

AESTHETIC REALISM FOUNDATION

141 Greene Street ☞ New York, NY 10012

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Dear Friend,

I am Devorah Tarrow, an Aesthetic Realism consultant, a sociologist, and Director of Outreach for the Aesthetic Realism Foundation. I'm writing to you about this not-for-profit foundation, the most valuable and exciting educational institution in America.

Aesthetic Realism is the philosophy founded in 1941 by the great American scholar, poet, and critic Eli Siegel. I have seen that it has the *answers* to the most pressing national matters—including youth violence, failing education, the horrible prejudice and economic injustice that make for so much suffering. Aesthetic Realism also has the answers to the biggest questions in people's personal lives—including *How can I really like myself? How can I have more confidence? What is love, and what interferes with my having it?*

As a person who has studied extensively both sociology and psychology, I've seen that the principles of Aesthetic Realism, stated by Eli Siegel, are the most important principles about the self ever discovered. He identified the deepest and primary purpose of a human being: it is *"to like the world on an honest basis."* And he showed that this purpose is at war in us with another purpose, *contempt: "the lessening of what is different from oneself as a means of self-increase as one sees it."* He showed that contempt is the cause of war and every injustice, including racism, and is the thing in a person that weakens his or her own mind. And he explained that the self is an *aesthetic* situation: *"All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves."*

I have carefully tested these principles, and seen that they are TRUE. Also, for many years it has been my honor, with my colleagues, to have given Aesthetic Realism consultations to hundreds of individual women; and I've seen this: when a person meets the principles of Aesthetic Realism and studies them honestly in relation to her own life and the world she's in, she comes to be ever-increasingly the person she hopes to be; to understand things about herself she thought she'd never understand; to make sense of her past; to change as she hopes to change; to become kinder, wider, more intelligent. This is what happened to me!

—The Education People Are Longing For: Some Examples—

In a moment, I'll give some examples of what takes place in the Foundation's Outreach events. Meanwhile, at the Foundation's SoHo building, the principles I quoted are the basis of magnificent classes on such subjects as poetry, anthropology, the visual arts, singing, film studies, music. There are the class for educators on the Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method; the Understanding Marriage! class; the Learning to Like the World class for children ages 5–12. There are dramatic and musical productions by the Aesthetic Realism Theatre Company; and public seminars on such subjects as "The Mix-Up in Marriage about Coldness & Warmth," "What Is True Strength for a Man?," "Happiness: Can a Woman Really Have It?—& What Stops Her?"

As part of our Outreach Program, consultants [Barbara Allen](#) and [Robert Murphy](#) conduct workshops for young people at after-school centers and libraries. One of these workshops is titled "What Will Make Us Truly Strong?" and I'll describe a little of what took place when Ms. Allen and Mr. Murphy taught it to persons aged 9 through 15 at an after-school center in

Suffolk County, Long Island. This center is in a neighborhood affected terribly by America's unjust economy, and, as in so much of our nation, torment about money permeates the children's lives. Parents work two jobs or more just to get by. Children hear distressed conversations about money—Can we make the rent this month? Youngsters themselves are very worried, and *angry*—how can there be this pain and uncertainty in a nation where some people seem to have everything? There's also fury that so much of what people are able to get depends on the color of one's skin. I have seen young people look dazed, or furious and scornful. Every day, without knowing it, they're making up their minds about whether this world is a friend or enemy.

Ms. Allen and Mr. Murphy spoke passionately, with sincerity and principles clear as a bell, about what's most needed for these young people (and *any* people) to make choices for which they can respect themselves. At the heart of the workshop is a question only Aesthetic Realism articulates: What will make us truly strong—respect for the world, *which includes criticism of injustice*; or contempt for the world, which, the speakers showed, always weakens us. The fight between respect and contempt is in all of us, they said; and in learning about this, the young people responded very deeply.

Ms. Allen told of something she'd experienced as a girl which has to do with this question: Should we use what pains us to be angry with everything; or should we try to value what *can* be liked honestly—even as we cannot like a particular situation? She told how, when she was young, there had been much difficulty in her home because of the ill health of her mother. She said she used the situation to be against things in general:

BA. I was angry at the world, I'm sorry to say. I was the oldest of three children and often had to take care of the others. Now, do you think the fact that my mother was ill made the *whole world* bad? What do you think? Was I smart to think the whole world was bad?

Children called out, "No!" A child said, "*Everything* wasn't bad." I have heard Ms. Allen ask this question of young people at many workshops in many neighborhoods, and every single audience has had that same answer—and it's an *ethical* response. They're hearing the question for the first time and they have an immediate feeling: *she shouldn't have used that to hate the whole world.*

BA. You're right! A person could say: "This was wrong. I cannot like it, and maybe I shouldn't like it, but there are still things in the world I *can* like. And I will be stronger the more I can like, the more I find good meaning in the world."

—"*The World Is More Friendly Than You Know*"—

Then these young people began to learn a big reason why, as Aesthetic Realism explains, "The world is more friendly than you know." The teachers held up a tall, golden yellow sunflower. They asked if someone would like to describe it. Feeling the stalk, a teenage boy said it was *rough*. Mr. Murphy asked him if he'd like to put the petals to his cheek; he did so and said they were *soft*. "And is that like *you*—tough and gentle?" A look of surprise and recognition came into the boy's face. Mr. Murphy asked, "Are we all tough and gentle?" Yes!—and many of the children wanted to touch the sunflower and feel those opposites in it.

“Who here wants to be tough?” the teachers asked. Every hand shot up. Then: “Who here wants to be *kind*?” I watched as the children thought about this—and as every hand also went up. “So, are we like that sunflower; are we like the world?” the teachers asked. And they asked the students to think about this: Can we respect the way the world is *made*—which is the oneness of opposites—even as we may accurately criticize the way the world is *run* by various people?

Ms. Allen and Mr. Murphy showed there is a true, honest way of being against injustice: to oppose it with the purpose of being fair to people and reality. They showed this as they spoke about the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Early in his life he was hard-hit by racism and economic injustice. Mr. Murphy and Ms. Allen read an account of his being forced, as a child, to stand for many miles on a long bus ride, as the bus driver ordered him and a teacher to give their seats to white people who got on the bus. Dr. King said he had never been so angry in his life. But, the teachers asked, did he make a choice not to despise the world, but to value what was good and fight for justice for everyone? Did he use his fury to despise or be just? “Just!” the students said.

I was moved to see young people gather around Mr. Murphy and Ms. Allen afterwards. The staff of the center was excited: “What you’ve done is so clear!” “We never thought this way before.” And the center’s director kept saying, “I love this! I want you to teach my staff the Aesthetic Realism method!”

What happened in this workshop is so important for America. When, like these young persons, people can learn from Aesthetic Realism about their desire for contempt and learn that their deepest desire is to be just to the world—a world that’s deeply akin to them—they begin to see that being just is smart and that belittling and hurting other people is not what they want to do. There’s nothing America needs more than this education.

—From Children to People Much Older—

Our Outreach Program also includes the much-loved workshops for seniors. These have been taught by Jeffrey Carduner joined by Anne Fielding or other Aesthetic Realism consultants—with translation, when the audience is Spanish-speaking, by Dr. Jaime Torres. I’ll mention one workshop that took place at a senior center in Downtown Brooklyn. The subject was “Every Person Can Tell You Something about Yourself!” People in their 90s, like those below 10, are thirsty to know about the two purposes fighting in them: to like the world and to have contempt for it. And these senior citizens were agog as they learned for the first time in their lives that their deepest desire as to people is to see them the way an artist does: to see that *the structure of the world itself, the oneness of opposites*, is in a person. They were learning this as the teachers showed and asked questions about Van Gogh’s portrait of a postal worker, [Monsieur Roulin](#). These students loved seeing how Monsieur Roulin’s eyes had simultaneously depth and brightness; his beard had both wildness and order. And the teachers asked, Does the lively background show the vivid relations to the world that a person has?

There was a discussion with a woman who wanted to know how to see someone she disliked, whom she called “a nosy neighbor.” The teachers asked questions about the neighbor’s *feelings*, and about the opposites—the world’s opposites—the neighbor was hoping to put together: like hardness and softness, for and against, rest and motion. And we actually saw this woman realize, on the spot, that she’d been having contempt and that what she wanted from herself was something else, more in keeping with the Van Gogh: the respect and thoughtfulness of the artist. She

was very grateful! One of the persons attending the workshop said to me later, “Aesthetic Realism makes for very deep thoughts—thank you!” And the director of the center told me afterwards that the people attending the workshop “loved it!”—as did she.

—The Cause of Prejudice & Bullying & the Real Alternative!—

In our Mission Statement brochure you can find out more about our Outreach Programs. For instance, there are talks on architecture—given by architects Anthony Romeo and Dale Laurin—and on the visual arts. There are workshops in the great Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method. There are thrilling events presented by the Aesthetic Realism Theatre Company. There are workshops explaining—as only Aesthetic Realism does—the cause of prejudice and bullying, and the one real alternative to these: good will, the aesthetic seeing of people. Many anti-prejudice, anti-bullying events are presented by Emmy-award-winning filmmaker Ken Kimmelman. He illustrates what he explains with films of his own—including the wonderful *Brushstrokes*.

Mr. Kimmelman had been commissioned by the United Nations to produce this animated film, which had to have no particular language because it would be shown all over the world, and no colors that would indicate a particular group of people. So he created a film about a green brushstroke, to show that the fundamental thing in prejudice is dishonesty about reality’s sameness and difference: *prejudice comes from contempt for the world different from oneself*. A tremendous value of this animated film about a prejudiced green brushstroke is that, through humor and the power of art, it makes contempt walk the floor. Throughout, with diverse motions, the green brushstroke expresses scorn for any shape or color different from its own, and as it does, the film has one feel both the hurtfulness and utter stupidity of contempt.

Without giving too much away, I can say that audiences cheer when they see, at the end, the many differently colored and shaped brushstrokes come together—including that green brushstroke. I’ll quote a representative comment from a person in one of the audiences, a New York City teacher. He said of the workshop: “This brings alive a very difficult subject—and presents an ANSWER, in a way that’s welcoming, with a lot of warmth. What Eli Siegel explained is *powerful*. It’s really possible to change your way of thinking!”

Yes. I agree that “what Eli Siegel explained is powerful”—it’s what the world needs. Studying with him for ten years, I saw firsthand Mr. Siegel’s sincerity, his gusto in loving truth. I saw he was a oneness of great, exciting, original scholarship and unparalleled kindness to people, to all people—including, I’m so grateful to say, *me*. And now, it’s a privilege to attend the professional classes for consultants and associates taught by Ellen Reiss, the Chairman of Education, who is true to the philosophy Eli Siegel founded. Her depth of knowledge and her good will are magnificent. I consider her the finest educator in America.

I could certainly say much more. But I’ve given some reasons why I’ve said the work of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation is so valuable, exciting—and needed!

Sincerely,



Devorah Tarrow

Aesthetic Realism Consultant

NOTE. When a hard copy of this letter has been mailed, it’s been accompanied by:

- *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*, issue 2006, “Men, Women, & the Art of Justice”
- *Buffalo Criterion*, “Two Poems by Eli Siegel about Martin Luther King and America” by Alice Bernstein
- *ArtBeat*, “The Message of Pop Art: Everyday Objects Have Wonder!” by Donita Ellison