to concepts is not unnatural.

*Bildung* is the cornerstone of McDowell’s image of re-enchanted nature, but the philosophical implications of this concept require further unpacking. As McDowell argues, *Bildung* is the process of actualizing capacities of first nature in the realm of second nature that enables the subject to realize its particular nature as a rational animal. Moreover, *Bildung* furnishes the subject with the capacity to formulate conceptual judgments and communicate formal reasons for such judgments—it inducts the subject into a space of reasons wherein they acquire the proper conceptual capacities for reflection and judgment on experience. Another way to put this point is that *Bildung* engenders in the human subject a constructive orientation in and towards a social world that develops in part by the process of acquiring language, understood by McDowell to be “something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons.”<sup>6</sup> This suggests that in acknowledging the meaningfully organized structure of experience the subject is presented with a world already invested with rational meanings that are ‘putative’ in the sense that they have the authority of the social tradition that corresponds with a language. In this way, exposure to traditional practices, values, and ways of using language engenders conceptual capacities in the subject that already embody possible orientations to the world. The inextricability of thought, language, and tradition is accompanied by the ethical dictum that the individual is faced with the

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<sup>6</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 125.

“standing obligation” to critically reflect on and modify tradition, yet McDowell is not explicit about how such critical reflection is made possible.

Part of the purpose of this argument is to elaborate on McDowell’s use of the concept of *Bildung* as a process of acculturation and self-development that actualizes the free critical capacities of the subject to rationally apprehend the experience through traditional conceptual structures that inhere in every perceptual deliverance from the world. An appropriate conception of *Bildung* is required to assure that experience, inherited by the subject through language and other cultural practices, provides grounds for critical reflection on the conditions of its own possibilities and truth. *Bildung* therefore necessitates that the subject come to cognizance of the meaningfully structured nature of perception and the shared background of natural and cultural proclivities that determine its meaning for a community. McDowell argues that perception is conceptual because empirical content is open to be exploited conceptually and communicated normatively through a shared framework of cultural semantics.<sup>7</sup> Such a framework is assuredly mutual for a community inasmuch as comprehending meaning presupposes familiarity with a social tradition by initiation into language.<sup>8</sup> As a general body of collected knowledge, this traditional background constitutes an accumulated totality of social meanings and language serves as its repository.<sup>9</sup> An accumulated totality describes a shared historical paradigm that generally frames a community’s shared sensibility regarding objects and events within the world. Consequently, the theoretical work of Thomas Kuhn on the concept of the paradigm as a shared collection of explanatory models will be a source of analogies for how tradition may be properly conceived within McDowell’s work.

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<sup>7</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 57-58.

<sup>8</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Much of McDowell's thought rests on exactly what he means when referring to "concepts." If he means nothing more than "being initiated into the space of reasons" (i.e. coming to appreciate the practice of having reasons for acting and judging), then it seems there is no problem with labeling experience as wholly conceptual. However, if by "conceptual" McDowell means that all empirical content is necessarily linguistic content, this too narrowly ignores the phenomenology of perceptual experience. McDowell is altogether silent on any constructive account of what being "responsive to reason" actually means.<sup>10</sup> Charles Larmour raises this objection in his paper "Attending to Reasons" and offers a brief, positive account of reasons in response. He says, "reasons are essentially normative entities, and they resist identification with anything physical or psychological precisely to the extent that their normativity is regarded as irreducible."<sup>11</sup> Provisional as these remarks are, they suggest the path constructive philosophy must take is to articulate a theory of reasons as essentially non-neutral constituents of experience.

Larmour's observations speak to the peculiar phenomenology of reasons—they can be neither psychological nor objective and yet they undoubtedly make demands on us as subjects. What is called for in light of this is a phenomenology of reasons that articulates their essential non-neutrality for the subject and gives a systematic account of how reasons fit into the overall scheme of worldly experience. This sort of phenomenological account of human experience is absent from McDowell's thought, and the purpose of this work is to present something of a phenomenological supplement to McDowell's work. Martin Heidegger's concept of mood will hence serve as the basis for an adequate phenomenology of reasons and their relevance for action

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<sup>10</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 79, 84.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Larmour, "Attending to Reasons" in *Reading McDowell, On Mind and World*, edited by Nicholas Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 192.

theory and language. McDowell's insights into the connection between rationality and tradition, the ethically formative process of upbringing, and aspects of his theory of second nature should be preserved, commended even. Nonetheless, his thought must be situated within a broader phenomenological account of the irreducible non-neutrality of reasons.

In conjunction with a discussion of the phenomenology of moods, aesthetic experience will be analyzed as a potential mode of presentation that expresses meaning entirely in terms of moods. Specifically, the found art object and its theoretical significance for the Surrealist tradition divulge the particularity of aesthetic objects as meaningfully incommensurable with any mediating framework like a concept. In the context of this argument, a critical interpretation of Joseph Cornell's experimental art film *Rose Hobart* serves to demonstrate the non-neutrality of moods. In this way, I aim to demonstrate that objects of experience attune cognition to their significance in a decidedly non-predicative manner. This is not to rule out McDowell's claim of the ineluctability of grasping meaning in the world and knowing concepts. If concepts can allow for the rich phenomenology illustrated by the idea of moods, then there is no reason to reject McDowell's insight, but he is not clear whether this idea fits into his project. Nevertheless, inasmuch as acute aesthetic experience reveals something about normally meaningful experience, it is reasonable to consider that such particularized moods disclose dimensions of experience that are not conceptual in any literal or discursive sense.

The strong aim of this work is to demonstrate that direct phenomenological access to things in the world is a transcendental condition on meaningful perception. As such this moves the epistemic dialectic back into a consideration of non-conceptuality in the strictly linguistic sense. The positing of experiential constituents beyond the span of the concept is classically regarded as a regression to the Kantian thing-in-itself and suggests a realm of experience wholly

beyond meaningful investigation. However, the sense in which thing-in-themselves may be understood requires clarification. Namely, the concept of thing-in-themselves can refer either to (1) the idea that rich perception precedes and is independent of language or (2) to the idea that there is something prior to representational content. For the purposes of the present work, the former interpretation—that rich perception precedes and remains independent of language—serves as the backdrop for a phenomenological supplement to McDowell’s work. The latter, much more radical interpretation enjoins proper articulation in the context of a broader dialectic of aesthetic theory. As such, the question of its actuality will be left open for the time being. In light of this, a narrow interpretation of perspicacious aesthetic experience serves to divulge the necessity of thinking about objects not simply by grasping or applying their normative meaning for others but by attuning to their immediate, non-neutral significance. Concurrently, this sort of direct phenomenological access to things in the world is captured by the idea of mood.

## **II. The Aristotelian Concepts of Habituation and Second Nature**

The process of individual self-edification described by *Bildung* involves a human subject’s acquiescence to reasonability—what McDowell likens to the practice of giving and asking for reasons—as the natural state of human perceptual experience. Reason establishes its fundamental connection to the world as the actualization of the human organism’s natural capacity for comprehending the world as rationally meaningful. The ineluctability of logically structured experience is due to rationality being the natural state of the human subject. Aristotle’s concept of second nature serves as the core of McDowell’s argument for a naturalistic ontology of reason. McDowell is compelled to argue for the reality of a second nature, conceived as the sorts of rational behaviors and practices that a subject appreciates as natural.

McDowell urges philosophical exploitation of the idea of second nature on grounds that it eliminates any worry that the mind might be alienated from nature, because the self-constituting operations of the mind are not to be considered as extra-natural. This apparent paradox arises out of the incompatibility of Kantian spontaneity (i.e. the *sui generis* character of the logical space of reasons) and the epistemological requirement that thought be constrained by the world to which it intends.<sup>12</sup> To alleviate this dialectical contradiction, McDowell invokes Aristotle's insight into the autonomy of ethical demands as a path out of this bind, remarking:

“Moulding ethical character, which includes imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect, is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which includes responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics. Such initiation is a normal part of what it is for a human being to come to maturity, and that is why, although the structure of the space of reasons is alien to the layout of nature conceived as the realm of law, it does not take on the remoteness from the human that rampant platonism envisages. If we generalize the way Aristotle conceives the moulding of ethical character, we arrive at the notion of having one's eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature.”<sup>13</sup>

McDowell's interpretation of this Aristotelian insight is meant to demonstrate that the norms of the concepts of the logical space of reasons (both ethical and otherwise) are not outside of what we take to be reality. This feature of the space of reasons thus implies that the world in which we humans come to live is not only expressive of natural order but also a human order. Through initiation into the space of reasons, the subject is opened up to the possibility of seeing the world as mattering in terms particular to a normal subject—of perceiving the world as being expressive of real human potentialities for acting, judging, reflecting, responding, and learning.

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<sup>12</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 5. In his initial elaboration on Donald Davidson's discussion of the “dualism of scheme and content”, McDowell sets the stage for his argument by suggesting the need to reconcile the notion of rational thought's spontaneous (i.e. active) participation in determining knowledge with the passive conception of mind that regards perception as the receptivity of causal impingements.

<sup>13</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 84.

By invoking Aristotle's insight into the self-organizing nature of ethical norms, McDowell implies that a transcendental condition for experiencing the world is acknowledgement of the perceptual world's dual natural and cultural character. Through entrance to the space of reasons, a human subject comes to possess the world not as a bare, objective space of things, features, and causal relations amongst things and amongst features and things. Instead, the individual subject perceives his existence in the world as a space of human possibility, of states of affairs and certain objects and circumstances that matter in a specifically practical way for the human subject. The process by which the individual appreciates that objects and situations in the world are defined in terms of what they normally mean for others is *Bildung*. The idea of second nature, considered as subjective congeniality with a presupposed background of normative social practices, is thus necessary to comprehend the philosophical significance of *Bildung*.

Though Aristotle never explicitly refers to a concept of "second nature" directly in his discussion of the formation of ethical character, there is good reason for McDowell to attribute the idea to him. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle argues that acclimating oneself to custom through habituation achieves the shaping of ethical character. That a process of habituation is fundamental to the formation of ethical character is, on Aristotle's view, evidence that "virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature."<sup>14</sup> For McDowell, this is translated in the modern context by the Kantian insight into the autonomy of reason that the normative meanings of the concepts of the space of reasons organize themselves in a realm independent of the law of first nature. That is, human perceptual experience is rendered comprehensible by a normative structure not explicable

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), Book II, Chapter 2 §3.

in terms of the laws of first nature. McDowell does not then conclude that ethical character must be bestowed upon the subject from a mystical, extra-natural force. Rather, the norms of thought (i.e. Aristotelian ‘virtues’) are such that “we are, by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit.”<sup>15</sup> Some have argued that by pointing to Aristotle’s insight into ethical character McDowell risks undermining his project of describing how the subject comes to possess conceptual abilities inasmuch as Aristotle’s account of ethical habituation apparently requires that the subject already possess complex conceptual abilities.<sup>16 17</sup> This is not necessarily the case, because McDowell conceives of coming to reside within the space of reasons as involving the actualization of latent natural capacities of the human subject such that concepts are regarded as immutable constituents of the nature of the human organism. That is, the existence of an individual subject, as a rational animal, presupposes that the capacity to conceptualize experience is a natural potentiality of the human organism. Second nature figures into this theory of the subject as the organic actualization of putative forms of life the individual comes to appreciate as the natural possibilities of the human.

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), Book II, Chapter 2 §3.

<sup>16</sup> David Forman argues that Aristotle’s account of ethical character is not a matter of actualizing latent natural capacities of the human subject but of habituating oneself to a custom through practice and repetition such that it becomes like a natural response. Forman believes that the aporia structure of Aristotle’s insight (that one becomes virtuous by repeatedly performing virtuous acts) is problematic for McDowell, because it describes a process whereby complex activities requiring conscious thought and effort are integrated such that they may be unreflectively performed with ease. Whether or not this may be the case is irrelevant to McDowell’s argument, because he is making a point about the sort of rich perception of the world that is constructively grasped in terms of a rational framework. For McDowell second nature connotes the human organism’s natural capacity for rational intelligence, implying that the self comes to grasp reliable forms of relating themselves to the world prior to being able to comprehend anything discursive.

<sup>17</sup> David Forman, “Second Nature: On McDowell’s Aristotelian Naturalism,” In *Inquiry*, 51: 6, (London: Routledge, 2008), 563-580.

Critics of McDowell, like Forman, assert that the subject must exhibit complex rational capacities prior of their coming to acclimate themselves to a certain customary form of life *qua* second nature. Citing the following passage, Forman claims that Aristotle necessarily requires that the subject possess conceptual capabilities prior to the formation of ethical character:

“Further, if something arises in us by nature, we first have the capacity for it, and later perform the activity. This is clear in the case of the senses; for we did not acquire them by frequent seeing or hearing, but we already had them when we exercised them, and did not get them by exercising them. Virtues, by contrast, we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having first activated them. For we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it; we become builders, for instance, by building, and we become harpists, by playing the harp. Similarly, then, we have become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.”<sup>18</sup>

While it is correct to consider that what Aristotle is discussing in this passage is a learning process whereby a complex activity requiring serious effort becomes deftly integrated into the subject’s capabilities, such a process is only available to a subject that grasps those complex activities as meaningful in terms of a shared framework of reasons. So if conceptual capacities are considered as that which gets a subject into the space of reasons, McDowell uses second nature to argue that being at home within the space of reasons (i.e. coming to appreciate having reasons for acting, judging, and rule-following) is not outside the realm of the human organism. McDowell explains that second nature is the “resulting habits of thought and action,” implying that conceptual capacities are already in place by the time the subject actualizes the capabilities of second nature.<sup>19</sup>

Aristotelian second nature is not a model of how an individual subject acquires conceptual capacities; rather, it is meant to demonstrate that the sort of complex activities

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<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), Book II, Chapter 1 §4.

<sup>19</sup>John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 84.

and reasoning that come into view for the subject of the space of reasons is an integral part of the human organism and therefore not extra-natural. Additionally, the concept of second nature forms the basis of a critical response to the inability of disenchanted nature to account for the autonomy of human reason. McDowell is problematically unclear about how second nature relates to first. By claiming that second nature is constrained by first nature, it seems he commits himself to the perspective that second nature supervenes on first nature, but he does not characterize it directly as such.<sup>20</sup> With this in mind, it seems that there are grounds for skepticism as to whether the rational capacities of the human organism are autonomous in the sense McDowell argues for.

For McDowell, habituating oneself to the norms of the space of reasons is but one aspect of *Bildung* that brings the knowing subject to an awareness of how a framework of communal ideals and practices influence the immediate content of perceptual experience. Beyond merely acknowledging that shared traditional ideals conceptually mediate the sense of the world, the self-edified subject must realize their critical potential to further mediate and criticize the tenets of tradition.<sup>21</sup> *Bildung* thus implies that the subject realize the historical and cultural limitations inherent in the structure and meaning of the space of reasons. To do this, the subject of *Bildung* must maintain an awareness of the apriority of concepts as immutable structural vehicles for world disclosure and meaningful experience.

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<sup>20</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

### III. The Relation Between Second Nature, Spontaneity, and *Bildung*

*Bildung* is fundamental to the conception of the human organism that McDowell argues for inasmuch as it forms the basis for his contradistinction between animals as inhabitants of first nature and human beings as inhabitants of second nature. While animals respond to environmental stimuli and changes in such stimuli, McDowell feels they cannot be conceived of as having any sort of “experience” even a semblance like our own. The essential discrepancy between animals and humans is that animals have no concepts, no means of cognitively ordering phenomena. As rational animal, human experience of the world is necessarily constituted by the space of reasons inasmuch as the human subject comes to appreciate its second nature as a structure of intelligibility already established through heritage. McDowell identifies this as the human’s natural capacity to conceptualize experience—the faculty of the human organism that sets it apart from any other animal.<sup>22</sup> The human animal of second nature exists within nature by identifying and projecting order into an otherwise fluctuating milieu of phenomena. For McDowell, the sort of phenomenology that operates within animals, if it may be called phenomenology at all, is radically unstructured in comparison to the human. He regards animals as manifesting a sort of proto-subjectivity that is explicable wholly in terms of biological factors stating:

“In mere animals, sentience is in the service of a mode of life that is structured exclusively by immediate biological imperatives. That is not to imply that life is restricted to a struggle to keep the individual and the species going. There can be immediate biological imperatives that are at most indirectly connected with survival and reproduction: for instance the impulse to play which is found in many animals.”<sup>23</sup>

Deriving this theory of animal life from Hans-Georg Gadamer, McDowell seems to be saying that since “mere animals” cannot be considered to have conceptual capacities that

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<sup>22</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 115-118.

<sup>23</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 115.

they are wholly subject to the compulsions and imperatives of first nature. Interestingly enough, he asserts that animals may behave on the basis of compulsions that are indirect, as in the case of play. Nonetheless, that these compulsions are indirect suggests that they are ultimately derived from biological necessity—for the use they might serve in sustaining the organism.

How does this relate to humanity's second nature? McDowell wants to establish that the human emancipates herself from the biological necessities that produce compulsory behavior. He carefully clarifies that this does not mean that humans fully transcend the concerns of biology inasmuch as the human is not merely preoccupied with series' of problems and opportunities imposed upon them by the environment. This is what he means when he describes human orientation to the world as "free"—that human cognition is necessarily above the pressures of biological self-preservation.<sup>24</sup> Yet animal lives are shaped by responsiveness to stimuli, activities, and patterns of first nature. As such their proto-subjective existence reveals synthetic, purposive responses to first nature to be antecedent to conceptual thought. If second nature must be conceived as supervening on first nature, then there are no grounds for assuming that conceptual capacities are special for the human. By these lights, it seems problematic simply to assume that the capacity for rational thought is wholly above the biological pressures of first nature. There seems to be no adequate standard, criteria, or method for determining where compulsory response to stimuli stops and rational thought begins. Hence, without any systematic account of how rational capacities evolve from or supervene on animal behavioral patterns, there is no certain discrepancy between human cognition and the perceptual lives of animals.

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<sup>24</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 115.

McDowell asserts that the human animal is distinct from brute animals to the extent that human experience is “permeated with rationality,” which is to say it is shaped fundamentally by concepts.<sup>25</sup> In asserting this, McDowell may be implying that (1) experience provides us with the appropriate content to apply concepts to things in a normative manner or (2) experiential content is necessarily linguistic content. McDowell does not distinguish which of these senses in which experience may be conceptual he has in mind. Nonetheless, he argues for a picture of experience wherein the determining power of the intellect is necessarily implicated at the most basic level of perceptual experience. McDowell asserts that no meaningful perceptual experience can be regarded as such without the active recognition of rational and putative norms.<sup>26</sup> This means that even the most passive of experiences, like watching a sunrise or smelling burnt toast, concepts are operative in such a way that they articulate the meaning of those experiences in relation to their normative sense for a community. That such passive experiences are necessarily structured in terms of shared norms revokes the possibility of experience being dependent solely upon receptivity, or mere causal transmission of given empirical data automatically registered by the mind. McDowell uses spontaneity to describe the active process by which concepts necessarily determine the comprehensibility of an experience in terms of mutual norms.

McDowell’s use of spontaneity illustrates a structure of the mind-world relation that purports to avoid the epistemologically problematic dichotomy between impingements on the senses (i.e. sense data, impressions, Kantian intuitions, Givens—operations of receptivity) and the determinate meaning manifest in experience (i.e.

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<sup>25</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 85.

<sup>26</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 79.

concepts—operations of spontaneity). That is to say that McDowell regards the operation of spontaneity as the inalienable aspect of experience that apprehends normative rational meaning implicated a priori in the deliverance of perceptual material that constitutes experience. Beyond determining the meaning of deliverances of empirical content, McDowell's notion of spontaneity makes a much stronger claim to be inextricable from any idea of a "world" that is independent from and yet always available to the understanding of the human mind.<sup>27</sup> The deliverances from the world are only open to comprehension by the mind and comprehensible as such because they are structured by the operation of active conceptuality that cognizes the world in terms of a shared rational organization.

McDowell's spontaneity establishes that the capacity to apply a putative framework of normative meanings *qua* the space of reasons determinately to percepts is a necessary feature of knowing subjectivity. Primarily, spontaneity reflects human modes of understanding that constitute the meaning of objects in relation to the normal concerns of a community of subjects. It is, in effect, the subject's rational capacity to regard meaning in the world by in virtue of his possessing social forms of understanding. This suggests that the idea of "conceptual content" may be defined as something within experience that warrants a subject with a belief about the world that is both normative and social. Such content might be normative in that it provides the subject with a justified sense of how she ought to take things to be; and it might equally be social in that the criteria for how things ought to be taken to be is determined socially. This may be one way of reading McDowell's assertion that concepts necessarily disclose the whole

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<sup>27</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 39, 116.

perceptual world in terms of the shared space of reasons. Nonetheless, he offers no exact account of what conceptual content is, only that it is essential to human experience.

Spontaneity figures into McDowell's picture by implicating the mind within the world inasmuch as concepts actively determine the mind-world relation such that any empirical deliverances from the world are only graspable as deliverances in terms of a putative conceptual framework.<sup>28</sup> Concepts essentially determine the meaning of experience inasmuch as they orient the subject in a world where objects, events, and situations are regarded in terms of what they normally mean for others. McDowell hopes that his conception of spontaneity will entirely do away with any basis for positing the given, because the presence of a world that is cognizable as such presupposes the putative rational structure facilitated by the concept. Through the operation of spontaneity, experience is structured freely by concepts such that it is imbued a priori with a conditional human meaning, broadcast and buttressed by the concept, that discloses a historically and culturally shared world as the essential and universal ground for human experience. For McDowell, the concept is thus a fundamentally structural form by which the world is presented immediately as meaningful and rationally intelligible.

McDowell's thesis on the essential conceptuality of experience aims to establish that for objects to be present to cognition, they must be apprehended in some mode of determination. Public forms of life engender the individual subject with the proper capacities for involving himself within a shared world. The human subject apprehends forms of life as second nature, as actualizations of the organic necessity of the human as rational animal. Such forms of life are given to the individual by acquiring a language through his upbringing or *Bildung*. Familiarization to a language implies that the individual engage with a communal form of life

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<sup>28</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 72, 91-92.

that extends beyond her individual being. What this suggests is that the way in which an individual comes to interpret her experience shapes the character of her experience in relation to the social tradition to which the language accords. On this view, language embodies certain traditional manners of seeing and experiencing, both the mind and the world.<sup>29</sup> As such the mind-world relation is one of immediacy to the extent that the immediate perceptual image available to any subject is laden with putative possibilities for judgment and action. Spontaneity constitutes the experience as evocative of certain dispositions that may orient the sense of a judgment or action within the particular context of that experience and, subsequently, the world as a totality. Thus, the human organism is not automatically responding to stimuli located within the realm of law or first nature. Instead, the subject experiences a world that is expressive of normative human meanings and reasons that are of an altogether different kind than those elements of first nature. Such normative meaning is constituted in accordance with the traditional uses and norms embodied in a concept and transmissible through language acquisition and upbringing.

McDowell claims that the sort of meaning proper to humans is naturalistic in that the human is a subject of both first and second nature, but he is quick to note that the contents of second nature are constrained in part by those of first.<sup>30</sup> The human subject exists in an environment that imposes certain physical limitations on its natural potentialities but nonetheless comes to be at home within a world that expresses the rational meaning of second nature. As a rational animal, the human gets beyond her existence in first nature to establish herself in the autonomous realm of second nature through *Bildung*. Nonetheless, the sort of background concerns that condition the putative

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<sup>29</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 125.

<sup>30</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 84-85.

functionality and sense of concepts are generated by the physical limitations of first nature. Thus, second nature depends on first nature for conditions on its meaning, despite its claim to autonomous, normative organization. Spontaneity must therefore be situated within the sorts of biological capacities and concerns that are ordinary for the human animal. However, exactly how spontaneity may be situated within the biology of the human organism remains ambiguous in McDowell's work. As I remarked earlier, it seems there is no firm delineation between compulsory responsiveness to stimuli and rational conceptual thought. If spontaneity is conceived as supervening on proto-subjective biological patterns of activity, then there is reason to doubt the reality of its autonomy relative to first nature. As a technical term, "spontaneity" is nonetheless useful to refer to the human subject's capacity to respond to reasons.

Actualizing one's spontaneity involves cultivating openness to the traditional putative meanings that constitute the normative structure of thought and experience through concepts. In other words, it entails feeling oneself at home within the logical space of reasons, which is comprehended as the authoritative ground for meaningful thought and action. The process of coming to be at home in the space of reasons—*Bildung*—entails that the subject regard the rational order provided by the space of reasons as being "there anyway".<sup>31</sup> In this way, reasons obtain as normatively binding entities inasmuch as their *sui generis* order is grasped as a fundamental constituent of reality—as a second nature. The semantics of this order are determined in relation to a community's putative forms of life. As such the subject *Bildung* comes to appreciate what counts as a reason from within a shared social tradition. Hence, *Bildung* must entail that a subject recognize the potential for creating new perceptual

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<sup>31</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 82.

sensibilities—of affecting innovatory reconfigurations in the structure of conceptuality through critical reflection.

#### **IV. The Autonomy of Concepts Within the Space of Reasons**

For McDowell, the experiencing subject is “open to facts” such that “perceptible facts are essentially capable of being of impressing themselves on perceivers,” which suggests that any thinkable content must be all of the same kind.<sup>32 33</sup> What is meant by this is that for a subject to be responsive to reason such that he may be able to demonstrate reasons for his actions and judgments, the contents of his experience that he exploits in giving a reason must be the same contents communicated in giving a reason. For example, if you perceive a bluebird on your windowsill and your friend asked what you are doing, you would be able to rationally respond: “I am looking at a bluebird.” The content of this experience must be of the same kind, namely “that I am looking at a bluebird.” As such McDowell asserts that there is an identity between the sort of thing that can be the case and the sort of thing one can think can be the case. In so doing, he claims that the contents of thinking and judging, and hence language, are the very same contents that make up an experience of the world. McDowell hopes that this notion can accommodate *de re* senses of objects such that a rational subject may be able to take rationally conflicting stances towards the same object of thought without compromising her rationality.<sup>34</sup> That is, he contends that concepts alone can account for the different ways in which the same content may matter for a subject inasmuch as concepts have an ostensive role in experience.

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<sup>32</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.72.

<sup>33</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> I have in mind here Frege’s notion of sense, which claims that if the same content may be regarded from rationally conflicting standpoints by a normal, unconfused subject, then there must be a difference in the mode of presentation or sense of the content that accounts for the conflict between rational perspectives on the same content. See Donald Davidson, “Truth and Meaning,” in *Synthese*, 17: 304-323, 1967.

Nonetheless, he is unclear as to whether conceptual content is identical with linguistic content (i.e. with the statement “I am looking at a bluebird”) or if it is something like being able to justify a belief on the basis of a perception of fact. The latter entails that empirical content warrants the subject with an appropriate belief about what is the case but without any explanation of how this relation of warranting obtains.

On McDowell’s view, it seems that if a subject is to be responsive to reasons, then the empirical content he experiences to be the case must be exploited in judgment such that his judgment that things are the case is identical in content to the fact that things are the case.<sup>35</sup> Returning to the example of the bluebird, the content of the visual experience—“I am looking at a bluebird”—accords wholly with the thought “I am looking at a bluebird” such that the immediate perception of the bluebird is conceptual in that it affords the appropriate use of the concept “bluebird.” So, But this seems to imply a fundamental difference between a fact, as something that is the case, and a reason, as something that supervenes on the perceived fact as warranting our taking that something to be the case. McDowell does not explicitly address this distinction between facts and reasons, and this seems problematic for his project as a whole. This issue centers on the question: what determines that a fact may be grasped as a reason for judging, acting, or following a rule? Moreover, what criteria of relevance determine that *these* facts, as opposed to some others, count as reasons for a subject?

Considering McDowell’s perspective on the concept as a social form of reasoning, it is worth asking whether the sociality of the concept gives grounds to be skeptical of his epistemological quietism. If the specific meanings of the norms in the space of reason are determined in accordance with the concerns and practices of their particular community, then it

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<sup>35</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.179-180.

is not unreasonable to consider that the criteria for what constitutes rational experience must therefore be determined in advance by the traditional concerns and practices of that very same community. That is, the proposition that concepts, as putative forms of normative intelligibility, fundamentally mediate the relation between the mind and world entails that the meaning of such forms be influenced by certain historical and cultural contingencies. The norms of rationality structuring experience for a certain edified subject are congenial to the heritage of which they are a part. What this suggests is that putative forms of rationality are furnished in terms of a historical accumulation of social meanings, uses, and practices. McDowell affirms that the meaning of concepts is conditioned partially by their practical usage in preserving the self from the milieu of biological, environmental and physical concerns precipitated by first nature.<sup>36</sup> That concepts imbue judgments within percepts experienced by the individual necessitates that the space of reason relinquish any ambition to complete objectivity and recognize its historical limitations.

The concepts of the space of reasons accrue normatively through self-organization such that the content of experience available to rational reflection is meaningfully constructed through the mutual identification and communication of a self-identical consistency in objects. Putative forms of regard for objects, persons, and the world are abstracted as reputedly normative such that the subject of *Bildung* accepts them as naturalized manners of taking things to be “thus and so”.<sup>37</sup> In this way, an inter-subjective conformity of second nature *qua* meaningful conceptual norms is unreflectively heeded as an organic exigency of an edified self.<sup>38</sup> Forms of life provide a shared background of determinate norms that rationally orient the self amongst a milieu of

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<sup>36</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 84-85.

<sup>37</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> This is what McDowell describes as “having one’s eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring second nature.” John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 84.

human concerns in the world, and this background is tacitly discerned as the a priori necessity of the subject of second nature. Individual phenomenal objects are grasped as meaningful only in terms of its relation to a general category of understanding that, in its autonomy, exists apart from the particular object.

Thomas Kuhn uses the notion of a scientific paradigm to describe how a shared body of ideas, theories, values, analogies and accepted disciplinary practices operate holistically as a model for taking things to be such and such a way. Kuhn breaks down the structure of the paradigm into three subcategories: symbolic generalizations, metaphysical paradigms (i.e. shared commitments to established beliefs), and shared values. Symbolic generalizations refers to commonly held expressions and notions, which includes presumptions like “action equals reaction” or accepted equations that form the basic foundation of the individual scientists’ knowledge of his discipline.<sup>39</sup> Such values, ideals, and putative metaphysical commitments may be considered as models, serving as criteria for accepting new data and notions as properly rational. In this way, a paradigm sets its own limits on what can be readily accepted as descriptive of “reality” and what is cast off as poor science or false reasoning. Accordingly, a paradigm cannot be provable in any concrete sense—a paradigm is not a fact but rather a body of facts organized as a totality of cultural knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Members of a paradigm thus draw on the same body of accepted notions, laws, practices, and values that allow them to recognize phenomena in comprehensible terms by deploying traditional ideas and operations that bear resemblance to the contemporaneous problem-situation.

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 188.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 85.

Kuhn's work establishes the theory-dependence of observation—that what is observed in experience is not theory-neutral. In other words, a scientist's observation of the world is not independent from the background of beliefs, assumptions, and putative commitments of his paradigm. Empirical observation is not some neutral "given" or "sense-data" but is instead "paradigm-determined" in that observational data is rendered meaningful in terms of the categories of the Gestalt-like whole of a distinct paradigm.<sup>41</sup> This can shed some light on the discrepancy between perceiving a fact and the reason that supervenes on it. Namely, a fact provides a subject with a reason only if that fact is given as affording the possibility of grasping its meaning in terms of a normative manner of taking things to be in some way or another. A fact can only provide a reason if it may count in favor of holding some belief about the world, and the criteria for what facts afford what beliefs is determined in advance by the assumptions of a paradigm. For example, imagine a subject perceives the fact that there is a pencil on the table in front of her. This fact affords her the belief that a pencil is in front of her (i.e. not merely some indeterminate streak of color in her visual field) only if she possesses the relevant theoretical conceptions of "pencil" that are provided to her by her community. The fact of the presence of a pencil constitutes the possibility of the subject believing that there is a pencil in front of her, but her being able to have a reason to believe that what she sees is a pencil presupposes her possessing a normative sense of what "pencil" is. She must be in possession of the knowledge that pencils are normally used to write down ideas, communicate thoughts, or draw pictures in advance, and this sort of knowledge is provided by the principles of her social tradition.

Something like Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox is fitting here. As Saul Kripke fleshes out, there seems to be nothing about the formal character of a rule that explicitly

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 126.

determines a properly normative manner of obeying the rule.<sup>42</sup> In terms of concepts, this suggests that the authority for applying certain concepts and words in the proper contexts does not come from the formal character of the concepts or words themselves. That is to say that there is no fact in virtue of which one may be certain of how to follow a rule, because it is a matter of know how that cannot be entirely reduced to facts. Instead, a background of know-how competence must be presupposed by any capacity to grasp facts. For example, one must know how to use a pencil before understanding that pencils are for recording thoughts or erasing mistakes, and the way in which one acquires this know how competence is through the teachings of one's upbringing. So, the use-conditions for applying a concept or word in a certain instance rely on the customary and normative practices of a social group that socialize the individual to a specific form of life.

The traditional forms of life that are socialized to the individual through *Bildung* are deemed proper both by the authority of the social group but also the individual herself. McDowell says that forms of life are accepted as natural because they are humanity's second nature, conceived as an organic outgrowth and totalization of an assuredly natural power.<sup>43</sup> Second nature arises through a process of acculturation and normal upbringing that forms subjective understanding of the world in connection with certain obviousness about behaviors and judgments and the corresponding conventionally derived necessities motivating those behaviors and judgments. McDowell hopes that establishing that rationality is ontologically natural will ease the epistemological anxiety that the mind might be problematically alienated from the world. In categorizing rationality as natural, the modern thinker risks regarding all forms of life as equally reasonable to the extent that they are the organic becoming of a natural faculty. So, second nature may account for how a subject appreciates the tenets of one's

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<sup>42</sup> Saul A. Kripke *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1982).

<sup>43</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 82-86.

upbringing, but McDowell is not explicit about what grounds one has to rationally criticize those tenets if one is to regard them as congenially natural.

Kuhn is of aid here in paving the way for how one might conceive of criticism arising from a paradigm internally. Members within a paradigm share a network of commitments that determine their sense of both science and the world around them, but these commitments are not explicit rules to be followed.<sup>44</sup> As such, members of a paradigm have common ground on the commitments that they share, but these commitments do not determine monolithically the way in which scientists within a paradigm understand the world. Instead, they serve as a repertoire of common assumptions and some of these assumptions may be critiqued on the basis of some other assumptions within a paradigm.<sup>45</sup> Considering this analogously with McDowell, it seems that tradition can provide criticism on its own tenets by providing its members not with binding, rule-determined notions but with a general body of common assumptions and commitments that may be accepted or rejected on the basis of other assumptions and commitments.

The force of McDowell's argument is transcendental insofar as he establishes that to be able to take a rational stance towards things in the world presupposes that the individual subject be unreflectively initiated to a traditional conception of the world. As second nature, the subject becomes bound to the particular conception of the world that he is familiarized with on the basis of his social tradition. In this way, the socialized individual is devoted to a particular conception of conception, meaning that he comes to regard what is proper to his particular social heritage as what is naturally proper for his being. That is to say that the individual is bound to a specific social tradition by virtue of the fact that the possibility of self-understanding is ineluctably

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 50.

related to a paradigmatic body of meaning. What is worrisome about this notion of second nature is that the subject unreflectively appreciates her heritage's particular conception of the world as a wholly proper realization of human nature. In short, this debars the socialized individual from the possibility of recognizing a range of possible logical applications of forms of life to the world that extends beyond the narrow set of possibilities for taking things to be thus and so that are heeded as wholly natural by her upbringing.

One dilemma with McDowell's notion of second nature centers on the question of the genesis of reflection. Namely, does reflection arise out of tradition from the work of *Bildung* or must it be simply posited? McDowell cannot permit it being posited, because this would run counter to his need to deploy *Bildung* as a description of how the human comes to possess conceptual capabilities in the first place. In placing rationality beyond the bounds of critical investigation as an unquestionably natural phenomenon, McDowell attempts to secure a basis for rational perception in the natural world. However, conceiving of rationality as second nature precludes the individual subject from a critical perspective on the space of reasons as a mediated, historical phenomenon, rather than natural and congenially invariant. That is to say that the historical character of traditional forms of life ought not impede all forms of life from being accepted as valid and natural human practices. McDowell confirms this, in remarking:

“in this reflection we can regard the culture a human being is initiated into as a going concern; there is no particular reason why we should need to uncover or speculate about its history, let alone the origins of culture as such.”<sup>46</sup>

McDowell's aversion to any theoretical account of the evolution of culture is problematic insofar as it seems to place culture beyond the bounds of critical investigation. However, it seems any rich account of what it means to be responsive to reasons ought not rule out any systematic

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<sup>46</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 123.

investigation into the body of historically accumulated knowledge that shapes an individual's conception of rationality. What arises from McDowell's work, oddly enough, is the worry that the individual self is to accept the background of cultural practices as necessarily according with truth to the extent that rationality and, hence, culture are unproblematically natural. McDowell puts this point by saying that accepting his notion of *Bildung* "should eliminate the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason."<sup>47</sup> Yet he offers no account of what it actually means for a subject to acquiesce to the demands of reason. He seems to be suggesting that to accept the demand of reasons is to adopt a particular manner of conceiving of putative norms, judgments, and interpretations. No doubt, enculturation factors largely into this picture, but conceiving of cultural rationality as the actualization of our "sentient nature" does not explicitly allow for the possibility of critically reflecting on tradition.<sup>48</sup>

Considering the Kuhnian framework of the paradigm serves as a framework for comprehending how tradition allows for critical reflection on its tenets. For Kuhn, an individual within a paradigm derives his self-understanding and understanding of the world around him on the basis of the shared values, metaphysical commitments, and exemplary generalizations.<sup>49</sup> Members within a paradigm comprehend the world in terms of the body of practices, models, and facts regarded consensually. On Kuhn's framework, the general body of accepted, practices, exemplars, and data is necessarily incomplete to the extent that normative consensus on the fundamental constituents of a paradigm facilitate new areas for research by revealing phenomena that remain unexplainable by the accepted, normal practices of the paradigm.<sup>50</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>47</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 90-92.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 181-185.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 65.

consensus on the fundamentals of a paradigm provides a standard against which new data and solutions may be measured.

It is unclear whether McDowell's conception of second nature can allow for the sort of internal criticism that Kuhn's model allows for. Namely, it seems that regarding traditional forms of life as unquestionably natural does not leave open the possibility that an individual may be able to challenge the validity of socially determined rationality. Accepting forms of life as wholly natural precludes the individual from the possibility of criticizing aspects of tradition—of raising consciousness to and negating the ways in which one has been habituated to, for example, modern skepticism or Cartesian dualism. While second nature establishes that learning how to use concepts is concurrent with upbringing within a social tradition, it does not provide a systematic explanation of how the tenets of one's upbringing are situated within a historical paradigm. There is no reason to believe that a tradition cannot simultaneously educate individuals in the use of the intellect while nonetheless urging them to call into question its use. However, a theoretical description of this sort of reflection is absent in McDowell.

A positive theory of reflection for the subject of *Bildung* ought to account for (i) an ethical moment when it occurs to the subject that the normal ways in which she has used concepts have not done justice to their objects or to the world in general and (ii) an aesthetic moment when the subject recognizes that the set of logical possibilities for taking the world to be such and such a way is larger than the normal framework that is heeded as binding for her. What tradition *qua* second nature must disallow if it is to be accepted congenially is reflection on its conditions of its possibility and continuity. This is mainly because regarding the social forms of life to which one has become habituated as the realization of the human organism's animal nature does not necessarily or automatically motivate any need to question the validity of such

forms of life. Reflection on tradition must accordingly stem from the resources provided by tradition, but it nonetheless aims at a break with traditional conceptions in order to secure a perception of something new and other than what is known traditionally to be the case. Second nature provides a model of how conceptual capacities come to be appreciated as normatively and naturally binding, but it does not provide anything in the way of how those capacities might be adjusted or revised.

Though his doctrine of second nature aims to assure that the mind has a foothold in reality, McDowell suggests that familiar manners of taking things to be thus and so for a particular community are necessary and sufficient conditions for grounding thought and language within the world. Inasmuch as human cultural practices and norms are a second nature, traditional forms of life are unproblematically connected to the world. As such social upbringing familiarizes one with accumulated paradigmatic background of knowledge by which one understands the world. The tradition within which a subject is brought up provides them with resources for reflection, and what must be accordingly be articulated is a theory of tradition that allows criticism some of its tenets on the basis of some of its other taken-for-granted tenets. Hence, a discussion of the possibility criticism of tradition by its own resources must aim at describing a standpoint whereby the common norms of the space of reasons appear as contingent historical structures, not binding determinacy. A proper theory of reflection on tradition must accordingly do justice equally to the traditional resources for reflection and reflection's ambition to modify and reevaluate traditional forms of reasoning in order to extend thought's capabilities towards hitherto unrealized notions or forms of life.

Recall that by Kuhn's lights the set of assumptions and commitments that define a paradigm do not determine the way in which scientists understand phenomena in terms of an

explicit rule. A paradigm, conceived narrowly as a shared explanatory model, provides subjects within a community with a historical template by which they may recognize situations to be *like* the paradigmatic case.<sup>51</sup> In this way, observable phenomena are rendered meaningful against the background of collected historical assumptions and exemplars. If tradition in general is conceived paradigmatically, then the relation between the exemplary case regarded consensually by a community and real observable cases in the world must be one of similarity. Conceived thusly, critical reflection is grounded in the capacity to evaluate similarities amongst concepts as explanatory models and the concrete perceptual phenomena to which they apply. However, this may not necessarily be what McDowell has in mind when he is thinking of concepts. He says:

*“That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world.”<sup>52</sup>

His point is that for a subject to have rational beliefs about the content of some experience (i.e. “*that things are thus and so*”) then the content of the experience must be of an identical kind as that of the belief.

What McDowell needs here is the Kuhnian insight that perception is necessarily theory-laden—that perceptual phenomena are seen through the comprehensive lens of a paradigmatic body of knowledge. This idea is central to any account of how a subject may be responsive to reasons precisely because McDowell conceives of the fundamental constituents of immediate experience as conceptual in the sense that they provide normative reasons for belief that are putative. To the extent that this is the case, it may be reasonably assumed that McDowell is not far off from Kuhn and that his thesis on the fundamental conceptuality of experience can

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 26.

accommodate the idea that perceptual phenomena are “paradigm-determined”.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, McDowell provides no phenomenological account of how concepts actually determine the experience of perceptual phenomena, only that they do determine the experience of perceptual phenomena. That is, he offers no systematic or positive description concerning how the irreducible non-neutrality of reasons are given to a subject as both normative and determined in advance of immediate perception.<sup>54</sup> An appropriate phenomenology must be central to any account of how human responsiveness to reason, and hence a turn towards Heidegger is of aid in fleshing out a phenomenological account of reasons.

## **V. The Background of Thought and Action Considered as the Heideggerian Mood**

The necessary conditions for a meaningful language and intentional action require that the subject perceive value and meaning directly residing in the world, unmediated by any descriptive or propositional content like a concept. Notice that these conditions are essentially differentiated from the classical presuppositions of action theory that explains actions as the result of causal forces that push actions from behind.<sup>55</sup> The reason for arguing in this way is that construing action, like Davidson, as being caused entirely by the appropriate belief-desire pair does not account for the intelligibility of an action aimed at an object. Davidson’s famous climber case illustrates the issue of construing action in this way. In this example, a climber is suspended by a rope held by another climber who is in danger of slipping off the cliff. The second climber thinks, and hence believes, that he can secure his own survival if he lets his

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 126.

<sup>54</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 79, 84.

<sup>55</sup> I have in mind here Donald Davidson’s work on action theory that outlines a conception of agency wherein a belief-desire pairing serves as a causal force impelling actions as their effects. See Donald Davidson, *Essays on Action and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), mainly essays 1-7.

partner drop, and of course he has the desire to survive. As Davidson tells it, the climber's recognition of his thinking in this way unsettles him so much that he accidentally loses grip and drops his friend. So the appropriate belief-desire pair caused the action, but the climber cannot be said to have chosen to act in that way.<sup>56</sup> Hence a belief-desire pair alone does not necessarily render behaviors aimed at objects intelligible. This suggests that a causal account of action offers nothing in the way of how an action or object shows up for a subject in some way such that it entails its desirability or value.

The conception of action I want to advance here is one in which the agent aims actively at some desired object or end within the world. In this way, desire must be construed not causally, but phenomenologically if one is to do justice to the agency of a subject. To articulate a full-blown argument for why this conception of action is preferential to the classical causal account requires another paper altogether. Nonetheless, a detailed argument for this position has been advanced elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> For the purposes of this work this view serves as a template for discussing the phenomenology of practical behavior. Intentional action requires that the subject operate with a rational belief in a valued reason for preferring some course of action to another, and insofar as this is the case, an agent's desires must follow from their rational belief about the value they judge to be in the world. Hence, a condition for a meaningful concept of agency is an internal connection between possessing a reason for holding a belief about a certain course of action and a direct perception of the value for that action in the world.

As such a theory of agency must account for an experience in which the subject perceives a value and there is nothing that one perceives in virtue of which this perception of value is made to be the case. A value cannot be inferred from a concept alone, but rather must bear a direct

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<sup>56</sup> Donald Davidson, *Essays on Action and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) p. 77-78.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen White, "The Transcendental Significance of Phenomenology," in *Psyche*, 13/1: 2007 p. 1-31.

affect on the subject that inspires both a rational conceptual belief in ontological reality of that value and a desire that intends towards that value. Moreover, this perception of value is direct in the sense that the perception itself contains the disposition to commit oneself to a course of action—it is, in principle, an experience characterized by non-neutral content. This suggests that the subject must have direct perceptual access to the world that is grounded in something more general than what a concept alone might provide.

Heidegger's concept of *Stimmung* or mood provides the basis for articulating a condition for encountering things in the world as non-neutrally affective (i.e. as valuable, desirable, moving, etc.). In Being and Time, Heidegger argues for a theory of subjectivity that avoids the problematic linguistic distinction between subject and object, inner and outer domains of experience, and most generally, the mind and the world. Specifically, Heidegger levels a critique against traditional philosophical a conception of the self that receives unstructured, non-conceptual deliverances from material stimuli in the world and rationally orders the meaning-neutral sense impressions a posteriori. As can be inferred, the traditional conception of the self against which Heidegger argues is far too thin to ground language and thought meaningfully in the world. In fact, any theory of perception that attempts to cash out experience solely in terms of sense impressions troublingly debar the philosophical subject from ever being certain that ideas, words, and actions are grounded directly in the independent world. The reasoning here is that the subject is debarred from the possibility of communicating the meaning of a term via ostensive definition, as a word or thought can never refer to anything concrete outside the sphere of neutral sense impressions to which only the speaking subject bears unproblematic access. Heidegger thus articulates *Stimmung* as the epistemic basis for ordinary experience in order to demonstrate

that a priori engagement within a shared space expressive of normal possibilities for acting and judging is presupposed by the existence of an individual subject.

Some have translated *Stimmung* as “affectivity” or “disposedness” but the characterization “mood” seems most appropriate.<sup>58 59</sup> Mood should not be taken as a generalized emotional state because it prefigures any sort of intentional content. Intentional states such as emoting, judging, perceiving, believing, thinking, remembering, and desiring are, in principle, experiences that are directed at something in the world—moods are not. Rather, mood is the condition of possibility of the occurrence of such states; it is the subject’s necessary attunement to the reality that things are able to matter in a given way. *Stimmung* presupposes not merely that a world be made available to the subject, but that that world be disclosed as proffering certain, practical and meaningful possibilities for thought, action, and speech that the subject may choose to endorse or neglect.<sup>60</sup> What is significant concerning this idea is that the subject is ever aware of these presented dispositions, regardless of their neglecting to act on them. In other words, a mood divulging values and reasons for performing some practical action presupposes any phenomenology of action. This is because phenomena philosophically describable as “intentional content” (i.e. beliefs, desires, experiences, ideas, etc.) presuppose a mood that discloses a world expressive of values and action possibilities for an action or judgment to be about.

The argumentative thrust of Heidegger’s *Stimmung* is the notion that human experience is invested with an a priori putative order (i.e. perception is theory-laden) such that the rational self must be conceived as engaging with the world at a primordial level—one that precedes the linguistic distinction between subject and object. This point is exemplified in Heidegger’s

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<sup>58</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's being and Time, Division I*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> William Blattner, *Heidegger's 'Being and Time': A Reader's Guide*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), 176-177.

discussion of the background of ready-to-hand objects that characterize meaningful action.

Considering a hammer, one might go about several different ways to determine what exactly the hammer, as an existent thing, is; that is, one might perform a chemical analysis or perhaps research the origin and history of the hammer. Both sorts of intellectual investigations will no doubt return descriptive answers, but Heidegger stresses that none of these sorts of analyses will give concrete knowledge of what a hammer, as a functional whole, actually is (i.e. an instrument people use primarily to bash in or pry out nails and apply blunt force to other such objects).<sup>61</sup>

What's more, asking questions about the hammer occasions a standpoint where the individual analyzes a world populated with objects that remain independent of it. In taking this position, the individual affirms her existence as a subject that stands over and apart from objects within a world. Heidegger argues that this position, wherein the subject differentiates herself from objects in experience, is secondary to a primordial state of perception that encounters objects without conscious recognition of them as objects separate from the self.<sup>62</sup>

It is when the hammer is put to use as an instrument of accomplishing some sort of work that a thing's meaning for the subject is experienced as a point of intentional activity that is continuous with the world that impels immediate action. Heidegger refers to this feature of objects as their "ready-to-handness" indicating that an object's meaning is revealed not by gazing at it or contemplating it intellectually, but instead by taking it up as a tool for furnishing productivity with regard to the immediate tasks concerning the subject.<sup>63</sup> The strong point in Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of objects is that to know the meaning of an object is

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<sup>61</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 98-107.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 98.

inextricable from being able to use that object—to know how to use the object. In the case of the hammer, one cannot be fully said to know what “hammer” is unless they have taken it up and used it for the appropriate purposes that a hammer may be of use for. This connection between meaning and use grounds language and thought within the world inasmuch as to know an object presupposes active, embodied engagement with that object. As such the meaning of a thing is not wholly distinct from its practical use.

Theoretical inquiry into the nature of a thing may produce insights of method, into the optimal ways of utilizing the hammer. However, theoretical knowledge is superseded by manipulation of the ready-to-hand elements of a thing that is guided by the potentialities of the thing, which is grasped as a constituent part implicated in a general activity that requires that sort of equipment. Heidegger’s point is that the immediate task the tool is implicated in the conditions for its conspicuous use and guides subjective action in accordance with the ongoing activity. In taking up the hammer and using it practically as a blunt instrument, the individual engages with this nexus of meaning relations by investing themselves entirely in the instrumental action impelled by the object. In such moments, the self is not experienced as a phenomenon explicitly distinct from the world—it embodies an unself-conscious intentionality absorbed within a purposive activity structured by the immediately relevant tasks facing normal cultural subjects. That is, the particular function of any thing (i.e. that a hammer is made for getting nails into or pulling them out of things, that boots are made for wearing during inclement weather, that a watch is made for telling the time, etc.) is encountered when it is taken up in subordination to the subject’s “in-order-to” concerns as already intending towards a determinate context that compels the utilization of the thing’s function.<sup>64</sup> By utilizing the ready-to-hand being of a thing,

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 97.

its potential practical functionality for the dealings of humanity, the self is given over to an immediate contextual milieu of tasks and concerns that require their pragmatic engagement as a module of the shared labor, Heidegger describes this as ongoing coping.<sup>65</sup> The end purpose of ongoing coping activity is not fixed or given transparently, but the immediate sense of one's activity is conditioned by the normally relevant tasks that arouse the concern of the subject.

This illuminates another important function of *Stimmung*: that it serves as a pre-reflective basis for awareness of the immediate tasks toward which the specific labor and cognition of an individual are directed. In this way, a mood is not simply a cultural sensibility that exists wholly apart from the subject but is realized in the subject as a disclosure of how things are for him. That is, the immediate concerns affecting the individual are made manifest to the individual by way of a mood. Consider the example of the hammer again; if a subject's perception of a hammer does not arouse any strong desire to use it or elicit any specific action from the subject, then the immediate irrelevance of the hammer's readiness-to-hand indicates that the present tasks facing the self do not reasonably entail use of the hammer. In other words, the present situation of the individual reveals not merely that the immediate tasks do not concern the utility of a hammer, but that the self, inasmuch as its concerns are presented to it by the irrelevance of the hammer, is primordially embedded within a world that still entreats the subject's attending to it.<sup>66</sup> During such occurrences the hammer does not disclose itself as an optional readiness-at-hand amongst others; rather, it is superseded by its presence-at-hand such that it contextualizes itself in relation to the totality of assignments and tasks that determine the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 103-104.

immediate content of the subject's intentionality.<sup>67</sup> That is, the hammer's readiness-to-hand is debarred from present accessibility by the subject, because it remains outside the collection of relevant equipment that serve as objects for his present circumspection. What this suggests is that the world divulges itself through objects as the shared basis for the purposive activity of ongoing coping dispensing various traditional possibilities for being oriented within and towards objects conceived as equipment.

What Heidegger demonstrates is that subjective perception cannot be meaningfully understood without being given direct access to the world. Like McDowell, Heidegger regards being pre-cognitively embedded in a public, inter-subjective world is a necessary condition for selfhood. Thus, a mood cannot be considered as the way in which objects appear to the subject, but as the condition of objects being made available to the subject at all. Furthermore, mood cannot be taken as a generalized emotional state because it prefigures any sort of intentional content. Intentional states such as emoting, judging, perceiving, believing, thinking, remembering, and desiring are, in principle, experiences that are directed at something in the world—moods are not. Rather, Heidegger characterizes moods as anti-subjectivist in that they are condition for what it means to be in the world at all—not subjective additions to the world.<sup>68</sup> The point Heidegger wants to push with this a necessary condition for experiencing objects is that they be disclosed as mattering. Therefore, the perception of an object requires nothing in virtue of which that perception is veridical. The Heideggerian background of moods is thus not an object in worldly experience that confirms the reality of direct perception, but a

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<sup>67</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 95-100.

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger remarks that a mood “comes neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside’, but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such being” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 176.

transcendental condition that requires direct perception as a necessary feature of worldly experience and intentional action.

Like McDowell, Heidegger argues for a conception of subjectivity wherein the world necessarily makes demands on the subject's rationality. However, Heidegger does not construe the mind-world relation fundamentally in terms of a concept of the understanding. He instead establishes that things in the world are presented as mattering in a certain way for the subject by virtue of a mood. What this suggests is that a subject's direct perception of objects is *expressive* of certain potentialities for judgment and action that are intelligible in terms of the occurrence of a mood. As a cognitive stance, a mood comprises of a direct perception of an object that is demonstrative such that the object's relevance for the subject is immediately and unreflectively apprehended, as in the visual perception of a sailboat that is unreflectively heeded as "that thing on the horizon" or "a potential mode of transportation". In this way, a particular object's significance for a subject is structured against the fixed background of concerns, beliefs, and tasks that shape the subject's experience. This speaks to moods being perspectival inasmuch as it discloses how things are in the present moment for the subject. If a meaningful theory of action and language requires that concepts and words necessarily hook on, so to speak, to objects in the world, then a mood discloses a direct perception of objects that bear certain relevance for ordinary subjects. In this sense, moods have an irreducible social dimension, and it follows that the repertoire of world-disclosing moods in which the subject might find herself will necessarily be culturally conditioned.

Let me explain further: for a subject to feel some emotion, like shame, she must possess the right cultural vocabulary that recognizes the character of certain situations as giving rise to feelings of shame. In this sense "vocabulary" is construed broadly to account for the set of

categories, roles, customs, and values of a community that shape the subject's relation to her world. This vocabulary must provide her with the capacity to recognize the circumstances, feelings, and intentions that are characteristic of an experience of shame. For example, a normal, modern American's experience of shame must be distinct from that of a Japanese shogun during the end of the Tokugawa Era. This is not simply because the foreign vocabularies are necessarily distinct from one another but because the semantic relevance of "shame" is embedded within different cultural matrices of social customs, assumptions and historical concerns.

Heidegger demonstrates that a subject comes to comprehend objects in terms of their being situated within a mood that discloses the immediate practical concerns of the subject within a community. In a mood things in the world show up against a background that substantiates those things as non-neutrally affective in virtue of their expressing certain, immediately possible modes of practical or theoretical involvement with an object. In this way, to encounter an object as a piece of equipment entails the existence of others inasmuch as part of the sense it bears to the perceiver is defined in terms of what it normally means for subjects. That is to say that part of what it means to understand the meaning of a chair or a hammer is to understand that it is something for people in general to use. As such the concepts "chair" or "hammer" are, by their nature, shared concepts that derive their sense from a holistic cultural framework. When encountering such entities in the world, a mood discloses to the subject the character of his concern with a world that is essentially a world for others like him.

So, Heidegger and McDowell offer up similar solutions to classical epistemological problems (i.e. direct access to the world, the problem of other minds) that focus on concepts and objects immediately encountered in experience being expressive of a world for others. With *Stimmung*, Heidegger establishes the world is disclosed to cognition in terms of things and

situations that appear directly as mattering in some way—as non-neutral. How might the idea of a mood square with McDowell’s claims about experience being conceptual at its most basic? Specifically, does the notion of mood entail that something more than conceptual capacities must be operative for knowledge? It seems that a mood is composed not of propositional content but a direct perception to which any propositional content might refer. Consider the example of the hammer again. The sense the hammer bears to the subject varies depending upon the immediate tasks that the subject is concerned with. If it appears irrelevant and merely present-at-hand, the perception of the hammer discloses that the subject’s mood, the way in which things are going for her, does not require the use of a hammer. However, if the very same hammer is attended to with an eye for building a birdhouse, a mood discloses the hammer as being essential for the dealings of the subject. So, it is important that the subject know the kind of normative significance that the concept of a hammer may have for certain situations, but this presupposes that those situations are given as possible in a mood.

The perception of the hammer—a subject’s sense of “*this* hammer” that she encounters in the present—can be influenced by more than the ordinary or discursive concept “hammer”. This is because a mood gives a direct, context-specific perception of things. In other words, the non-neutrality of the world being disclosed by way of a mood may encapsulate content more fundamental than just the conceptual. McDowell offers some remarks on this sort of object in his discussion of Gareth Evans’s claims about color concepts. In short, Evans claims that in the normal perception of a color, the specificity of its shades and textures present properties not captured by “green”, “red”, “blue”, or “sunburst”. McDowell’s thoughts are as follows:

“Why not say that one is thereby equipped to embrace shades of colour within one’s conceptual thinking with the very same determinateness with which they are presented in one’s visual experience, so that one’s concepts can capture colours no less sharply than one’s experience presents them? In the throes of an

experience of the kind that putatively transcends one's conceptual powers—an experience that *ex hypothesi* affords a suitable sample—one can give linguistic expression to a concept that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience by uttering a phrase like “that shade”, in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample.”<sup>69</sup>

So, McDowell thinks that when one points to “*this shade*”, “*this texture*”, or “*this flavor*” and when one holds this specific shade of color, texture of cloth, or taste in mind after having indicated in thought or speech, one is drawing upon conceptual capacities in decidedly meaningful ways. His point is that if a subject is in possession of the normal spectrum of color concepts and the concept of a shade then his conceptual capacities must be fully adequate to capture every color experience in its determinateness. McDowell suggests that being able to indicate a specific texture or shade by way of a demonstrative and being able to hold that specific texture or shade in mind are necessary and sufficient reasons for fine-grained experiences having a direct conceptual character. The use of such demonstratives certainly does clue the subject into just how determinate reality is for her, but that does not necessarily secure that all salient senses of an individual object are encapsulated by the concept. Moreover, what a person means specifically when referring to “*this color*” may have more senses than the logical application of a color concept, because what a specific person means in referring to “*this color*” is inextricable from her background of personal and impersonal concerns.

So, it seems that a kind of non-linguistic, non-descriptive content must be available to the subject for a demonstrative to have any sense. As such this content may be conceptual, in the broad sense that it gives grounds for grasping reasons. McDowell is largely unclear about whether his conviction that experience is conceptual amounts to experience being wholly linguistic or if he is merely saying that experience can appropriately orient a subject within the space of reasons. In his paper “Avoiding the Myth of the Given” McDowell seems to suggest

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<sup>69</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 56-57.

that having empirical content does not entail that the subject be actively making judgments but that that content be conceptual so that it may be able to be exploited for articulating a judgment or using a demonstrative. He states:

“Having something in view, say a red cube, can be complete in itself. Having something in view can enable a demonstrative expression, or an analogue in judgment, that one might use in making explicit something one takes to be so, but the potential need not be actualized.”<sup>70</sup>

The sort of content McDowell describes is not propositional *per se*, but it is nonetheless available for the possibility of making a proposition. As such the subject does not exercise her rationality until she exploits the content that is immediately available to the mind in the act of taking a stand on how things are by way of a judgment or action. Regardless, McDowell does not want this idea to undermine his claim about the basic conceptuality of experience, stating that “rational capacities, and hence availability to apperception, permeate our experience itself, including the experience we act on in our ordinary coping with our surroundings.”<sup>71</sup> In his attempt to avoid positing non-conceptual content, McDowell proposes that empirical content is available for making propositions but that it is not heeded as propositional unreflectively, yet is nonetheless conceptual such that it may serve as a reason for a judgment. This move should be met with skepticism. McDowell’s claim that “having something in view... can be complete in itself” suggests that the sort of pre-propositional content that may be actualized in making a demonstrative claim is structured as conceptual to the extent that the thing that is in view is grasped unreflectively as the instance of a kind in virtue of the unity of its formal properties.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> John McDowell, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given." Chap. 14, In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 270.

<sup>71</sup> John McDowell, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given." Chap. 14, In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 272.

<sup>72</sup> John McDowell, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given." Chap. 14, In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 271.

This raises the question of whether objects are recognized primarily in virtue of the fact their having such-and-such formal properties. What Heidegger shows with *Stimmung* is that objects are encountered as mattering immanently in virtue of a mood against a background of certain personal and impersonal concerns, not in virtue of their formal or theoretical properties. In this way, the individual subject encounters objects in terms of what they may mean for ordinary subjects within a shared heritage and in terms of the immediate concerns that weigh upon her. A mood characterizes the sense in which the world is disclosed precisely because the individual is open to taking things and situations as mattering in some sort of way. Heidegger says, “a mood implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.”<sup>73</sup> A mood can refer to the sensibility of a period (such as baroque, romantic, or modern), the culture of a group (such as fearsome, pugnacious, or encouraging) and the sense of how things are for a subject in his current situation (such as a nervous mood before a test or a sense of eagerness before a big date). As such a mood is not merely the feelings or affectivity of an individual subject but a necessary openness to taking things to matter in a certain way, and the ways in which things matter may be rendered in terms of private or public frameworks of interpretation.

Turning to Heidegger, it seems that moods are internally connected to public forms of life. He says:

“Publicness, as the kind of Being which belongs to the “they”, not only has in general its own way of having a mood, but needs moods and ‘makes’ them for itself.”<sup>74</sup>

And:

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<sup>73</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 177.

<sup>74</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 178.

“The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world “matter” to it.”<sup>75 76</sup>

So a mood opens the individual up to a direct perception of things that is oriented against a background of his immediate concerns and the common modes of interpreting objects and situations (i.e. the ordinary ways in which the “they” interpret the world). As the above quotes attest, the idea of mood denotes a mode of encountering things and situations in the world that is more general than what might be disclosed in terms of a concept, because a mood can disclose how things are for a single person just as much as it can disclose how things are for a people. As such the moods available to a specific subject have a certain range that is fixed by the web of customs, assumptions, and values congenial to her social tradition. In this way, the possible of moods available for a subject are socially determined. This does not entail that a subject’s mood merely reflects that of the public, but her mood nonetheless arises out of her involvement with a public world that, as such, is constituted by a set of traditionally defined social structures, roles, and categories. So, the character of a mood lets her know how things are going for her *specifically*, but it does so against a background of public structures of significance—a cultural idiom of possible modes of conducting herself within the world.

Moods serve as a holistic background for intentionality whereby things appear relevant or irrelevant on the basis the immediate pressing concerns of the subject within a community. A mood is holistic inasmuch as the way in which a subject comports herself

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<sup>75</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 123.

<sup>76</sup> “Dasein” translates usually as “Being” and refers to a human self that is constituted by its temporality and its involvement with other beings in the world (both persons and objects). Heidegger describes Dasein as “an entity which, in its very Being, comports itself understandingly towards that Being.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 78.

towards events in the world is grounded in advance by the character of a mood. Things are always encountered as mattering in some specific way, perhaps as boring, compelling, suggestive, interesting, etc.; equally, possible actions are presented as tempting, unnerving, dangerous, clever, etc. As such moods provide the conspicuous pre-theoretical background for both practical and theoretical intentionality that the concept simply cannot. As the presupposed background for intentionality, a mood is not a subjective coloration of privileged theoretical perspectives but a primordial ground where things can show up as “this” or “that” in an all-enshrouding fount disclosing or giving meaning to all conceptions of theoretical beings and all possible engagements with practical beings.

Heidegger says “mood has already disclosed, in every case, being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something.”<sup>77</sup> So, a mood constitutes a sense of how a subject relates to the world in advance of his coming to awareness of how things are for him. If a mood is “fearful” this reveals to the subject not just something about his immediate situation but about the whole character of the world—that it is one in which the feeling, circumstances and response that make up fear have a standing. Coming to understand this aspect of the world is not inherent to the mood of fear (i.e. the intensity of fear may be so great that the subject of fear cannot reflect on her state) but the possibility of gaining this knowledge is grounded entirely within the occurrence of a fearful mood. This reveals that since moods disclose the world as a whole, they necessarily limit the scope of possibilities available for a subject in the present moment. For example, when an individual is irritated, new situations or tasks,

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<sup>77</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 176.

even those that might usually be regarded with pleasure or interest, are presented as further reasons for being irritated. She may come around to realize that she is annoyed and the basis for this sort of reflection is derived from how the world occurs to her in the mood of annoyance. In this way, a mood has an irreducible dimension of directedness, which means that the subject interprets the meaning of how things are for her on the basis of a direct perception of a range of possibilities for responding and acting within the world constituted by the character of her mood.

One final illustration of this point, imagine you are skiing with a friend and you both stop at the top of a steep slope. Staring at the steepness of the slope, you begin to feel unsettled and worried by the idea of taking such a precipitous trail. Your friend, on the other hand, is beaming, eager to hit the slope and feel the adrenaline rush of shooting down the mountain. Now ask yourself: what is it in virtue of which your friend is excited and you are hesitant? Surely you are both looking at the same empirical ski slope and surely you have the same concept of a ski slope. So you both have the general concept “ski slope” and can both unproblematically apply it to “*this* slope” that you are both gazing at, but does this account for why the perception of the slope arouses the excitement of your friend while it inspires worry in you? The short answer is no, and this is because the same ski slope appears to both of you not in virtue of a capacity to recognize the formal properties of a ski slope but in virtue of a mood that discloses how things matter for you and your friend in the current moment. To your friend, the ski slope appears as enticing and stimulating; but for you it appears as treacherous and threatening. There may be myriad reasons for why you have such different senses of the same slope (e.g. you are not confident in your skiing abilities but your friend is experienced, you are

a generally more cautious person while your friend is more of a risk taker, etc.), but neither of these are grasped as mattering in terms of a concept. Instead, you would both have to concede that the very same slope that appears dangerous to you appears alluring to your friend in virtue of the different background concerns you each have. What this points to is that moods have an irreducible character of making things appear in determinately specific ways for different subjects relative to their distinct background commitments.

### **VIII. Mimesis: Aesthetic Experience as Assimilation to a Mood**

Moods are necessary and sufficient presuppositions for the possibility of having intentionality (i.e. for the possibility of taking things to matter in a certain way) because they have the function of expressing that things may be taken to matter. Moods are not constituents of explicit intentionalities nor entirely distinct from intentional states; they are the background that supplies structure for explicit intentionalities and provide the scope of impossible intentional acts and objects. That is to say that moods disclose the whole world in some non-neutral sense by directly providing the subject with immediately grounded possibilities for acting and judging. As such a mood limits possibilities presented to a subject just as equally as they reveal possibilities. Inasmuch as moods have the a priori function of relating a subject to the world by way of a direct, non-neutral perception of things and states of affairs, they might best be thought of as a generalization of what the analytic tradition has meant by expression. Traditionally, analytic thought has regarded expression as a synthetic unity that discloses content directly.<sup>78 79 80</sup> In this

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<sup>78</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 1-14.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1970), p. 76-77.

<sup>80</sup> Mette Hjort and Sue Laver, *Emotion and the Arts*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). See essay 6 for a discussion of “hypothetical emotionalism” which identifies the content of artistic works as

sense, expression bears resemblance to language in that it articulates its content in virtue of its own non-linguistic syntax that presents ideas and affects not discursively but simultaneously.<sup>81</sup> As such, the formal relations structuring the expressive content of a work are grasped directly in a singular experience.<sup>82</sup> Rather than orienting the subject in relation to the object on the basis of understanding, expression “lets the mind dwell on the sheer appearance of things.”<sup>83</sup>

Drawing an analogy between the traditional notion of expression and Heideggerian moods, one sees that the phenomenology of moods has a profound affinity with the classical notion of expression. When a person is fearful, the appearance of her immediate surroundings express her fear to the degree that objects and places present themselves directly as providing grounds for exacerbating or mitigating her fear. That is, objects are not regarded normally as “there is the table,” “here is my coffee mug,” “there is my backpack at my feet,” etc.; instead, the table appears as a potential spot to hide from the fearful object, the coffee mug a potential weapon to defend oneself against what is feared, and the backpack presents itself as potentially another weapon to ward off the feared thing (or perhaps a hindrance if one’s fear inspires flight). If a person is joyful, the whole world expresses to him with an irreducible character of delight in a singular moment of perception. Making the world appear in such and such a way (i.e. disclosing the world) requires that certain objects and events express certain kinds of value for the subject. Hence, other possibilities and situations must necessarily not be included in the sense of the world that is disclosed by a mood. Returning to the example of the ski slope, your whole

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the expression of the “work’s world”. This suggests that the emotional content of a work is regarded by the positing of a hypothetical persona as the bearer of a work’s mood.

<sup>81</sup> Guy Sircello, *Mind and Art: An Essay on the Varieties of Expression*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 130-131.

<sup>82</sup> Suanne K. Lanfer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 93.

<sup>83</sup> Suanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), p. 49.

world may be disclosed to you as worrisome precisely because the immediacy of the slope you are faced with pressures you more than other possibilities and situations to comport yourself in some very particular way, namely, as worried. So a mood grants the subject a direct perception of the world that is perspectival in the sense that it is necessarily limited in the scope of its exigent content.

As the grounds for comprehending how things are going for a subject, a mood has the character of disclosing the specific way in which things matter in advance of the subject coming to awareness of how things are. This disclosure occurs in advance of the subject's awareness in the sense that it forms the essential grounds upon which the subject may come to understand how things are going for her. Concepts thus operate from within the frame of a mood. Another way to put this is to say that while a concept may determine whether or not an object or situation does appear significant in some manner, it does not determine whether an object or situation can be significant in such a manner. Moods shape the space of possibilities for relating oneself to the world within which the concept operates.

Since moods are the a priori grounds for any intentional content appearing to cognition at all (i.e. all perceptions, beliefs, desires, values and the like presuppose the occurrence of a mood), language too is grounded within moods as the medium of communicating the mood of the speaking subject. Heidegger characterizes this by saying that in talking, the speaker expresses "the way in which one currently has a state-of-mind (mood), which we have shown to pertain to the full disclosedness of Being-in... the communication of the existential possibilities of one's state-of-mind can become an aim in itself, and this amounts to a disclosing of existence."<sup>84</sup> This

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<sup>84</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 205. "state-of-mind" is another translation for *Stimmung*. Read: "mood". Additionally, Heidegger's reference to "Being-in" denotes that an individual subject necessarily exists prereflectively *in* a shared world.

is to say that a mood may give a sense of what matters to a subject without that sense being divulged primarily by a concept, but it also grounds the possibility of the subject identifying and reflecting on her mood with concepts and communicating it through language. In other words, a mood can be expressive of meaning for a subject not encountered primarily in terms of a mode of understanding, but it is nonetheless presupposed by any content for the understanding. Such a mood that gives a sense of non-neutrality without any explicit propositional content is best characterized as the occurrence of an aesthetic mood. The distinctness of this sort of mood is grounded in its capacity to express meaningful content by way of aesthetic form alone.

Recall from above that Heidegger regards the communication of “one’s existential possibilities”—the immediate sense of what matters for a subject disclosed by way of him having a mood—can become “an aim in itself”.<sup>85</sup> Here Heidegger is characterizing a poetic dimension to language that aims not simply at asserting some propositional content or communicating some explicit information but at sharing and expressing a mood to a listener or reader.<sup>86</sup> For Heidegger, poetic language serves primarily to attune a listener or reader to a certain contents or qualities of existence that cannot be conveyed by way of a proposition. This implies that language intends, at its most spontaneous, to express something that cannot be captured by ordinary linguistic assertions. The sort of expressive language implicated in “‘poetic’ discourse” strives to express a mood, and in this sense the content of a mood becomes aesthetic, rather than literal. Expression therefore becomes the focal content of poetic language, and what this suggests

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<sup>85</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 205.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* Heidegger refers to this dimension of language as that of “‘poetical’ discourse” that conveys nothing beyond the “disclosing of existence”. This may be interpreted as a form of linguistic discourse that serves not to convey information but to attune a reader or listener to a mood without explicitly characterizing the mood. As such it seems he is attempting to delineate a dimension of language that communicates by expressing only mood—not propositional or inferential content.

is that the meaning disclosed is primarily figurative and a function of imagery that attunes the listening subject to a specific mood towards which the language gestures.

That the content of a mood may be disclosed aesthetically implies that artistic expression endeavors to acclimatize subjects to certain unobvious moods. An artwork communicates by way of expression, disclosing its imagery and representational content as meaningful without any recourse to an identifying concept or word. In other words, the particular significance of an artwork is inseparable from the subject's identifying with the artwork by a willingness to be in the mood it expresses. As something that aims at attuning subjects to some particular mood, an artwork presents its content entirely by way of its self-consistent form. As something non-linguistic and not communicative in any ordinary sense, the artwork can be said to capture or express a mood. Expression in an artwork resembles something linguistic inasmuch as it announces itself through itself, but it withdraws from being completely communicative inasmuch as it offers no propositional or overtly discursive content. This proto-linguistic meaning (i.e. the "expression" rather than "communication" of an artwork) cannot be accessed in terms of a concept of understanding but must instead be perceived by the subject's willingness to displace her sense of ordinary understanding and open herself to the mood embodied in the work.<sup>87</sup>

The expressive content of an artwork is only accessible by way of a mood wherein the subject does not conceptualize, but assimilates himself to the terms of the work. That meaning in an artwork must be experienced by way of openness to being in a mood points to an artwork's capacity for "mimesis". For the purposes of this discussion, the sense in which "mimesis" will be used is based largely on the aesthetic theoretical work of Theodor Adorno. For Adorno, mimesis figures into the expressive capacities of an artwork in two important ways: (1) the artwork aims

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<sup>87</sup> Shierry Weber-Nicholsen. *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999). See chapter 2 for discussion of the difference between communicative and expressive dimensions of language.

at defining some mood that eludes discursive or explicit communicability, that is to say that it purports to express the indefinable (i.e. the Kantian sublime, the Romantic idea of the monstrous, the inhuman, the eternally beautiful, etc.); and (2) the artwork, insofar as its meaning derives from the internal self-coherence of its form, requires that the subject mimic its imagery for its expressive content to be apprehended.<sup>88 89</sup> Inasmuch as an artwork aims at capturing the sense of a monumental mood that remains indefinable in terms of a concept or word, the artwork retains its unique self-identity by expressing the mood by way of figurative, rather than literal content.

As figurative imitations of naturally indefinable phenomena (i.e. natural beauty, the sublime, the uncanny, the monstrous, etc.), artworks embody a form of mimesis that aims at the preservation of vividly enigmatic moods in objectified expression. Artworks imitate the authoritative and enigmatic qualities of indefinable moods, and these qualities derive their vividness not from the translation of the indefinable into a concept or linguistic element but instead from the preservation of opaqueness and non-meaning in expression. What this points to is that a mood grasped within a work is expressive and figurative in the sense that it requires interpretation in terms of what it evokes, rather than what it asserts literally. Hence, the meaning of a work resides in the unique organization of its imagery, which resembles a linguistic or conceptual character in that it is disclosed in terms of the work's formal construction. Yet the expression of the artwork does not communicate anything definitively beyond the apodictic *beingness* of art as the punctual, non-linguistic expression or episodic disclosure of a mood.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> "The content of art does not reduce without remainder into the idea, rather, this content is the extrapolation of what is irreducible..." Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 128.

<sup>89</sup> "The mimesis of works of art is their resemblance to themselves." Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 104.

<sup>90</sup> By invoking this idea of the "beingness" of art I mean no more than to suggest that what is expressed in an artwork is the actuality of the irresolvable affective tensions it manifests as the unique content of its mood.

Adorno characterizes this proto-linguistic expressive dimension of artworks, commenting on the Etruscan vases of Villa Giulia, saying that their aspects “that most resembles speech depends most likely on their *Here I am* or *This is what I am*, a selfhood not first exercised by identificatory thought from the interdependence of entities.”<sup>91</sup> By evoking the thought of interdependent of mute presences, Adorno implies that artworks express a mood of obscurity insofar as the meaningful appearances and images within a work do not communicate explicit anything beyond the appearances and images themselves. Elaborating on this thought, he draws an analogy between this idea and how the appearance of a mute animal like a rhino seems to say: “I am a rhinoceros.”<sup>92</sup> The expressive mood communicated by a work thus cannot be separated from the formal presentation and arrangement of the work’s appearance, which is to say that art preserves a sense of enigma and non-linguistic significance that eludes a subject’s ordinary conceptual forms of life and public structures of moods. The artwork represents an emotional episode inasmuch as the specificity of its content focuses cognition of expressive meanings not encountered by the normative structure of everyday moods. Such an episode is affectively punctual to the extent that the subject relates herself to the artwork’s expressive content by recognizing and submitting herself to the uniqueness of its import.

For the philosophical subject, this act of mimesis is a mode of reflection prompted by and occurring within the enigmatic expression communicated by an artwork. Shierry Weber Nichol森, a contemporary translator and scholar of Adorno’s work, notes that mimesis is behavioral in that it can only be actualized in the subject’s experience.<sup>93</sup> Through mimesis, the subject perceives expression in the artwork as the posing of the possibility of attending to objects

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<sup>91</sup> Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 112.

<sup>92</sup> Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 112.

<sup>93</sup> Shierry Weber-Nichol森. *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 148-149.

pre-theoretically and pre-practically by way of a sensuous mood. Such an experience cannot merely be grasped by the concept because it is manifest to the subject primarily in assimilating oneself to the mood expressed in the work—which is to say that it is the subject’s willingness to entertain her self-understanding by way of the work’s mood. As NicholSEN puts it: “[f]or Adorno, understanding a work of art is not a matter of conceptual analysis.”<sup>94</sup> This is because an artwork embodies a mood that is accordingly mute (i.e. it gives an undeniable sense of things mattering without explicitly defining what it is that matters), and it requires the subject for the realization of its expression yet without surrendering the uniqueness of its message to discursive thought. The individual must hence identify with the mood in an aesthetic object by allowing himself to be assailed by the affective tensions of its internal constitution and reflecting on the work’s expressive content from within the bounds of its idiosyncratic mood.

The expression of artworks can be characterized as the occurrence of an enigmatic mood—it is the mute disclosure of an indefinable affect as that which appears inexorably obscure precisely because it resists disclosing any fully-fledged propositional or discursive content.<sup>95</sup> Enigma arises in the difference between what is normally experienced outside the confines of the work (i.e. ordinary, everyday, and public forms of life) and what is experienced from completely within the delineations of the work (i.e. the unique expression of a mood in the absence of normative interpretation).<sup>96</sup> The artwork establishes an open ground wherein the subject’s sense of how things are ordinarily for her may be disrupted by the occurrence of a mood containing non-predicative content. This sort of content stands against ordinary conceptual

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<sup>94</sup> Shierry Weber-NicholSEN. *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999, p. 149.

<sup>95</sup> Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). p. 120 for discussion of the ‘enigmaticalness’ of artworks.

<sup>96</sup> Shierry Weber-NicholSEN. *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999, p. 151.

thinking inasmuch as one can only grasp it in the presence of the object directly influencing subjective response. What this implies is that aesthetic expression does not transcend the public frameworks of ordinary life from which it emerges. However, expressive content does not does not situate the meaning of the aesthetic object within a holistic matrix of cultural semantics but the expression of an artwork presents itself as the paradigm for orienting the subjective identification of meaning. Expression in artworks derives from their capacity to present objects directly in such a way that the subject must attune himself wholly to the intransitive content of the work. An artwork's expressive content hence makes demands on the subject without making explicit what that content is—artworks embody moods that are ineluctable from the appearance of artworks themselves.

Adorno says that this irreducible quality of the artwork “is bound to their specific experience; but can be fulfilled only by way of the theory that reflects this experience”.<sup>97</sup> Here, Adorno is attempting to articulate a bounded space of reflective experience that occurs within an aesthetic work's enigmatic space of difference—a zone of experience wherein the enactment of the self's mimetic assimilation to the mood of the aesthetic object becomes inseparable, though distinct, from a process of philosophical reflection on the work's expression. As an example, consider you are standing in front of Michelangelo's David. Your satisfaction with its monumental, strikingly beautiful presence must not derive from your capacity to subsume the meaningful content of the statue beneath a concept. Instead, your reason for appreciating the statue as a beautiful object must arise from within the manifold of non-predicative content presented by the work. In other words, your judgment that the statue is beautiful occurs in conjunction with the particular mood or state-of-mind that the statue's appearance produces in you. Aesthetic reflection is accordingly singular in that it extends directly from the work's

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<sup>97</sup> Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). p. 122.

content insofar as the expression within the work is what orients the subject in relation to the work, and hence the possible orientations to the object affects all subjective responses to its content.

Another way to consider this is that in the experience of an aesthetic work, grasping expression within the work must stem directly from the presence of the art object. Subjective orientation to a work stems from attunement to a mood of subject-object interdependence that obtains so long as the subject experiences expression that exists actually in the work. During such moments, a mood is disclosed by an indefinable appearance that articulates a sense of things mattering without subsuming that sense to the identity of a concept or the certitude of a word. In other words, the aesthetic object fashions a momentary break in the dynamics of ordinary moods. This break provides grounds for recognizing latent significances grounded wholly in the indefinably affective content of a mood expresses tensions irresolvable in terms of ordinary frameworks for interpretation. The subject apprehends the expression of a work by way of identifying himself with the work as something meaningful by its own terms in the mimetic act—as something that announces its being without defining itself.<sup>98</sup> In this sense, the subject does not stand over and above the meaning of a work, analyzing it in terms of his capacity to identify its properties conceptually or in terms of what it means for him or others like him, but is instead implicated within the meaning of the work as the grounds for the expression of its pre-subjective mood.

Precisely a mood whose expression derives from the irresolvable tensions of its affective content is disclosed in the experience of watching Joseph Cornell's experimental art film *Rose*

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<sup>98</sup> "The spectator must not project what transpires in himself on to the artwork in order to find himself confirmed, uplifted, and satisfied in it, but must, on the contrary, relinquish himself to the artwork, assimilate himself to it, and fulfill the work in its own terms." Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). p. 275.

*Hobart*. Taking footage he happened to find from a copy of an early genre film, 1931's jungle adventure *East of Borneo*, Cornell spliced it up, reordered it, and eschewed its conventional narrative structure—resulting in a 20 minute sequence of ethereal images focused mainly on the ambiguity of characters' emotions and gestures and the austerity of the environment in which they take place. In conjunction with his collage-like splicing of the original film, Cornell slowed down the film to silent speed (16 frames per second as opposed to the 24 frames per second of sound speed), projected it through a blue filter, and provided musical accompaniment from a kitschy Brazilian jazz record.<sup>99</sup> The subject of the film, as the title suggests, is the female lead actress from *East of Borneo*, Rose Hobart, whom Cornell fixated on obsessively. At silent speed, Hobart's presence, elevated from the ordinary confines of conventional narrative, arouses a sense of remoteness that registers in her protracted gesticulations and nuanced facial expressions. In separating her actions and comportment from any stable narrative context, Cornell selectively deconstructs Hobart's jejune persona in *East of Borneo* into a mood expressive of remoteness and arresting beauty latent in the genre conventions that structured her role.

The sense of mystery surrounding Hobart's appearance is amplified by the implacable fluctuation of light, which, confluent with the blue tint of the filter, dithers the boundaries between her figure and the background. This unfettering alternation of light expresses an obscure significance produced by the interplay of sensuous dynamics that are not decipherable in terms of a conventional plot or the application of a categorical identity *qua* concept. A mood best characterized by a striking sense of opaque repose inspires heightened sensations of fear, bewilderment, intimacy, empathy, and most discreetly, beauty—all of which hang together in an imaginative collage of irresolvable passions and emotions. The dynamic interplay within this

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<sup>99</sup> Joseph Cornell, *Rose Hobart*, edited by Bickford, Charles, Rose Hobart and Lupita Tovar. Vol. 35 mm. New York: 1936.

indeterminate sensuousness is guided by the real content of the imagery depicted onscreen, and the ambiguity of Hobart's gestures and facial expressions evoke an indefinable sense of profundity calling out for interpretation and yet withholding all explicit or propositional content. Instead, a background of pre-propositional content structures the focus of theoretical deliberation on the film's meaning, and discrete emotions arise from the background, focusing cognition even more specifically. The affective content does not resolve itself in any conventional or normative context but instead fluctuates indeterminately amongst various incongruous emotions. As such the work must be appreciated in its capacity to disclose mood that evokes an unhinged milieu of affects—ranging from wonderment to terror—that fundamentally directs cognitive intentionality.

No taken-for-granted contexture for interpretation is of aid in deciphering the meaning of the film as a whole, because Rose Hobart's allure and affectivity derives precisely from her lack of ordinary consistency in action and expression and the sense of distance from the everyday her gestures imply. Her image, elegantly responsive to the natural, rainforest environment and its various inhabitants, evokes a sense of dreamlike fantasy that, in turn, contributes to her sense of resplendent, yet indecipherable, uniqueness. Hobart's apparent distance from the viewer is intensified by her complete ambivalence to the incongruous blaring of Brazilian jazz over the soundtrack. What this suggests is that her presence must be regarded mimetically insofar as it is up to the viewer absorb himself within the expressive content of the work through the acts of association, recognition, and repetition. No narrative is determinately communicated in the combinatory sequences of imagery and sound, but Hobart's disquieting visage and abstruse gestures evoke a contemplative mood of contemporaneous remoteness and intimacy. The bewilderment felt at the simultaneous expression of such contradictory sensibilities compels the viewer to suspend his impulse to search for propositional or inferential content in the work in an

effort to experience the object wholly in terms of its mood. Insofar as it explicitly communicates anything, the film poses the question possibility of attending mimetically to objects and subjects—of recognizing the subtlety of a mood presenting things as indefinably significant as that which fundamentally focuses cognition non-predicatively.

In *East of Borneo*, Rose Hobart plays the character Linda Randolph who travels to the island of Marado to search for her husband. She is warned that the jungle in which her husband is supposed to have gone is “entirely too dangerous” for a woman, but Linda nonetheless perseveres through treacherous raft rides and threats from wild beasts. She learns that her husband has become the personal physician to the island’s prince who, in turn, falls in lust for Linda. A love triangle ensues wherein the Prince attempts to keep Linda and her husband captive by invoking his clandestine customs, though they eventually escape. The subtext amongst this otherwise listless genre film is Linda’s stubborn refusal to observe her conventional role and what is expected of her as a woman.<sup>100</sup> Despite her being the protagonist, Linda is portrayed as a non-agent, whose behavior is almost entirely passive, her general conduct reduced to dramatic emotional reactions to various distressful situations. While no doubt a charming screen presence, Hobart’s role is as fungible as the genre film, and the systematic disempowerment that is pressed upon her character by reference to what is properly expected of her as a woman reflects the leveling of her individuality implied by the fact that her self-understanding is confined by her common social role.

Cornell released the ambiguity of Hobart’s appearance from the manacles of the conventional narrative causality, heightening this quality of her appearance to the figurative image of the authoritatively beautiful. In so doing, he reflects the appearance of the enigmatic in

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<sup>100</sup> George Melford, *East of Borneo*, edited by Bickford, Charles, Rose Hobart and Lupita Tovar, edited by Melford, George. Vol. 35 mm Universal Pictures, 1931.

Hobart's unique presences and expresses it in a mood that reveals the indefinable embodied in what would be regarded as the ordinary.<sup>101</sup> The nuance of Hobart's character's responses to the ways in which the male characters both cosset and reproach her reveals unresolved emotional tension implied by the rigidity of her categorical role. By exposing the emotional turmoil latent within Hobart's visage, Cornell freed her presence from between the lines of genre convention and revealed the unsettling affects subdued by ordinary frameworks of interpretation. Cornell unveils the deeper, less obvious moods beneath the everyday by recasting Hobart's screen presence as a memory of what was lost in the progression of the film tradition from silent to talkie films.<sup>102</sup> *Rose Hobart* accordingly embodies the memory of the mute elegance and conspicuous vitality evoked by the reticence of the silent film. Cornell's incisive displacement of found traditional materials produced a unique aesthetic object whose radical differentiation from the ordinary traditional standards evokes an image of what has remained unrepresentable for the popular film tradition. The expressive content of the film is grounded in the preservation of the lost beauty of the silent film actualized by the creation of what is entirely new for tradition. Through the exacting destabilization of the viewer's sense of linear narrative progression, Cornell points to an indefinable beauty in Rose Hobart's ordinary appearance that remains unrealized by the putative semantics associated with everyday moods.

By creating his collage film from a lowbrow pop jungle film, Cornell reveals a latent, equivocal beauty in the ennui of a Hollywood potboiler. If the Hollywood genre film can be

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<sup>101</sup> See Stanley Cavell "The Uncanniness of the Ordinary" *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Stanford University, 3 & 8 April, 1986. for a superbly detailed discussion of the appearance of the indefinably uncanny in the everyday.

<sup>102</sup> Cornell has been quoted as saying, "among the barren wastes of the talking films there occasionally occur passage to remind one again of the profound and suggestive power of the silent film to evoke an ideal world of beauty, to release unsuspected floods of music from the gaze of a human countenance in its prison of silver light." Joseph Cornell, "The Enchanted Wanderer: Excerpt from a Journey Album from Hedy Lamarr," *View Magazine* 9/10 (1941): 3.

considered the translation of contemporary notions of the ordinary into images, Cornell's work recovers the enigma of unresolved moods that is necessarily repressed by the everydayness of common, taken-for-granted frameworks of interpretation. The disfigurement of the linear narrative structure in *East of Borneo* into a sequential cluster of particularized, yet similar images evokes the untamed play of the emotions and the imagination that processes objects mimetically. The film's structure functions with the logic of a dream or an involuntary memory as it cuts rapidly amongst estranged moments, moving associatively amongst points of heightened tension whose import is unknown. Moments occur and recur in a repetitive ellipsis; jumping to an instant shown earlier only to associate it with a new cluster of obscurely similar events. As such the mimetic act transfigures the subject into a receptacle for the echoes of resemblance amongst these indeterminately connected events. By repetition and association, the mind cycles through images in a process of review, recollection, and reflection, trying unremittingly to decipher the uncanny similarities amongst discrete moments.

*Rose Hobart* embodies a mood that is necessarily enigmatic insofar its content delivers a punctuated episode of bewilderment as opposed to an experience of understanding. The viewer's attempts to grasp meaning in the film in terms of any conventional narrative coherence are fruitless, and emotion, association, repetition, and recognition, not logic, articulate the meaning of the experience through an idiosyncratic mood. All attempts at synthesizing the film's meaning into a communicative whole are annulled by the pervasiveness of the work's mood of bewilderment. By tracing the work's self-identical structure in mimesis, the subject assimilates herself to the indeterminate clusters of representations and figurative images within the film. In this way, the self and the mute expression of contemplative and affective moods in the film are on equal grounds, because the expression, by its enigmatic nature, presents meaning in terms of a

mood disclosing its sense wholly in-itself. As such the content of the film cannot be separated from the appearance in which the content is delivered to and experienced by the mind.

In a certain sense, the expressiveness of a mood itself can be interpreted as the film's content—it reads as an argument for the priority of mood as the fundamental medium of world disclosure that compels reflection and interpretation. From an epistemological standpoint, Cornell intimates that the disclosure of objects with expressive, non-predicative content serves as the a priori ground for reflective experience. The radical differentiation between the ordinariness of the content familiar to the self and the enigmatic artistic expression unfamiliar to the self inspires reflection on both the content of the self and its ordinary experience of things. Along with this, Cornell articulates the austere background of mood as the fundamental grounds constraining the focus of perceptual attention and reflective deliberation. By assembling the moments of *East of Borneo* that resonated with him, Cornell was able to expose the responsiveness of the mind as the capacity process of moods echoing from an initial, punctuated appearance of the enigmatically indefinable.

The expression of the art object requires the subject for the clarification and realization of its content in a mood the artwork as affecting without explicit reason for what exactly is affecting. The artwork as an in-itself preserves a certain indefinable quality that is not revealed except by aesthetic reflection that takes the form of mimesis. With *Rose Hobart*, Cornell suggests that ordinary frameworks of semantic interpretation necessarily repress the irreducible in-itself quality of appearances and the free self-interpretation implied by that quality. This idea comes across most sharply during the final scenes of the film, wherein Cornell spliced in footage of an eclipse that he edited contiguously with a shot of a white ball, lined up exactly with the position of the sun, falling into a murky pool of water. The ripples pulsing on the surface of the

water express the sharp organicism of this moment. Namely, the natural grandeur of the sun during an eclipse is disenchanted in an instant, divulged as nothing more than a cunning effect bound up with the singular perspective that attends to it.

In this moment, Cornell seems to be saying that even the awe-inspiring imagery of art does not hold the weight it purports to, for in reality it too is mediated by traditional vocabularies, which suggests that art operates necessarily at a remove from the immediacy of the affective phenomena it seeks to define. In shifting from figurative scale to literal, Cornell implies that the awe-inspiring majesty of the sun is lost when its marvelous wholeness is hypostasized literally. This final event of the film expresses how the indefinable enigma that characterizes natural beauty cannot, by its nature, be seized and assimilated into ordinary theoretical consciousness of identity. Like the sun, the arresting quality of natural beauty falls out of view and vanishes from common structures of everyday experience, its spellbinding authority trivialized by its failure to be recognized and communicated putatively.

Through the mimetic act, the subject identifies his existence in terms of the enigmatic expression residing within the film. Hobart's presence expresses a form of authoritative meaning, derived from the irresolvable affective tensions registered in her countenance, which do not give themselves up to the concepts of the understanding. The subject that grasps this meaning does so only by assimilating herself to the indefinable opacity of Hobart's irresolute mood. The film expresses the primacy of aesthetic form, presenting the disclosure of meaning in the absence of identification by thought as the presupposed ground for reflection and judgment. As such the film's expression remains non-subjective in that its mood assails the viewer with its irresolvable and indeterminate affective tension. Since no overt judgment or concept accords entirely with the expression of the film, it might be said that the *beingness* of the disclosed appearance is the

essential content of the film's mood. This *beingness* of the world-disclosing mood refers to a mood's capacity to express a direct sense of how the world is without propositional or discursive content. That is to say that it establishes that moods necessarily exist pre-subjectively.

As the mimetic expression of an indefinable, pre-intentional mood disclosing sense without denotation, *Rose Hobart* presents the authoritative particularity of expressive imagery as the fundamental content of experience. In this way, the film makes a case for the irreducibility of a pre-conceptual mood as grounds for the direct appearance of value. Paradoxically, Cornell's film also suggests that the non-conceptual cannot be experienced directly in-itself without a traditional element of mediation inasmuch as the literal existence of that which is unrepresentable cannot be recognized in the absence of the form in which it expresses itself. As appearance, the form of the expression resembles the structure of conceptual cognition and the syntax of language without capitulating to either entirely.<sup>103</sup> What must be drawn from this is the irreducibility of the appearance of aesthetic forms without immediately determinate propositional content for the actualization of spontaneous cognition. That is to say that the appearance of objects structured in terms of a mood promulgating the subject's comportment towards the world serves as the fundamental ground for reflecting on the meaning of an experience.

By expressing the ordinarily indefinable by way of a mood rather than a concept, art establishes a space wherein the subject may attend to the content of an experience without interpreting it literally or discursively. The subject assimilates herself to this space by mimetically tracing the tension amongst associative imagery in an attempt to exhaustively decipher the work's meaning. That no explicit or linear interpretation emerges from this process suggests that the artwork preserves its independence from language and conceptual thought by

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<sup>103</sup> Theodor Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). p. 120.

expressing its content as enigmatically in-itself. Communicated by the artwork as expression, the enigmatic specificity of an aesthetic mood is disseminated in the presentation of that mood, which confirms the primacy of the presence of an object for the possibility of a rationally oriented subjective response. Drawing an analogy to poetry, Wallace Stevens aptly evokes a mood disclosing an expressive meaning that calls for interpretation yet stands apart from all attempts to interpret it determinately by a shared word or concept. Quoting from his work “Prologues to What is Possible”:

“The metaphor stirred his fear. The object with which he was  
 compared  
 Was beyond his recognizing. By this he knew that likeness of  
 him extended  
 Only a little way, and not beyond, unless between himself  
 And things beyond resemblance there was this and that  
 intended to be recognized.”<sup>104</sup>

An experience with “things beyond resemblance” elucidates that the encounter with expressive content to which no name or concept accords reveals the ordinary frameworks of semantic interpretation to be limited in scope. Attuning to a mood wholly by its own terms allows the subject to experience what he has no concept for, characterized as “this and that / intended to be recognized.” The putative theoretical conceptions of experience unreflectively heeded by the subject of *Bildung* as her second nature are abrogated by the indefinable mood disclosing unrealized content for new experience implied by the idea of things beyond resemblance. Such an experience is emotionally acute inasmuch as the ordinary theoretical coherence of the world is suspended as the mind is stringently guided through experience by the enigmatic, pre-intentional content of mood.

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<sup>104</sup> Wallace Stevens, “Prologues to What Is Possible,” in *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 377-378.

The aesthetic appearance of indefinable things beyond resemblance confirms that the world is disclosed to cognition not primarily in the mode of understanding but on the pretense of a mood. Art's expression reveals that which is indefinable to be the inextricability of certain, subtle forms of significance from their mood of disclosure. For the purposes of an epistemological dialectic, the artwork communicates an object's capacity to express a mood pre-subjectively—its capacity to resemble itself in the absence of conceptual identification in such a way as to impose certain non-neutrality on the subject. In other words, what art communicates is that the expressive presence of a singular objects fundamentally orients subjective responses in relation to the world. Since the appearance of things by way of a mood remains literally indefinable in terms of a concept, the figurative expression of a unique appearance derives from its capacity to resemble itself by way of resembling something opaque.<sup>105</sup> As such expression in art reveals the possibility of identifying objects non-predicatively or, more specifically, mimetically. This priority of the direct presence of an object is required for the subject to be constructively oriented in relation to the meaningfulness of an object.

The encounter with “things beyond resemblance”; with meaning not included within pre-established theoretical or practical modes of cognition; and with a form of significance radically dissimilar from ordinary holistic interpretations of experience, reveals the generality of a non-subjectivist mood as a fundamental ground for all intentional states. With the exhaustive attempt to wrest meaning from the indefinable, singular expression of an artwork, as in the experience of Rose Hobart's beguiling equanimity, the mind passes through evocatively indeterminate moods to elevate itself to

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<sup>105</sup> Shierry Weber-Nicholsen. *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999, p. 164-165

the mood of resolute bewilderment. Hobart's countenance bears the expression of mood, which, in the absence of predicative content, remains obscure for conceptual understanding. Insofar as viewer remains open to being in a mood and in the equivocal mood evoked by Cornell's film, recognition and identification stems from the content of the mood itself. That is to say that the meaning appreciated within the film derives not from the identification of a categorical form that draws on conceptual capacities but from a lack of categorical unity that expresses the pre-intentional content of a mood.

## **VII. Conclusion: The Epistemic Value of Mood**

In analyzing the aesthetic dimensions of mood, it becomes evident that the expression of things mattering such that they make direct and immediate demands on a subject (both affectively and rationally) serves as the fundamental, pre-subjective ground for cognition. The linguistic meaning-ambivalence of aesthetic works, like the evocatively alienated moments in *Rose Hobart*, acclimatizes the mind directly to things in the world in a decidedly non-neutral manner. Concepts may be invoked to communicate reactions to the film or characterize certain moments of the film, but taken as a whole, it resists interpretability by the conceptual capacities of the understanding. As such the film embodies the generality of mood by expressing equivocating possibilities for interpretation that do not cohere into a holistic theoretical schema. In this sense, Cornell's film tacitly reveals that to encounter things in the world is to encounter them from within a mood that is irreducibly presupposed by any account of conceptual experience.

As pre-subjectivist grounds for intentional cognition, moods situate the operation of the conceptual capacities of the understanding by disclosing the world as essentially constitutive of

practical and theoretical possibilities for a subject. Heidegger sums this up when he says “we must keep in mind that knowing is grounded beforehand in a Being-already-alongside-the-world,” which suggests the faculties of the understanding *qua* concepts must be properly anchored within the contextual disclosure of a mood.<sup>106</sup> As he establishes, mood is not a second-order subjective coloration of the world but the essential condition for apprehending the world as an arena for practical projects, goals and purposes, as well as theoretical discourse. By these lights, moods are fundamentally constitutive to human understanding (i.e. they make possible grasping objects intelligibility) such that no subject may escape being in a mood nor accommodate a mood fully into a theoretical perspective. So, a mood encompasses a background upon which things can show as relevant to a subject’s agential capacities (i.e. situations and possibilities are given as doable opportunities) or as objects for a subject’s conceptual capacities (i.e. situations and things are given as available for theoretical analysis). The mind-world relation is thus fundamentally grounded in the pre-subjective deliverance of mood. Moreover, one can make sense of the idea that the world makes demands on rational subjects inasmuch as a mood strikes the perceiver in a decidedly non-neutral manner.

This sort of theory of direct, context-specific perception of non-neutral values and meanings residing actually in the world is largely absent from the notion of the concept as McDowell conceives of it. For him, empirical content, even during unreflective experience, is structured essentially by concepts such that it may be exploited in making a judgment or engaging in some practical action. In other words, McDowell claims that empirical content is not propositional or discursive on its own but that it is on par with the understanding in that the unity of the properties of an object available to sensory consciousness is grasped receptively by the

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<sup>106</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 2008), p. 88.

same function that provides the unity of a concept.<sup>107</sup> The problem with this conclusion is that it offers no account of how situations and objects come into view as mattering in such a way that requires the utilization of specific concepts. Of course, McDowell might respond that concepts can be specific enough to account for immediate relevance of an object for a subject. Yet he offers no phenomenological description of how concepts can reveal the specificity of an individual's commitments to the world. This move must be met with skepticism inasmuch as the conceptual capacities operative in making theoretical or propositional assertions are grounded within a direct, contextualized perception that affords objects with a sense of their being possible objects of theoretical or practical significance.

McDowell's remarks on second nature, nebulous as they are, aim to ground conceptual capacities pre-theoretically within the world as the realization of the natural potentialities of the human as rational animal. As a reaction to the rigidity of natural scientific conceptions of nature that reduce all phenomena to the activity of calculable laws, McDowell hopes his idea of second nature accounts for an internal connection between empirical and conceptual content. However, this amounts to identifying the nature of empirical content wholly with that of the concept. Without any account of how the predicative, theoretical content identified by the concept provides a direct, pre-intentional deliverance of a scope of possibilities for taking a stance towards the world, exactly what the concept is remains unclear. It may be allowed that concepts

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<sup>107</sup> Here I am thinking once again of McDowell's discussion in "Avoiding the Myth of the Given" wherein he asserts that the content unified in intuitions (i.e. sensory receptivity to the world) is necessarily of the same kind of content unified in judgments, namely, conceptual content (see p. 264, second full paragraph). He wants to establish that we could not identify distinct categorical forms if they did not accord wholly with the unified form of empirical content apprehended by the senses. What is problematic with this perspective is that it does not seem to account for the immediately relevant ways in which a specific categorical form may matter for a specific subject, as in the case where you and your friend have radically different orientations towards the same slope. Instead, McDowell seems to imply that the peripheral background concerns that weigh upon the subject can be condensed into the operation of the concept. In the absence of a phenomenological supplement, it remains to be seen whether the concept can actually account for the specificity of an individual's commitments to the world.

can account equally for content that has the potential to figure into discursive activity and the content of that discursive activity, say theorizing or judging. If concepts are taken as that which gets one into the space of reasons, then it seems they can bear the appropriate non-neutrality for a subject. However, Heidegger demonstrates that something more general than the concept can account for non-neutrality, and hence the idea of mood suggests the primacy of being directly attuned to the world by identifying the expressive presence of objects.

In this response to McDowell there arises a need for the reconsideration of a non-conceptual element for perceptual thinking, yet that element need not be hypostasized as the classical idea of the given. What is instead called for is direct deliverance of a pre-intentional contexture of the world expressive of immediate, focal possibilities for acting and judging. The conceptual capacities of the subject are situated in this picture as the capacities to understand one's immediate possibilities for practical action or propositional assertions but they are not the capacities by which one's immediate practical or theoretical possibilities come into view. This distinction, though fine, is essential for epistemological thinking to be grounded actually in the world. The capacity to attune oneself to a mood bases reflection in response to the specific character of how things are showing up for one presently, not solely on the basis of the historically accumulated modes of being in the world *qua* forms of life.

Since being in a mood directs the cognition of a subject towards significant situations and objects specifically relevant for him in the present moment, subjective reflection is grounded within an immediate contextual milieu that discloses the specificity of the subject's external world commitments. Such commitments show up on a fixed background of beliefs about the way things are and what sort of things may matter for the individual. Subsequently, the mind must be situated within a world that opens up to it pre-theoretically in the expression of mood, and the

discreteness of moods from intentional content ought not be understated. As irreducibly non-neutral in character, moods provide a schema for how the world makes demands on the subject and, moreover, how the subject may be appropriately responsive to reasons. That being so, modern epistemology must not neglect of the essentiality of the role of moods for anchoring human experience, both practical and theoretical, directly within the world of things.

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