

DOI:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2021.0020

Richard Shusterman
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters
Florida Atlantic University, USA
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0467-9781>
shuster1@fau.edu

Aesthetic Experience at the Borders of Art and Life: The Case of the Man in Gold

I

Since its modern eighteenth-century origins, Western aesthetics has essentially defined itself in terms of playing with boundaries and transgressing or surpassing limits. Alexander Baumgarten introduced aesthetics precisely to extend philosophy beyond the limits of conceptual knowledge and into the sphere of sensory perceptions and what he called “the lower cognitive faculties.” As he insists in paragraph 3 of *Aesthetica*’s “Prolegomena,” one of aesthetics’ goals is “improving knowledge also beyond the borders of the distinctly knowable” (“*Die Verbesserung der Erkenntnis auch über die Grenzen des deutlich Erkennbaren hinaus vorantreibt.*”) There is a basic logic at work here: To justify a new philosophical discipline or science like aesthetics, Baumgarten must argue that the new field is needed to go beyond the limits of the studies we already have, that it occupies a place beyond the boundaries defined by other fields. Hence, Baumgarten further defends the need for aesthetics by saying it also goes beyond the limits of *Rhetorik* and *Poetik* by comprehending a larger field by including also objects of other arts. Nor can we equate aesthetics simply with the general field of criticism or with art, Baumgarten argues, because criticism includes critique of logic while aesthetics is said to deal specifically with matters of sensibility, and because aesthetics is claimed to be a science (*Wissenschaft*) rather than just an art.¹

1) My citations from Baumgarten are from the bilingual (Latin-German) abridged edition of this work, Alexander Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik: Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der “Aesthetica”* (1750/58), trans. H. R. Schweizer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), 3–5.

Beyond Baumgarten, the modern field of aesthetics can be seen as an attempt to go beyond the limits of older philosophies of beauty, sublimity, and taste in order to engage a much wider domain of qualities and judgments relating to our pleasurable and meaningful experiences of art and nature. The defining strategy of Hegelian aesthetics (and other aesthetic idealisms) is to take the essence of aesthetics beyond the limits of nonconceptual sensuous experience and to celebrate instead the idea of art as purveying the very highest spiritual truths, albeit in a somewhat sensuous form. The progressive revolutions of artistic forms and styles that define twentieth-century art similarly reflect the same play of dynamic movement in which art and aesthetics advance by challenging and overcoming the determination of established boundaries posited by prior aesthetic theory and practice. The limit-defying trend in aesthetics is evident in the continuing unsuccessful attempts by analytic philosophy to provide a satisfactory definition of art that will perfectly define its extensional limits by either providing its core essence or some formula that will select (for now and for all times) all and only those objects that are genuine works of art.

Like other Wittgensteinian and pragmatist-inspired philosophers, I have criticized such compartmentalizing definitions of art (which I call “wrapper theories”), not simply for their failures to provide perfect extensional coverage of all the diverse works of art, but also for these theories’ explanatory poverty in explaining art’s meanings, purposes, functions, and values.² One of the problems with traditional definitions of art is that they attempt to define something that is not a natural kind but a historically constructed field composed of rather diverse practices (with their own independent, prior history). These diverse practices employ a variety of different media and issue in a variety of different works of art that appear to belong to different ontological categories. A marble sculpture enjoys a robust, particular spatial physical existence that a musical work does not, which instead exists in its diverse temporal performances and also (some would argue) in its score. A key problem for defining art’s distinctive common essence was that it seemed to have no substantive essence to define, a meaningful essence that was both shared by all artworks and shared only by them, and thus not to be found in other works or practices. Early analytic philosophers of art, reacting against the essentialism of Croce-Collingwood theories of art as expression and the Bell-Fry theories of Significant Form, repeatedly raised this problem and cautioned against hasty generalizations about art as whole while advocating instead an aesthetic theory that respected the clear differences between the arts. Famously complaining of “the dreariness of aesthetics” John Passmore, for example, argued “that the dullness of aesthetics arises from the attempt to construct a subject where there isn’t one.” His point was “that there is no aesthetics and yet there are principles of literary criticism, musical criticism, etc.,” and that general aesthetics should be abandoned “for an intensive special study of the separate arts,” whose specific differences should be respected.³

Although there are obvious benefits in focusing our theoretical efforts on analyzing separately the distinct arts and appreciating their distinctiveness, the problem of blurry boundaries and limit-transgression has become increasingly evident among the arts themselves. T.W. Adorno was quick to realize this, maintaining already in 1967: “in recent times the boundaries between the different arts have become fluid, or, more accurately, their demarcation lines have been eroded.”⁴ As “music inclines toward the graphic arts in its notation,” so “painting no longer wishes to confine itself to mere surfaces.” If sculpture through its use of mobiles (e.g., Calder) defies its traditionally defining limit as “motionless” and not “temporal,” then “sculptors [also] have

2) Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), ch. 2. In French, *L'art à l'état vif: La pensée pragmatiste et l'esthétique populaire* (Paris: Minuit 1992).

3) John Passmore, “The Dreariness of Aesthetics,” in *Aesthetics and Language*, ed. W. Elton (Oxford, 1954), 45–50 and 55.

4) Theodor W. Adorno, “Art and the Arts,” in *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 368.

ceased to respect the boundaries between sculpture and architecture,” by defying the distinction between functional and nonfunctional art.”⁵ Noting how “the artistic genres appear to revel in a kind of promiscuity that violates some of the taboos of civilization,” Adorno worries how this “blurring of the clean divisions between different genres of art produces anxieties about civilization” by presenting threats “to the rationality and civilization that art has always been involved in.”⁶ Still more frightening for Adorno is contemporary art’s phenomenon of the happening which seems to brashly mix various arts together (notably visual and performance arts) and thrust them into a defiant merger with practices and life-contexts outside those of the artworld in order to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that he critically regards as achieving “only total anti-art.”⁷

The sixties’ art of happenings, we should remember, was introduced by Alan Kaprow, inspired by John Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics that challenged the established dichotomy between art and life.⁸ The underlying pragmatist aim was to advance the democratic social project of making contemporary art more relevant to more people but also to make the social world more aesthetically satisfying for more people by creating more harmonious relations between individuals and social groups that would also be reciprocally enriching. My own philosophical work on art was similarly inspired by this pragmatist vision of integrating art and life. When I first came to Paris in 1990, invited by Pierre Bourdieu because of my earlier analytic work on Wittgenstein, my goal was to convince either him or other powerful people in publishing to arrange a translation of Dewey’s aesthetic masterpiece *Art as Experience*. After repeated failures to interest influential French thinkers in the Dewey translation, I decided to try to arrange the French publication of my own book on pragmatist aesthetics that I was writing at the time. The book’s title – *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (in French *L’art à l’état vif: La pensée pragmatiste et l’esthétique populaire*) – highlights its aim of blurring the established modernist boundaries between art and life, but also the Kantian opposition between the aesthetic and the practical.⁹ The book likewise challenged the oppositional divide between aesthetics and popular culture by refuting the arguments of both Adorno and Bourdieu. The book’s good fortune in France helped paved the way for pragmatist aesthetics’ reception in Europe and the eventual publication of a French translation of Dewey’s aesthetics, thirteen years later in 2005 for which I was privileged to write the preface.¹⁰

The book exemplified the pragmatist idea of blurring entrenched aesthetic boundaries by applying it to two major issues or aims: The first was challenging the apparent dichotomy or aesthetic gap between popular music and genuine art. Here my example was the then new genre of hip hop which blended the artistic genres of music and poetry with graffiti art, breakdancing, and ghetto-styled fashion to provide an integrated lifestyle or art of living. The second project of blurring boundaries worked at a more general philosophical level. It aimed

5) Ibid., 368–69.

6) Ibid., 371.

7) Ibid., 369.

8) Alan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (University of California Press, 2003).

9) The French translation of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* was published in Paris in 1992 by Minuit and is reprinted in a second, enlarged edition by *L’éclat* (2018).

10) John Dewey, *L’art comme expérience*, trans. Jean-Pierre Cometti et al, Editions Farrago/Universite de Pau, 2005; reprinted in Paris by Gallimard, 2010. For discussion of the reception of pragmatist aesthetics through my book of that title, see the symposium of the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, “A Symposium on R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* 20 years later” (with contributions by Paolo D’Angelo, Roberta Dreon, Heidi Salaverria, and Krystyna Wilkoszewska, and a response by Richard Shusterman), *EJPAP* (2012), 4, no. 1, (<https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/758>). For more recent discussion of the relation of my *Pragmatist Aesthetics* to Dewey’s classic *Art as Experience*, see “Pragmatist Aesthetics: Histories, Questions, and Consequences: An Interview with Richard Shusterman,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2021), <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/2261>.

to challenge the traditional opposition between ethics and aesthetics by presenting the idea of a contemporary ethics of taste where ethical judgments depend on the kind of complex reflective judgment that Kant and others identify with aesthetic thinking because it is not strictly reducible to moral rules but requires sensitivity and imagination. This notion of an aesthetical ethics found further expression in reviving the ancient idea of a philosophy as an embodied art of living, thus challenging modernity's dominant distinction between philosophy as a theoretical genre of writing and the actual ethical lives of the philosophers beyond their writings.

Pragmatism realizes that making distinctions is a very necessary and productive part of thinking. For example, it recognizes that modernity's sharp distinction of aesthetics from ethics was extremely useful in promoting the idea of art's autonomy and thus freeing modern art from art's traditional role of serving the ideology of Church, state, and aristocracy. But pragmatism warns against erecting useful, contextual distinctions into absolute, unhelpful dichotomies that result in unnecessary and oppressive hierarchical divisions that painfully fragment not only the social world but the experience of individuals, dividing us against ourselves. In this spirit, pragmatist aesthetics insists on the validity and value of "the mix" in the creation of art. Hip-hop art, with its appropriation and mixing of recorded sounds and its mix of African diasporic cultures and contemporary urban life in the big cities of America and Europe, strikingly thematizes the importance of blurring or defying boundaries through mixing.

Adorno claims that contemporary art's increased fraying of its defining genre boundaries "produces anxieties about civilization" and threatens "to the rationality" that sustains civilization along with art.¹¹ However, this desire to defy boundaries through mixing is a reaction against the contemporary hypertrophy of rationality in our culture, or more specifically what Adorno identifies and critiques as "instrumental reason" or "identity" thinking that insists on clear borders for classifying and thus subjugating individual entities (including people) under clearly distinct and determinate concepts. If Adorno's dialectical thinking aims to combat such thinking, then so does a pragmatist approach of mixing that brings diverse things together while still recognizing their difference and even highlighting those differences through the play of bringing or blurring them together. The fraying of boundaries can be seen as a positive and necessary response to an increasingly compartmentalized, bureaucratized, administered social, and cultural world whose categories and classifications are increasingly oppressive and detrimental to new ways of thought, action, and creation that do not fit those established categories. Conversely, because so much of our lives is powerfully structured by conventional practices and institutions defined by explicit and implicit limits (including those dimensions of life that should be most freely creative, such as philosophy and art), it becomes ever more difficult to create something new that does not fit those categorial limits.

II

The above remarks on aesthetics' essential play of boundaries and their transgression, a history that extends from Baumgarten through Hegel to Adorno and pragmatist aesthetics, will serve as the theoretical background to consider a puzzling contemporary case of aesthetic border crossing in which I am essentially involved. Sometimes it is most useful to work from examples one knows best through insider's knowledge even if this means abandoning the impersonal academic style that pretends to give an objective, God's-eye point of view. The case I discuss here concerns not only the fraying of boundaries within the realm of art but also the blurring of the boundaries between art and philosophy and those between art and life, challenging moreover also the conventional limits of personal self-identity. It concerns my work in photography and performance art with the Parisian artist Yann Toma. Before analyzing the theoretical aspects of its complex and puzzling

11) Adorno, "Art and the Arts," 371.

fraying of boundaries, I should briefly explain the origin and nature of this work that began in the Abbey of Royaumont in June 2010.

Toma asked me to pose for his photographic project he calls Radiant Flux in which he tries to capture and visually represent the invisible aura of the posing subject, an aura he conceives and perceives as a temporally changing energetic force emanating from the person's body. The photographic shot must be done in a totally dark setting, typically indoors for better control, and its technique ultimately derives from Man Ray's light drawing method called "Space Writing." After positioning his camera on a tripod, adjusting it to a special setting for the long exposure, and aiming it at the photographic subject who takes a pose and then must remain motionless, Toma – who is dressed in dark clothes so as to make himself less visible and holds a small hand-lamp or two – releases the shutter and approaches the posing person, seeking to sense that person's aura and trace it with the lamps' light. To do so he hovers very close to the subject's body, moving very quickly around it, not only to catch the changing flow of the person's auratic energy but also to ensure that only the stationary posing subject and the tracing of the lights (but not his own body or the lamps tracing them) will be captured on film. After a short burst of such energetic swirling, Toma returns to the tripod and closes the shot. The photograph that emerges portrays the posing subject surrounded by the lines of light created by the trajectory of Toma's hand-held lamps.

I had expected to be photographed in my ordinary clothes but when we reached the darkened room in the Abbey to do the photo shoot, Toma instead asked me to wear skin-tight gold bodystocking that he had inherited from his parents (former dancers at the Paris Opera Ballet). I reluctantly put it on and posed in it, working for a day and a half, silent and motionless in the mystery of the dark Abbey room. My poses were sometimes erect, but sometimes seated or reclining (especially as I grew tired), and sometimes with my eyes closed (either intentionally to magnify the mystery or unintentionally because of fatigue). By the early afternoon of the second day, I could not tolerate the immobility and darkness anymore so I suddenly ran outside into the Abbey courtyard and gardens. Although surprised, Yann Toma grabbed his movie camera and chased after me, filming my capering ramble through the Abbey grounds. The picturesque gardens and ruins prompted me to improvise scenarios of dance and gesture that fit my playful, exultant mood that was inspired not only by the blossoming, sunny outdoor energies of the June flora but also by the excitement I felt in Yann and by the puzzled glances of the tourists visiting the Abbey grounds. This *al fresco* romp introduced a new artistic genre to our collaboration – my costumed and improvised movement performance in a public space that Yann then captured in video. Because my unexpected outdoor ramble had made us already very late for our lunch with the family who hosted us at the Abbey, there was no time to return to the darkened shooting room to change back into my ordinary clothes. Stunned but amused by my strange attire, they dubbed the apparition I embodied as "*L'homme en or*."

The naming of this persona was as aleatory and uncalculated as the urge to leave the dark room of still photography for energetic movement in the sunny outdoors. But this name became increasingly meaningful as it helped give the persona an identity that nourished my collaboration with Yann and thus fueled the future appearances of *L'homme en or*. Each performative sortie added more content to his evolving identity and his repertoire of silent gestural expression so that he developed a personality and movement signature of his own, quite different from those of the philosopher Richard Shusterman. As the Man in Gold never speaks but expresses himself only through movement and gestures, he has come to be known as "the philosopher without words" ("*le philosophe sans la parole*"), embodying the silent wisdom of Chinese sages.¹² Since June 2010 the Man in

12) I treat some of the epistemological issues of the idea of wordless thinking and speechless philosophy in "The Philosopher without Words: Philosophy as Performative Art with *L'homme en or*," in *Unsettled Boundaries: Philosophy, Art, Ethics, East/West*, ed. Curtis Carter (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2017), 36–50.

Gold has appeared in fifteen public sorties in Paris, South America, South Florida, Northern Denmark, and the Polish cities of Łódź and Wrocław. His image has been exhibited in art galleries and posters throughout the world and he himself has appeared in two Paris art galleries for very brief, improvised performances. But, all the other performances were spontaneously launched in open public spaces without any announcement that they would take place and without any script or prearranged scenario. The event depended entirely on the occasional proximities and convergent energies of Yann (who keeps the golden costume) and me (who provides the body for the Man in Gold to inhabit). In December 2016 a bilingual book was published in Paris that describes his performance experiences largely from his point of view but in my language, presenting those adventures in the narrative structure of a philosophical tale that is illustrated with stills from his videoed performances and photographic poses as captured by Yann's photographic art.¹³

Why have I have pursued this project of performance art despite its problematic fit with my long-established identity as a professional philosopher? I came to appreciate the Nietzschean critique that philosophical aesthetics is mostly written by philosophers whose perspective on art is only that of observers or interpreters rather than that of creators, and that their aesthetic theory suffers because of that one-sided perspective. I thought I would have a better understanding of art and its aesthetic experience if I could understand and experience it from the creator's or artist's perspective. My quite accidental initiation into performance art through my encounter with Yann Toma provided me that instructive perspective, no matter the artistic quality of those performances. Moreover, there was the pure pleasure of playful performance and the thrill of spontaneity that involved risk-taking and emancipation from my conventional sense of self as an aging professor of philosophy.

III

This brief description of my collaboration with Yann Toma (a collaborative project we call Somaflux to distinguish it from Yann's photography with other subjects) should provide enough material to tease out some of the project's key limit-blurring aspects. This dimension of the project became clear to us only as the project evolved since the project was never planned from the beginning but only emerged organically from the essentially contingent and spontaneous evolution of the Man in Gold through the experiences of his performances.

Perhaps the most fundamental boundary question that this work raises is whether the Somaflux project and its performances qualify as genuine art? Or are we dealing here instead with philosophical research in aesthetic experience that does not merit the title of art? One angry critic (from the field of theatre history) vehemently complained (after I presented the Man in Gold and his book at an invited lecture in Berlin) that this performance work has nothing to do with true art. Instead, the critic claimed, it is merely an irreverent, provocative exercise in narcissistic role-playing that insults the very idea of art, because its alleged performance art is done by someone who is not a legitimate artist. As several witnesses to his angry response quickly remarked, the fire of resentment derived from his feeling that a sacred boundary that separates (and protects) art from non-art had been violated, and that this boundary should be decided and safeguarded by conventional academic standards of professional credentials.

13) *The Adventures of the Man in Gold: Paths Between Art and Life: A Philosophical Tale/Les Aventures de l'homme en or: Passages entre l'art et la vie: Conte philosophique* (Paris: Hermann, 2016). A second, "pocket" exclusively French edition of the book, enlarged with two new essays was published as *Les Aventures de l'homme en or: Passages entre l'art et la vie, Suivi de "Le philosophe sans la parole" et "Expérience esthétique et effrangement de frontières,"* trans. Thomas Mondemé, Simon Gissinger, et Wilfried Laforge, (Paris: Hermann, 2020).

I make no claims here for the artistic value of the Somaflux works or for my own contestable status as artist. But the project clearly suggests the fraying of the boundaries between art and philosophical research, along with the boundaries between artists and non-artists. Photographs and videos of the Man in Gold have been presented in art galleries and museums in Paris, Bogota, Helsinki, Stockholm, Denver, Seoul, Kraków, Wrocław, and Shanghai; although my artistic credentials may be questionable, the Somaflux works are equally the creation of Yann Toma, whose status as artist cannot be questioned. Our collaboration likewise blurs the boundary between represented object and the creating artist because while my embodiment of the Man in Gold is the object represented, this embodied object is also the somatic subject who is creating the performative poses and actions that are then represented in photographic stills or videos produced by Yann. This fraying of boundaries finds expression in an ontological complexity of the works of the Somaflux project that is reflected in the captions these works carry. On the one hand, the works are temporal performances in which I am the principal artist performing as the Man in Gold. But, on the other hand, these works qua photographic visual images – either in the form of photographic stills (in print or digital format) or video film – are the creations of Yann Toma. Hence, a typical example of our standard caption formulation for photographic artworks of the Somaflux project goes as follows: Yann Toma, *Somaflux with Richard Shusterman performing as the Man in Gold: Currents of the Seine*, 2012.

If Somaflux's fraying of the borders between art and philosophy has faced condemnations of artistic fraud, it also risks the charge of trivializing (or even abandoning) philosophy by its forsaking the proper means of philosophical expression. Instead of writing abstract theoretical texts according to the currently dominant academic standards and style, the Somaflux project plunges into experiments of deeply embodied aesthetic experience through improvised gestural expression and movement inspired by somaesthetic sensitivity to the energies of the subject and his environment (including of course the interactive energies I share with Yann). To refute such charges of trivializing or abandoning philosophy we should recognize that genuine philosophical thinking is not confined to the contemporary genre of academic philosophical writing by university professors but historically includes many other forms of expression. The culture of philosophy has included many literary genres other than the standard essay: dialogues, poems, meditations, confessions, memoirs, letters, sermons, aphorisms, and now also blogs. One of these genres is the philosophical tale (perhaps most influentially practiced by Voltaire and Diderot). *The Adventures of the Man in Gold* (which is subtitled "A Philosophical Tale") is an attempt to reclaim this genre for contemporary philosophy.

Moreover, the culture of philosophy (as Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault have shown us) is historically much broader than the practice of reading and writing texts but includes a reflective, critical, disciplined way of life that involves ameliorative self-stylization and self-transformation. In that sense, the approach to philosophy embodied by the Man in Gold represents a fraying of the conventional boundary between philosophy and life, between reality as critically studied through books and reality as personally lived through experimentation. My particular path in philosophy is nourished by this blurring or convergence of borders. My most important philosophical convictions and most fruitful ideas have come not from reading logical arguments but from powerful personal experiences. The experiences I gained through the Man in Gold's performances have been philosophically instructive in different ways. First, in terms of theory, these performances revealed to me that both analytic and continental theorists are wrong to reduce the art of photography to the photographic image. Instead, photography also involves a somaesthetic art of performative process that involves postural and gestural skill both in the human subject who is posing for the photography and in the photographer's manipulating the camera. It further involves skills of silent somatic communication between photographer and subject as well as skills of *mise en scène*.¹⁴

14) For a detailed discussion of these points, see Richard Shusterman, "Photography as Performative Process," in *Thinking through the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ch.11.

However, I should insist again that philosophy, as I understand and seek to practice it, is much more than discursive theory, but rather the comprehensive practice of a distinctive way of life, characterized by a quest for self-knowledge and self-improvement (which should, of course, include an ethical regard for others) that necessarily involves critically exploring the limits of one's self. So beyond the theoretical discoveries it afforded for my aesthetic theory, the experience of embodying another character, my work with the Man in Gold (who does not speak and whose strikingly unconventional shining appearance and somatic behavior are very different from my own) has provided me with precious personal insights. It has taught me about the limits of my conventional philosophical self and about what mysterious freedoms and possibilities (but also what risks) lie beyond it. Those risks (which include social rejection, insulting abuse, and physical injury) are described in *The Adventures of the Man in Gold*, along with the joys of emancipatory poetic visions.

The book itself is a complex hybrid that exemplifies the problematic fraying of established textual boundaries. Its strange hybridity is partly the result of it not being planned in terms of conventional genre categories but instead emerging, like the Man in Gold himself, through the contingency of spontaneous impulse. The book began (toward the end of 2014) as a chronological list of the dates and places of all my Somaflux performances with Yann, a list composed to accompany a planned exhibition of this work in an art gallery. While I was imaginatively recalling those performances, the spirit of the Man in Gold seemed to possess me. So the text's narrative, while respecting the factual details of dates, places, and persons, became shaped by his distinctively different and exotically fanciful view of these performance experiences and their meaning. The book is thus a blending of fact and fantasy, philosophy and fictional literature, philosophy and art – all pursued through both text and image (with forty color illustrations).

In a culture, pervasively shaped by compartmentalizing institutions that reinforce the conventional categories and boundaries on which those institutions themselves rely, a product's imaginative mixing of modes will tend to hinder its reception. I encountered some of these difficulties with *The Adventures of the Man in Gold*. When its Parisian publisher first announced that I was bringing out a new book, there were some promising inquiries from the radio (France Culture) about inviting me to talk about the new book, as I had done for earlier books. Once the radio hosts realized, however, that the book was a philosophical tale rather than a conventional work of philosophy, they refused to pursue the interview, explaining that they would not know how to conduct a thirty-minute or hour long philosophical discussion about an illustrated tale rather than a genuine treatise involving standard forms of philosophical argument. Similar problems arose in the French bookstores about where to place the book so that people could easily find it: in the philosophy section, the art and aesthetics section, or even the section on literature? Even the publisher could not properly place it in one of his book series, neither of philosophy nor of art.

The book's bilingual status (English/French) further intensifies its hybrid character, while highlighting a category boundary that seems extremely strong and central to defining culture and thus is very challenging to dissolve or blur: the boundary between different languages. Although languages are always in the process of change and constantly assimilate words and expressions from other languages, they strive, at least in modern times, to sustain their distinctive identity, employing a variety of methods to codify their proper particular forms in rules of grammar, spelling, and diction. Linguistic identity, as I learned from *The Adventures of the Man in Gold*, is also essential to the commercial marketing of books and is reciprocally reinforced by the mechanisms of global marketing. I wrote the book in English but included a French translation (because the Man in Gold was born in France), and placed it facing parallel to the book's English text. The book bore a French ISBN number because of its Parisian publisher. The result was that although English was the book's primary language, it appeared throughout Amazon's European and American websites as a simply a French book with no mention of its English text. Because this misinformation would certainly diminish the book's sales (as the

English-language reading public is much larger than that of French), the publisher tried to change the book's linguistic designation and description on those problematic websites. But this proved too difficult, because (so we were told) the relevant software and robotic search mechanisms would not permit the French ISBN number to be classified as an English book. It was thus necessary to acquire a new American ISBN number and print another set of books bearing that number.

This example of the automated rigid policing of linguistic or literary boundaries through computer programming suggests how our cultural world is increasingly controlled by mechanisms based on digital thinking's insistence on clear boundaries and discrete units. In this context, one is tempted to look to the arts to provide some resistance to the increasing fragmentation and compartmentalization of cultural expression and aesthetic experience that is part of our increasingly pigeonholed, stereotyped ways of thinking and living. Art's fraying of boundaries can perhaps serve as an expression of such resistance. One would like to hope that future technological advances will introduce increasingly more subtle mechanisms that encourage critical and creative thinking that, while recognizing the utility of boundaries and distinctions, can also appreciate and exemplify the value of blurring or fraying them. The dominant thrust of technological progress, however, seems to encourage greater surveillance of boundaries and control of borders.¹⁵

15) However, I should mention some promising new currents of somaesthetic design that aim at appreciating the ambiguities and inexpressible dimensions of subjective body experience in the field of human-computer interactive design technologies. See, for example, the cover story of Kristina Höök et al., "Somaesthetic Design" in *Interactions* 22, 2015. <http://interactions.acm.org/archive/view/july-august-2015/somaesthetic-design> and her book, *Designing with the Body: Somaesthetic Interaction Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).