

2016

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Recommended Citation

Roelofs, Monique (2016) "The Aesthetic and Its Resonances: A Reply to Kathleen M. Higgins, Carolyn Korsmeyer, and Mariana Ortega," *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)*: Vol. 14 , Article 21.
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The Aesthetic and Its Resonances: A Reply to Kathleen M. Higgins, Carolyn Korsmeyer, and Mariana Ortega

Monique Roelofs

Abstract

This essay offers replies to the critical commentaries on *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* presented by Kathleen M. Higgins, Carolyn Korsmeyer, and Mariana Ortega. The essay shows how the probing questions and criticisms that the three commentators raise bring out details in the framework of relationality, address, and promises through which the book theorizes the aesthetic.

Key Words

address, aesthetics, ethics, politics, promise, race, relationality, threat

The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic, for their spirited engagement with which I thank Kathleen M. Higgins, Carolyn Korsmeyer, and Mariana Ortega, highlights the ambivalence the aesthetic assumes in everyday life and in the artworld, historically as well as under contemporary, late capitalist social formations. The aesthetic, as I indicate here, activates its ethical and political polyvalence in the fields of difference, enjoyment, loss, connectedness, and violence to which Higgins, Korsmeyer, and Ortega point.

1. Singularity, race, the individual, and the social: A reply to Kathleen M. Higgins

I understand aesthetic theory as a form of narration, interpretation, and concept-building that is embedded in aesthetic life itself. *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* juggles several principal goals: One, to theorize the aesthetic in terms of what I take to be its three constituent notions, those of relationality, address, and promising and, thereby, to make a new case for its significance. Two, to demonstrate the fruitfulness of this conceptual framework in view of the task of accounting for the entanglements of the aesthetic with intersecting modalities of social difference and with the forms of power these differences tie into. Three, to show my three key concepts at work in specific historical, quotidian, and artistic cases. Four, to fashion a style of investigation, exposition, and writing that attests to our situatedness as aesthetic theorists and agents in the mosaic of factors we subject to inquiry.

The book seeks as far as possible to avoid projecting onto that mosaic an overarching narrative that belies the multiplicity of operative forces and that shortcuts the ongoing process of reading that I consider key to critical cultural and transcultural agency, given that we inhabit crosshatching modalities of hierarchized difference that pop up in oppositions such as those between reason and the body, the particular and the

general, the individual and the social.

My critique of Roland Barthes does not object to his valorization of the *punctum* as such. Though I recognize problems with the *punctum*, I believe it involves an important even if limited mode of apprehension. My central point of contention with Barthes is that his account of the *punctum* fails to yield a satisfactory answer to the gendered problematic of the detail. What the gendered status of the detail in the history of aesthetics, to my mind, demands, building on Naomi Schor's analysis and also on Barthes's views,^[1] is a dynamic form of reading that plays out the detail against the whole, the particular against the general, and the other way around.^[2]

A mere celebration of specific kinds of detail, such as the *punctum*, preserves intact a process of reverberating hierarchies that take different forms in different situations.^[3]

In sum, the *punctum* is necessary to a rethinking of the place of gender in aesthetics but it does not suffice. Aesthetic theory needs a more complicated revision than Barthes achieves, one that alerts us to a slippery, tenacious, and dispersed pattern of interlinking forces of masculinization and feminization. My issue is not with the *punctum* per se, which I find highly valuable, even if it incurs problems.^[4] The *punctum*, my main objection states, is inadequate to the theoretical task of revising aesthetics in light of its gendered deprecation of detail.

Although I argue that Arthur Danto disregards aspects of the form and content of Botero's work, in his review for *The Nation* of the artist's Abu Ghraib series (2004-06), my view is not simply the one Higgins ascribes to me: that it is Danto's "omissions [that] render 'the Abu Ghraib oeuvre a proper item for consumption by a proprietary, racialized, and nationalist cultural sensibility.'"^[5] I show how Danto actively buys into pejoratively racialized and racializing conceptual and affective schemes pertaining to figurations of childishness, repetitiveness, pathos, and marketability, as well as to conceptions of the artworld, disturbatory art, and the Latin American Baroque. The denominations 'pathetic,' 'blimpy,' 'bland,' and '[not] serious' retain a resonance and weight in Danto's review that he never retracts.^[6]

Danto's framing of Botero's work enacts a racially distanced mode of reading. In his remarks on the Abu Ghraib oeuvre, he preserves a form of racial othering under the rubrics of closeness, empathetic identification, and even praise. The art's meaning does not rely on emotional effects to the extent that Danto seems to argue. This meaning includes dimensions of artistic content that enjoy a certain independence from the viewer's affective response per se, elements that Danto ignores.

Danto fails to adequately mark, in terms of stylistic and formal features, how the Abu Ghraib series arrives at the power that he attributes to it. He is also unclear about the degree to which he takes the series to be artistically strong. The works' form and content give a specific contour to the affects they elicit in the discerning viewer. Danto downplays the formal structuration of spectatorial response. Thus he insufficiently acknowledges the work for the specific work it is. I do not straightforwardly agree with Danto's artistic verdict while

disputing omissions in his explanation; I challenge Danto's positioning of Botero's work in a field of racialized aesthetic discourse that is also a field of racial power.

In contrast to the reading Higgins suggests, I do not "demand that the entire web of social relationships be kept in view in every aesthetic analysis" (Higgins, Section 4). Concerning the worry that *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* overemphasizes the social nexus, it is worth observing that I see the aesthetic at work as a dimension of race, gender, and the political, just as I find politics and difference at work as aspects of the aesthetic. Rather than endorsing an exclusive or narrow focus on social constellations, I thus develop an expansive notion of aesthetically shaped and aesthetically operative differences.

I do not claim that the aesthetic generally is the most promising when it disrupts. In light of the need to contest established orders of aestheticized and aestheticizing difference, such disruption is often crucial, however, at the level of theory as well as practice.

An advantage of the term "affect," in my view, visible in the work of many so-called affect theorists, is that it recognizes the fluidity and temporal arc of emotions and their connectedness with perception, space, and collectivity.^[7]

How much weight should we give to social difference? This is a vexing problem, and the reply varies for different situations. To quickly glance the polyvalent, contravening forces into which social categorizations enter, it is worth recalling the opening lines of Pat Parker's poem, "For the white person who wants to know how to be my friend:"

The first thing you do is to forget that i'm Black.
Second, you must never forget that i'm Black.^[8]

Along with with artists, critical race feminist scholars have probed the multivalence characterizing practices of social classification.^[9] Yet, aesthetic theory has not given systemic difference the emphasis it requires. As aestheticians, we have a responsibility to think through how our conceptual frameworks construe questions of power. This task remains. It demands that we pay attention to racial, gender, and class context.

Notions of race, class, gender, and the other categories of difference with which they intersect do not, in my account, most centrally denote group status but modalities of power that shape identities, intersubjective relations, and a host of collective forms and interactions. Talk about race, class, gender, and sexuality does not ignore individuals—we are carriers of these dimensions. Individual identities are not neatly separable from these factors, even if such identities clearly are not reducible to them.

2. Navigating interlinking promises and threats: A reply to Carolyn Korsmeyer

Carolyn Korsmeyer scrutinizes the important and difficult dilemmas that arise when our moral values clash with our desires for aesthetic enjoyment and with our values of transhistorical and cross-cultural understanding. Do we take

in stride what may be the faintly or even intensely reprehensible enjoyment with which our engagements with fiction would appear to be shot through? Or do we opt to foreclose possibilities for attaining insight and experience across historical epochs and cultural boundaries by resisting morally troubling narrative presuppositions and seductions?[10] Korsmeyer's genre of potentially discreditable enjoyment signals the moral compromise that may be the price we pay for our delight and instruction.

The epistemic and moral pressures Korsmeyer highlights are significant. *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* develops some considerations that are worth taking into account in reflecting on them: The moral and political ambivalence of the aesthetic is endemic. Ethically objectionable elements occur at all levels of the aesthetically mediated structures of address and relationality in which we participate. They mark the modes of address we handle on a daily basis, the texture of relationships we navigate, and the repertoire of aesthetic promises and threats we realize.[11] I see Korsmeyer's species of reprehensible pleasures as a subcategory of a wide range of aesthetic promises and threats, whereby, as I indicate in the book, promises involve threats, and threats promises, and both comprise forms of address.[12]

Regarding poet Randall Jarrell's "gratuitous" and "jarring" references to African people, I would want to point to the entwinement of promises and threats: I would want to recognize the threat inherent in the promising "otherwise sensitive poetic voice," such as the threat of covering over racial constructions, and to recognize the promise held out by the threatening "then-conventional mode of address" (Korsmeyer, Section 4), such as the promise of enforcing racial configurations.

I am also curious about the tensions and collusions between this promise and threat. In the cases of Jarrell's and Walter Scott's novels, promises of narrative enjoyment, of diachronic cultural understanding, and, presumably, of moral uplift held out by fiction, are contemporaneous with threats of compromising our moral sensibilities. Likewise, in Jarrell's and Scott's stories, judging from Korsmeyer's account, black and white women, black men, and male gypsies appear to be construed as and invested with a whole gamut of aesthetic threats and promises. I would assume this assortment of threats and promises to include threats of moral dissolution, of existential bleakness, of an annihilation of white male control, and of the unraveling of human civilization and form. These threats, I imagine, are accompanied by promises of alterity, freedom, innocence, self-sacrifice, loyalty, speculative discernment, and material interconnectedness.

Again, I am interested in the ways these different threats and promises in the representation conspire and collide in the passages Korsmeyer quotes. Analogously, I would like to attend to the threats and promises inherent in our reactions to the representation. The latter set, presumably, would include the threat to morality, if we do not resist the relevant construals of blacks, etc., as threats, the threat of ethnocentrism, if we reject the portrayals too rigorously, and even the threat of seeing or imagining gypsies as embodying

promises of freedom. More generally, how do these kinds of threats and promises structure our experience of the works and organize our various identificatory and disidentificatory, participatory and nonparticipatory pleasures and displeasures, seductions and repulsions?

Letting go of a specific aesthetic promise does not mean dropping the promise of the aesthetic altogether. I would therefore reject Korsmeyer's suggestion that in situations where sexism and racism get in the way of the comical, as with the movie *Mash*, "the aesthetic . . . loses its power" (Korsmeyer, Section 2). Likewise, when moral resistance overcomes enjoyment or appreciation, I do not believe that for that reason "[t]he promise of the aesthetic," as Korsmeyer states, "is broken" (Korsmeyer, Section 3), and would want to point to a more local breaking of a *specific* kind of aesthetic promise that happens to be in effect.

The case of *Mash* seems to differ in this regard from that of Clarice Lispector's novel *The Hour of the Star*, which I discuss in my final chapter. This novel calls into question the promise of culture attendant on the aesthetic generally, as Lispector takes up the problem of the moral and political standing of aesthetic existence as a problem of certain aesthetic threats and promises, and edges the reader toward contemplating an all-round dismissal of the cultural promise, while simultaneously challenging us to construe that promise anew. [\[13\]](#)

I am interested in Korsmeyer's suggestion of a "dominant address" in *Casablanca* "to freedom fighters, to anti-fascists, to ordinary people trying to flee the dangers of war" that is interrupted by protagonist Ilsa Lund's (Ingrid Bergman's) reference to the black pianist, Sam (Dooley Wilson), as a "boy" (Korsmeyer, Section 2). I have reservations, however, about neatly separating these two forms of address. I see the movie's address to its public as qualified by Ilsa's address concerning Sam to a white interlocutor *within* the movie (Captain Louis Renault, played by Claude Rains). I experience the scene as representative of a broader mode of address from whites to whites and as an exemplification of a well-known script of address that enlists blacks for white purposes. On this interpretation, the moment is paradigmatic of the film's positioning of freedom fighters and refugees as mainly white, and of the movie's splitting of its implied audience along racially exclusionary lines, a positioning and partitioning for which the centering of a white love triangle in North Africa during World War II provides further evidence. [\[14\]](#)

By this reading I do not mean to suggest that address is a one-dimensional phenomenon but to stress the inescapable entwinement of aesthetic promises and threats in the world in which we live. Aesthetic address is not tidy. As I put it in my discussion of beauty, such address "is not ready to be set aright; it never will be." [\[15\]](#)

Korsmeyer notes that "if aesthetic enjoyment can mark the fact that one's imagination is captured by a fictional world, the question becomes: When does this phenomenon mask or overcome values that would otherwise be in place?" (Korsmeyer, Section 2). This is a poignant and worthy question. *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* expands the

range of tenacious problems that these kinds of dilemmas provoke: How do the phenomena of coming into, being in, or relinquishing the grip of a fiction play into constellations of relationality, address, and promising that *actually* are in place?[16] What is the cultural efficacy of the divergent sorts of enthrallment beholding us to fictional genres? The latter question rapidly branches out into a range of additional questions I want to ask: What do we make of the social productivity of various kinds of aesthetic engagement, such as the sustenance that Alice Walker's mother is said to have found in the growing of flowers, the racially exoticizing practice bell hooks calls eating the other, or the marketing of racial and gender differences in the form of "multicultural" Barbie dolls, explored by Ann DuCille?[17]

Constellations of address and relationality sustain a wide range of powers that shape the choices we face. Options for engagement or disengagement and resistance or submission pervade these structures at multiple sites. The framework of promises, address, and relationality I describe in *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* helps us to identify and to qualify our view of the different factors and forces that are at play in the kinds of conundrums Korsmeyer stresses. This framework allows us to see the ambivalence that Korsmeyer signals as endemic to aesthetic experience.

3. Love, plurality, and regulation: A reply to Mariana Ortega

Emphasizing the multiple forms and the complexity of the presence of the aesthetic in the political and of the political in the aesthetic, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* offers a theory of the aesthetic. It does not provide an assessment of whether political or aesthetic values should prevail over each other in specific cases or which particular commitments in a nexus of interlacing concerns we should give the greatest significance. The book signals the imbrications of aesthetics and politics. It highlights the aesthetic stakes that we have in political life and the political stakes in aesthetic life. I engage actual interventions, by theorists such as the poet and cultural critic Audre Lorde, artists such as Botero, and quotidian aesthetic agents, in fields of interactions. But, for the most part, I refrain from offering concrete recommendations for turning systems of relationality and address in more adequate moral, aesthetic, and political directions.

The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic underscores the ethical, political, economic, and aesthetic need to rethink the place of difference in aesthetics. It argues for forms of address that play out against each other the particular and the general as well as the known and the unknown. It implicitly supports the worthiness of values of truthfulness, justice, aesthetic and artistic goodness, critical agency and judgment, existential flourishing, sociality, and pleasure. It endorses, contests, and revises critical agendas on particular points. In doing so, however, the book lays out parameters for reflection on how we ought to act but stops short of outlining specific policies for necessary social changes. This is where strategies and possibilities such as those of Lorde's erotic, Gloria Anzaldúa's liminality, and María Lugones's active subjectivity come in. I value their productivity, within limits.

The erotic, for Lorde, is a source of vital promises for women: it promises connectedness, selfhood, and power. It makes a space where what to many has seemed to be a threat, namely women's, and especially black women's, erotic sensibilities, becomes a promise.^[18] As Mariana Ortega notes, Lorde believes the erotic can reduce the "threat of difference."^[19]

But, in thinking about such threats and promises, it is important to ask what is being promised or threatened to whom.

While the removal of a threat of difference is apposite in certain situations and can make possible much-needed interconnections across social divisions, this strategy fails to yield an adequate response to questions of difference in aesthetics in general. The aesthetic is a powerful contributor to the commodification of difference by the tourist industry. It is at work in the exoticizing regime of erotic and sexual consumption that hooks describes as "eating the other."^[20]

Given these aestheticized erotic threats, I worry that a general valorization of the erotic as an aesthetic response—a promising one—to the threats of contemporary violence, alienation, and a misrecognition or denial of difference involves a glorification of practices that we should call into question.

Love is important to the aesthetic.^[21] This is perhaps most influentially revealed in the case of Plato's love of beauty, truth, and goodness, and Barthes' *punctum*. The promise of love, in these cases, goes together, however, with the threat of the repulsive (a state that, as has been widely acknowledged, is not necessarily unpromising or, for that matter, unpleasurable). My point, here, is that we need to take seriously the ambivalence inherent in love and the erotic.

Neither can resolve the moral, political, and aesthetic difficulties of the aesthetic. A generalized solution belies the messiness of the field and inexorably displaces the problems it purports to solve.^[22]

The cultural promise of the aesthetic is not singular. It is a type of promise that subsumes a variety of promises.^[23] The promise of an egalitarian and harmonious society that Pablo Neruda attaches to our creation, interpretation, and exchanging of everyday objects is an example of a cultural promise that he takes the aesthetic to make. Culture and the aesthetic are sites of difference, antagonism, and rupture.

They host multiple forms of collectivity, ones that vary in the strength, structure, and plasticity of the bonds that they imply. For that reason, and in that sense, the "culture" and "aesthetics" parts of the cultural promise of the aesthetic are pluralized.

The plurality of promising and the heterogeneity of aesthetic collectivity are of a piece with each other. Promises promise specific things to specific types of addressees. They are selective and imply inclusions and exclusions.^[24] This sort of plurality stays clear of a liberal pluralism that places all kinds of collectives on the same level in a vision of endless flow.

Moral stances suffuse circuits of interaction but cannot be posited in the abstract—that is, lifted from the aesthetic positions, conditions and forms in which they inhere—to circumscribe what aesthetic life is about.

Aesthetic relationality is regulated. It is institutionalized. We orchestrate it through forms such as museums, schools, parties, design, fashion, and objects like vacuum cleaners, uniforms, and cars. I do not believe that in general we should expect more predictability in our relations.^[25] We need to challenge and foster sedimentations as well as flows, depending on context. Structure and contingency, system and happenstance, the predictable and the volatile or the mercurial are interrelated. Rigid oppositions between pattern and detail, the stable and the erratic, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the normalized and the queer do not exist. We have to work in all of these registers at once and play them out against each other.

Meanwhile, there is traction: We count on promises and threats. They are both stable and unstable. They arise within systems of relationality and address.^[26] These systems exhibit regularity and contingency in good and bad ways. An aesthetic space where we are either not divided or irrevocably divided is not available. The challenge that arises for us as aesthetic agents, then, is one of negotiating a field of promises, threats, relationality, and address. Showing how we are invested in those negotiations, as I do, does not require coming down on the ways we should carry them out in particular situations.

The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic emphasizes constitutive dimensions of aesthetic life. Stipulating what is to be done within those registers is a different matter. Bringing attention to structural operations does not require adjudicating how these phenomena are to be weighed, even if careful judgments necessitate paying heed to those factors. This is where the aesthetic and political commitments of agents and collectives enter the scene.

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Published on January 14, 2016.

Endnotes

^[1] Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and The Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

^[2] Monique Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 80-84; see also pp. 92, 103, 111, 114, 146-147.

^[3] This process can be found at work, for instance, in the tensions between the pearl and the mistress's left hand in

Johannes Vermeer's painting, *Mistress and Maid* (c. 1665-70), and between the sensory detail that David Hume valorizes in his theory of taste and other kinds of detail that he discredits. Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 59-71, 73-76, 78-79.

[4] The address to and from the *punctum* encodes patterns of racialization and ethnic subject formation that Barthes disavows. Such factors would be subsumed under the *studium*, from which he distinguishes the *punctum*. Barthes's view of the *punctum*, hence, articulates an insufficiently critical conception of aesthetic subjectivity, one that obfuscates registers of power, experience, relationality, and detail-oriented or -evading address that it simultaneously marshals. See Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 79-81.

[5] Kathleen M. Higgins, "Positioning and Discernment: A Comment on Monique Roelofs's *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*," Section 4, in this symposium of *Contemporary Aesthetics*. References to this essay will appear in parentheses in the text.

[6] Arthur C. Danto, "The Body in Pain," *The Nation* (November 27, 2006), 23-26; ref. on 23.

[7] Like Sianne Ngai, I consider the differences between feeling and affect differences in degree or intensity rather than in kind. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 27. On the fluid and historical dimensions of affects, emotions, and feelings, and their links with perception, space, and forms of personal and collective embodiment, see Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[8] Pat Parker, *Womanslaughter* (Oakland, CA: Diana Press, 1978), p. 13. A reprint of this poem can be found in *Callaloo*, 23, 1 (2000), 73.

[9] See, for instance, Patricia J. Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).

[10] Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Address and the Lure of the Aesthetic: Reflections on Monique Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*," in this symposium of *Contemporary Aesthetics*. References to this essay will appear in parentheses in the text.

[11] Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 207, 209-211. I should note that in reflecting on the links between address and community or the promise or pleasure thereof, it is important to realize that, contrary to what Korsmeyer may be taken to suggest (Korsmeyer, "Address and the Lure of the Aesthetic," Abstract; Section 1), promises of collectivity or community, in my view, are not necessarily promises of reception, appreciation, enjoyment, or pleasure.

[12] On promises and threats as involving each other, see Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 23, 177, 205-207, 241 note 27. On promises and threats as modes of address, see pp. 1, 203, 205. Address, in my account, is a mechanism of the receptive and appreciative activities, instances of enjoyment, and pleasures that Korsmeyer

discusses, while also exceeding them (Korsmeyer, "Address and the Lure of the Aesthetic," Abstract; Sections 2-5). These sorts of aesthetic engagement, as well as the community-building powers and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion activated by modes of address, including promises, in my view, are contingent on the broader structures of address in which these modes are emplaced, including the norms, forms, and scripts of address that these structures embody. See Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 23-27, 203-205, 215-216 note 22.

[13] Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (Manchester: Carcanet Press, [1977] 1986). Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 178-186, 195, 198-199, 204; see also pp. 90-93, 102-105.

[14] In Robert Gooding-Williams's astute reading, Sam serves as a black cupid figure who supplies erotic value to whites. Gooding-Williams traces how Sam participates in several jointly reverberating triangles in *Casablanca*. Mediating relations among whites, and making possible the expression of white sexual desire, Sam, in Gooding-Williams's interpretation, is enlisted to recast racial stereotypes and to reinscribe black subordination in the film's vision of the United States. Robert Gooding-Williams, *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 5-8, 18-26, 32-33.

[15] Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, p. 104.

[16] Address, as I understand it, underwrites actual, nonideal registers of normativity and codification and, in that capacity, fosters collective bonds as well as divisions. Further, besides pointing to idealized forms of uptake or publicity and thereby potentially working to bind people together in certain kinds of publics (viz. Korsmeyer, "Address and the Lure of the Aesthetic," Section 1), address, in that idealizing capacity, can also divide people. On the dynamic coincidence of idealized and actual forums of publicity centered around modes of culture-building address, see Monique Roelofs, "Kantian Mouthliness: Enlightenment, Address, Aesthetics," *differences* 26, 2 (2015): 29-60. On this coincidence, see also Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 5-28, 35-37, 53, 92-93, 195, 240 notes 18-19, 205-206, 214 note 4.

[17] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End, 1992); Ann DuCille, "Toy Theory, Black Barbie and the Deep Play of Difference," in *Skin Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996); Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose by Alice Walker* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983). For a discussion of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization in Walker's story, see Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 48-50, 52-54, 56.

[18] Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing, 1984).

[19] Mariana Ortega, "The Difference that Art Makes," Section 2, in this symposium of *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Lorde,

"Uses of the Erotic," p. 56. On this threat, see also Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Sister Outsider*, p. 119.

[20] hooks, "Eating the Other."

[21] I acknowledge this throughout *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*. See, for instance, pp. 205, 210. On the connection between the erotic, as conceived of by Lorde, and love, see Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," p. 56.

[22] Anzaldúa's view of liminality enters my account as an aesthetic perspective that challenges traditional conceptual dualities. A limitation attaching to this aesthetic position is that, like the dualities they contest, liminal stances incorporate proclivities to reproduce problematic differences and hierarchies. Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 117-118, 146. The oppressing-resistance dynamic that Lugones stresses resonates with my view of interlacing promises and threats, and with my emphasis throughout the book on the embeddedness of critical agents in the very formations of aesthetic relationality and address that they critically resist. For this latter point, see, for example, pp. 28, 84, 104, 115-116, 127-128, 226 note 47, 233 note 42. On active subjectivity and the oppression-resistance relation specifically, see also this last note (233 note 42).

[23] Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 26, 204.

[24] See Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 28, 204-205, for examples of passages that speak to the points just mentioned.

[25] Yet I find sharper environmental measures, constraints on the profit-magnifying behaviors of banks and companies, and checks on racial violence, on intolerance toward undocumented workers, and on bigotry toward immigrants direly needed. On regulation, see Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, e.g., pp. 28, 198, 203.

[26] Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*, pp. 23-27, 203-205.
