

This very short book is a plea for what I call closeness; it argues in particular for the importance of closeness in art. Closeness in art suggests a number of familiar activities, intentions, and wishes: wanting to have certain things close by, wanting to be close to certain things, paying attention to certain things. I believe that the notion of art is inseparable from such common situations. Closeness seems to be the sort of thought one can't do without. The question however remains of why exactly, and how. This suggests we examine the notion of closeness.

There have been a number of attempts to decry closeness. They were particularly extreme in matters of art. It was argued that looking at a painting or paying attention to a poem is inimical to being right about them; and conversely, that the best way of being right about a poem or a painting is by not being close to them at all. Odd as the argument may sound, there is something to parts of it. You clearly don't need to go to Naples in order to be right about Naples; you wouldn't know how to go to other people, at least in a cognitively effective way; and there is something

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obscure about the sense in which you claim that you are close to a tune, a picture, a community, or to your own past. This indicates that even if one can't do without the thought of closeness, closeness should really not be seen as a necessary condition to much of anything. Unfortunately most apologies for closeness pretend otherwise and wax lyrical about the necessary benefits of being extremely close to their objects of choice.

In this book I offer an examination of closeness in two connected essays. In the first essay I discuss the case of people who like to have art about them and claim to say true things about art because of that inclination. I argue that closeness should not be understood as the measuring of the distance between yourself and art; nor do I think that the nature of closeness can be adequately captured by describing practices or dispositions of those who enjoy having art about them. My inquiry is thus neither sociological nor psychological.

In the second essay I approach the problem in a complementary way. I readily concede that being close to a poem, a film, or a painting, or to anything really, does not necessarily yield any added understanding of it. Such added understanding tends to rely on descriptions, and on the progress of our descriptions, rather than on close encounters or on what a philosopher called, approvingly, "the overall bombardment of the subject." *Sed contra*, there is something to be said in favor of acquaintance. What exactly, and how, is the topic of the essay.

Taken together, the two essays suggest what for me is a relevant sense of closeness. I urge we abandon our hopes of measuring closeness; and our tendency to ask whether what is close to us is really close to us; or any expectations of necessary benefits. Closeness does not for me evoke choices, doubts, debates or plans, but ineliminable habits or organs, things or people that are not optional. I recommend that we think of it not as wearing a hat or as making a decision, but as brushing your teeth or as having a liver. This is just another way of saying that theories about art are perhaps bound to be theories about kinds of lives to which art matters. Having a life is in this sense

non-optional, and not very different from having a liver: you are close both to your life and to your liver.

The relationship between being surrounded by art and being close to art has eventually caused me to make sense of one of the most extravagant claims in Wallace Stevens' exhausted poem "Anecdote of the Jar." In "Anecdote of the Jar" Stevens remarked that the eponymous jar "took dominion everywhere." I now realize that there is more to what he said than the exaggerated invasion of Tennessee depicted in the poem. In fact, such jars tend to take dominion when you are surrounded by them; and you can only be surrounded by them if you are sufficiently close to them.

Some of these ideas were given a less-compressed form in a book I published a few years ago (*What Art is Like*). The pithiness into which I was pushed by the welcome limits of this series should now make them more obvious. They have accompanied me for a long time; I suppose this too indicates a thought one can't do without, or at any rate thoughts I couldn't do without.

Acknowledgments

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