

AESTHETIC REALISM FOUNDATION

141 Greene Street ∞ New York, NY 10012

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Dear Friend,

What teaching method can enable the young people of America to learn successfully—and become kinder? Is there an ethical, beautiful, utterly practical way of seeing economics in America—a way that’s *just* to all people? Is there a means for men and women really to know themselves and feel one’s life has a purpose that strengthens one, makes one happy and proud? The answers to these questions and so many more, the answers about the biggest matters today, are in Aesthetic Realism, the education founded by the great American philosopher, poet, and critic Eli Siegel.

I am architect and Aesthetic Realism consultant [Dale Laurin](#). And I’m writing about the not-for-profit Aesthetic Realism Foundation, where the education humanity so urgently needs is taking place. There are individual consultations, in which a person can learn to understand his or her own life, and a rich curriculum of classes—in poetry, anthropology, music, acting, and the visual arts, marriage, and the Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method. There are dramatic presentations, which are a thrilling oneness of entertainment and knowledge; productions by the acclaimed Aesthetic Realism Theatre Company; and public seminars on subjects such as “The Debate in Every Person: To Feel More or Less,” “What—in Ourselves—Hinders True Love?,” and “We’re Determined, but Are We Right? or, The Criterion for Good Determination.”

Our much loved Outreach programs are described in our Mission Statement ([link below](#)), but for now I’ll mention presentations for children, seniors, and everyone in between, explaining the cause of bullying and racism and the solution; and presentations on how “Art Answers the Questions of Our Lives!”—using music, drama, film, architecture. These have taken place in schools, libraries, colleges, and community centers, where they have been met with enthusiastic gratitude by people of all ages.

The Basis

What makes the work of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation so new and important? The reasons are in Aesthetic Realism’s principles, upon which all consultations, classes, and presentations are based:

- 1) Aesthetic Realism explains what our largest purpose in life is: *“The deepest desire of every person is to like the world on an honest or accurate basis.”*
- 2) Aesthetic Realism has identified and explained the thing in every person which interferes with one’s own life, weakens one’s mind, and is also the source of all injustice. It is *contempt*: *“the lessening of what is different from oneself as a means of self-increase as one sees it.”*
- 3) In the following historic principle, Aesthetic Realism describes the relation between an individual person and everything else in reality: *“The world, art, and self explain each other: each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites.”*

I'll be saying more about these groundbreaking principles. They are the product of decades of inquiry, scholarship, and analysis—all both exact and loving, objective and passionate—by [Eli Siegel](#) (1902–1978), who I believe is the greatest man of thought in history. He lectured on literature, philosophy, religions of the world, the arts and sciences, economics, current events. His desire to know had no limits. And that included his desire to know and bring out the best in every person. As someone privileged to have studied in classes with him in the last months of his life, I am moved to say Eli Siegel was a complete integrity and the kindest person I've ever known.

The Vital Need for Aesthetic Realism

The most important, most urgent matter in the world now is for people to see other people justly. And for that to be, the knowledge of Aesthetic Realism is necessary. People need to learn that there is a fight going on in everyone all the time between the desire to respect the world and the desire to have contempt for it. Knowledge of this fight is a national and world emergency—because people need to know that all cruelty arises from contempt, and contempt is very ordinary. For instance, contempt has a person feel important thinking someone different from oneself—of another race or religion—is inferior. *“As soon as you have contempt,”* Mr. Siegel wrote, *“as soon as you don't want to see another person as having the fulness that you have, you can rob that person, hurt that person, kill that person.”* Contempt is the cause of crime, racism, terrorism, bullying, and economics that sees human beings in terms of profit and has a few people be very rich and millions of others poor. Yet contempt is also what has a person not listen when someone is speaking, or sneer smugly in one's mind at someone for what that person is wearing. As an instance of how Aesthetic Realism can enable people to change how they see people, I'll say something about myself.

I grew up in Pleasant Hills, PA, and later Pittsburgh. And I remember with shame how I saw a 5th-grade classmate whom I'll call Sam Reed. He was a foot taller than I was, but as I ticked off in my mind what I saw as his deficiencies—unkempt, awkward, stammering, not too bright—I quickly cut him down to size. That he was a thinking, feeling person, a mingling, as I was, of sureness and unsureness, hope and fear, was unreal to me. I was intent on being superior and Sam was there to use. This contemptuous way of seeing continued, with other people, on a daily basis for years.

But I never saw a relation between the quick flush of victory I felt having contempt, and my increasing feelings of separation from people and discomfort beneath my own skin. Though I had friends, did well in school, and, in time, graduated from Carnegie-Mellon University with a bachelor of architecture degree and a medal “for leadership and service,” I did not feel like a success. I felt bored, distant, weary, angry at the world, and I disliked myself. When I got the job I'd always wanted, as an architectural designer, I soon found myself doing sketch after sketch, feeling terrifically unsure whether one idea was any better than another. I worried that I was incapable of having large emotions about anything.

Then, at age 23, looking through the stacks in the library, I came upon a book about Aesthetic Realism. I'll never forget reading in it a description, by Eli Siegel, of contempt: *“There is a disposition in every person to think we will be for ourselves by making less of the outside*

world.” Flash bulbs of recognition went off in my head. “I do this all the time!,” I almost shouted aloud in the quiet reading room. I had just discovered the ugliest thing in myself and every person who has ever lived, and I was smiling from ear to ear, feeling an amazing kinship with the strangers around me. I had to find out more. I first subscribed to the Foundation’s journal, *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*, then moved to New York. Here, I had Aesthetic Realism consultations, and also began graduate school at Columbia University.

The True Education of Self

In consultations, whether at the Aesthetic Realism Foundation itself or via phone or Skype, a person speaks with three consultants and, through the principles of Aesthetic Realism, begins to understand himself. Situations that seemed to have no solution—for instance, boredom, nervousness, loneliness, anger—*change*, ON A LOGICAL BASIS.

As my first consultation began, I was asked this great, kind question, asked by Eli Siegel in Aesthetic Realism lessons: “What do you have most against yourself?” “I feel I’m too cold,” I said. And then began a discussion of what Aesthetic Realism explains is the most crucial thing in a person’s life: how we see the world. “What would you say is your attitude to the outside world and people?” the consultants asked. “The world and people are basically selfish, self-centered, and cold,” I replied—not realizing until sometime later how close that answer was to what I disliked most about *myself*.

A person’s attitude to the world begins, I learned, with how we see its first representatives in our lives, usually our parents. While my mother gave me so much praise and extravagant devotion that I felt she was silly, I saw my father as the bane of my existence—disapproving, angry, and very cold. Because he didn’t make me the adored center of the universe, the way my mother did, I often punished him with stony silence, acting as if he wasn’t even there. Meanwhile inside, I was a cauldron, railing against God for giving me the wrong father.

All this went on from the time I was no more than 8. Then, through consultations, I began to see there was an actual value, even pleasure, I got feeling that Thurston Laurin wasn’t good enough for me—nor was the world he represented. It was the value of *contempt*.

A turning point was when my consultants asked me: “Is your father’s deepest desire to like the world, or to make you miserable?” Wow, I thought! Of course, it was to like the world—a world he was in relation to for 27 years before I was even born. I was given an assignment to write a soliloquy of “T” Laurin (as friends called him) as a young man. I did. And for the first time, I thought—and wrote—about what *he* might have felt: for instance, about love, career, and what was happening in the world.

A month before his 18th birthday the United States entered World War II, and within two years, Thurston Laurin was flying bombing missions over the South China Sea. He would come home in 1945 with one silver medal, three bronze medals, and memories he found it hard telling anyone about. But before studying Aesthetic Realism, I never knew those facts and ever so many others about my father—because I wasn’t interested in who he was.

Through the education of Aesthetic Realism, I now *did* want to know. My father and I

came to have many deep, critical, humorous conversations. And I changed the way I saw Thurston Laurin—from an anathema to my friend. It moves me tremendously to say that my father came to see me as his friend too. The year before he passed away, he and my mother wrote a letter to [Ellen Reiss](#), Aesthetic Realism Chairman of Education. In it, they expressed gratitude for what they so rightly called “the beautiful changes” that Aesthetic Realism and Eli Siegel made possible in my life.

Those beautiful changes include my changing from a cold-hearted man to someone proud to need and be stirred to my depths by a woman: Barbara Buehler, who is a city planner, Aesthetic Realism associate, and my dear wife and friend. Her criticism, her encouragement, her way of seeing the world add so much to me and make me a wider, more feeling person.

It is thrilling to be learning together in the professional classes for Aesthetic Realism consultants and associates. These classes are taught, with great scholarship and kindness, by Ellen Reiss, who also teaches the Aesthetic Realism Explanation of Poetry class and is the editor of the Foundation’s periodical, *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*. I believe Ms. Reiss is the foremost educator in the world today. I love her for safeguarding the integrity of Aesthetic Realism, for the depth and imagination of her thought, for the sheer joy of her teaching, and for her critical good will, which has strengthened people’s lives immeasurably.

The Relation of Art & Everyone’s Life

I have seen that, in the history of thought, it is Eli Siegel who explained what beauty is, and what art has to do with everyone: “*All beauty is a making one of opposites,*” he showed, “*and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.*” This great principle has been the basis of the Foundation’s Terrain Gallery since its founding in 1955. And it is central to Aesthetic Realism consultations. I love giving consultations with my colleagues and enabling a man to see that his questions are *aesthetic* questions, answered, in outline, by the art of the world.

For example, a man can want to have a big effect on others while feeling, as I once did, that to be affected *by them* lessens him. This rift between affecting and being affected makes for confusion, pain, shame—interferes with every aspect of his life, including love. His consultants might encourage him to look at Monet’s paintings of [Rouen Cathedral](#) and see that Claude Monet studied how that great structure is *added to* by the changing sunlight. Seeing, for instance, how light intensifies the sculptural power of the cathedral’s Gothic arches and makes its cold stone warm and luminous, is a magnificent means to see that being affected by the outside world does not weaken us but strengthens us, brings out new possibilities in ourselves.

The Aesthetic Realism Foundation is where the most important knowledge in the world is taught, and is the place from which this education goes out—meeting the hopes of people to understand themselves and the world they live in!

Sincerely,



Dale Laurin, RA
Aesthetic Realism Consultant