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# Aesthetic Perception, Attention and Aesthetic Psychology

Alan Mark Christopher Bowden

## Abstract

What are the psychological foundations of aesthetic experience? Disagreements about how to answer this question underlie tensions between the experiences described by those in the developing field of everyday aesthetics and many art-centred accounts of aesthetic experience. I argue that neither has provided the psychological framework to support their arguments in favour of or against the extension of aesthetic experience into everyday life. Such a framework is required in order to reconcile the two fields. This thesis aims to develop an empirically informed aesthetic psychology which accommodates both everyday and paradigmatic aesthetic experience without compromising what is distinctive about each.

In order to understand the oft-unacknowledged assumptions in everyday and mainstream accounts of aesthetic experience I distinguish between “broad” and “narrow” aesthetic psychology. I argue that each approach differs with respect to the necessity of attention for aesthetic experience. The narrow approach to aesthetic psychology underlies many contemporary accounts and places an “attention condition” on aesthetic experience; the broad approach underlies many accounts of everyday aesthetic experience and involves no such condition.

I develop a broad psychological account of aesthetic perception as the perceptual representation of bound qualities and suggest that its minimal or “bare” form goes on in the absence of attention, whilst its “rich” form requires attention and supports characteristically appreciative activities of mind. Using contemporary empirical and philosophical work on attention and its relation to consciousness and cognition I argue that there is an attention condition on rich aesthetic perception (and aesthetic appreciation), but not on bare aesthetic perception: this establishes a broad aesthetic psychology. In this way I reconcile everyday and mainstream aesthetic experience by creating a continuum of aesthetic engagement which runs from the fleeting and unattended experiences of broad aesthetic psychology to the complex and appreciative experiences of narrow aesthetic psychology.

# Aesthetic Perception, Attention and Aesthetic Psychology

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

By

Alan Mark Christopher Bowden

Department of Philosophy

Durham University

2014

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## **Declaration**

I confirm that no part of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for any degree in this or any other university. All the material is the author's own work, except for quotations and paraphrases which have been suitably indicated.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior written consent, and information derived from it should be acknowledged.



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How can everyday life be defined? It surrounds us, it besieges us, on all sides and from all directions. We are inside it and outside of it. No so-called “elevated” activity can be reduced to it, nor can it be separated from it. Its activities are born, they grow and emerge; once they have left the nourishing earth of their native land, not one of them can be formed and fulfilled on its own account.

*Clearing the Ground*

Henri Lefebvre<sup>1</sup>

Venice is not so much a town as a representation of a town. In the Italian theatre the whole arrangement is pivoted not on the stage or the auditorium but on the footlights that separate them, for if they were on the same level there would be no spectacle. Similarly, what defines Venice is not Venice but the lagoon separating it from the profane, utilitarian, interested outside world, a patch of water that performs the function of a “semiotic break”.

*Against Venice*

Régis Debray<sup>2</sup>

[The] task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience. Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They are the earth in one of its manifest operations.

*Art as Experience*

John Dewey<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Lefebvre, 1961/2008, p. 29).

<sup>2</sup> (Debray, 2012, pp. 16-17).

<sup>3</sup> (Dewey, 2005, p. 2).

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## Introduction

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There would seem to be nothing more obvious, more tangible and palpable than the present moment. And yet it eludes us completely. All the sadness of life lies in that fact. In the course of a single second, our senses of sight, of hearing, of smell, register (knowingly or not) a swarm of events and a parade of sensations and ideas passes through our head. Each instant represents a little universe, irrevocably forgotten in the next instant.

*The Art of the Novel*

Milan Kundera<sup>4</sup>

Here is a plausible experience of art: Whilst gazing in rapt contemplation at Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* the minutes seem to fly by. The gallery dissolves and the other visitors seem to drop away. We are immediately struck by the painting's balance; by the remarkable handling of colour to evoke light and shade and form; by what must once have been an astonishing yet now faded blue in the distance and its echo in a nymph's drapery; by the strong red tones balancing one another across the canvas; and by the solid verticals of a column and a male figure framing the scene: above all the poise, the moment of suspension supported by the triangular compositional structure which integrates the whole.

Perhaps our experience of the work is informed by knowledge of its subject matter and art-historical background. Capturing the moment between discovery and transformation that precedes the hunter's flight and death, Titian presages Actaeon's fate in the scarlet hanging cloth, the hunting dog by his side, and the lapdog with its hackles raised opposite; but most of all in the skull of a deer hanging on the column which balances Actaeon across the canvas. The

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<sup>4</sup> (Kundera, 2005, pp. 24-25).

calm stream will momentarily be disturbed as Diana effects Actaeon's transformation by splashing him with water. Perhaps we are aware of the work's commissioning by Phillip II of Spain; of Titian's belief that he was creating in his 'poesie' series the visual equivalent of epic poetry; of the work's place in that series of six based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; of the recent campaign to keep the painting in the United Kingdom. Perhaps our knowledge is limited to its being a work of oil on canvas. Perhaps not even that.

Thus, the sheer expressive power of the individuals and ensemble depicted seem to reward close attention and repeated viewing, for somehow the experience cannot be captured or recollected as fully as we might wish. As a result we set aside time and mental space to consider, appreciate, and take pleasure in Titian's achievement in terms of its product, the process itself, and its effect on us and the nature of that experience's development. This experience might well involve or produce a judgement of the value of the work. Such a judgement might be as straightforward as the belief that the painting is beautiful, without necessarily involving any explicit reasoning in aid of the judgment; or it might be a more nuanced collection of appraisals of the work's formal and expressive qualities combined with the dovetailing of such qualities with its subject matter and art-historical significance. Perhaps this reflective and complex experience of the painting and its qualities is what we find so peculiarly valuable. Perhaps that is why we return.

This is a picture of the aesthetic appreciation of art which should be familiar in philosophical aesthetics. It involves an absorbed, attentive contemplation of appearances and the qualities which interrelate to produce the particular character of the work. This aesthetic experience may be pleasurable; and the value of such experience as well as that of its objects might be understood in terms of such pleasure. As an experience of *art* we might also include

judgements of originality and the satisfaction of the artist's aesthetic and artistic aims: however we think those are related.<sup>5</sup>

So goes a generic account of aesthetic experience in what we might call "art-centred aesthetics" (Saito, 2007). It links a form of experience with a kind of value and evaluation, with the relations between qualities, and the context in which such an experience occurs. We can imagine modified versions for the other arts. Yet, we might ask, does this exhaust the forms of experience we can call "aesthetic"? Discussions of the aesthetic experience of nature are now familiar and fairly uncontroversial, although, of course, as Ronald Hepburn wrote, "we are *in* nature and a part *of* nature, we do not stand over against it as over against a painting on a wall" (Hepburn, 1966, p. 523).<sup>6</sup> Can we go further? Are there other aspects of our lives into which aesthetic experience or similar forms of aesthetic engagement might extend?

This is a thesis about aesthetic experience and the ways our minds shape the nature and extent of such experience. This issue has become pressing because many contemporary accounts of aesthetic experience seem ill-suited to explain the kind of *everyday* experiences which it has recently been suggested have a claim to be regarded as aesthetic. In contrast to the characteristically attentive, absorbed, and contemplative experiences of the qualities of objects which many philosophers of art consider paradigmatically aesthetic, "everyday aesthetics" emphasises forms of experience characterised by inattention, distraction, and a vague awareness of sensory qualities (e.g. (Irvin, 2008a; Saito, 2007)).

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<sup>5</sup> This characterisation draws on a wide variety of accounts of aesthetic experience. For a small sample, see (Beardsley, 1981, 1982a; Budd, 1995; Carroll, 2006a; Goldman, 1995; Iseminger, 2006; Levinson, 1996b, forthcoming; Saito, 2007; Sibley, 2001b, 2001d; Stecker, 2006a; Stolnitz, 1969; Walton, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> For overviews of environmental aesthetics which pay particular attention to the relationship between art and environment see (Carlson, 2011), (Carlson, 2007), and (Brady, 2003). See Carlson for a much-debated cognitive theory of the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments. Carlson's original statement of the view is (Carlson, 1979), but he develops his "scientific cognitivism" at greater length in (Carlson, 2000).

These putatively aesthetic experiences are very different from the art-centred form of experience described by, for example, Monroe Beardsley, who wrote that “the painting and the music invite us to do what we would seldom do in ordinary life—pay attention *only* to what we are seeing or hearing, and ignore everything else. They summon up our energies for an unusually narrow field of concern” (Beardsley, 1981, p. 528). On the art-centred view, aesthetic experience is *distinguished* in part by its difference from everyday life. How, then, should we understand the relationship between experiences which seem so different whilst both claiming to be in some sense *aesthetic*? What, if anything, could the experience of hanging laundry (Rautio, 2009) or cleaning the house (Leddy, 1995) have in common with the attentive and detached contemplation of music or painting?

The aesthetic experiences discussed by everyday and art-centred aesthetics can seem different not merely in degree but in kind. Are everyday experiences legitimately aesthetic? If they are, then we need some way to go about reconciling these diverse forms of aesthetic experience. One way to do that is to think about the psychological foundations of everyday and art-centred or contemplative aesthetic experience.

In attempting to understand the operations of the mind in an aesthetic context we are engaging in what we might call “aesthetic psychology”. Questions in aesthetic psychology include the following: Which psychological processes and capacities are required for distinctively aesthetic forms of experience? Can we distinguish between different forms of aesthetic experience on the basis of the psychological capacities they involve? Attempting to answer these questions should help us with the problem of the status and relationship of everyday and paradigmatic forms of aesthetic experience.

This consequence becomes clearer if we consider some of the ramifications of aesthetic psychology for accounts of aesthetic experience (and vice versa). For example, if, along with many accounts of aesthetic experience, we think having such an experience requires that certain epistemic or cognitive conditions are satisfied in or by experience, then aesthetic experience will be restricted to the occasions on which our psychology can meet those conditions. Correspondingly, if aesthetic experience requires a particular form of awareness of appearances (perhaps in order to satisfy those epistemic conditions) then that form of awareness needs to be possible in any context in which aesthetic experience is to be possible. If, for whatever reason, our psychology is such that conditions for aesthetic experience cannot be met in a particular circumstance, then we can safely say that aesthetic experience is ruled out in that instance.

So aesthetic psychology and aesthetic experience stand in a reciprocal relationship: what we think aesthetic experience *is* affects the kinds of psychological capacities required for its occurrence; and the presence or absence of those capacities in different contexts affects the possibility of aesthetic experience. One way to go about understanding the nature of aesthetic experience in everyday life, then, is to think about the psychology involved in accounts of aesthetic experience and the capacity for everyday experience to meet the psychological demands of such accounts. It might be the case that we end up adjusting both our account of aesthetic experience and our understanding of the psychological capacities required to instantiate such experience.

One of the aims of this thesis is thus to analyse the assumptions about aesthetic psychology and its relationship to aesthetic experience which operate in contemporary aesthetics. If our aesthetic psychology is so significant for the forms of aesthetic experience of which we are capable in different circumstances then we need to be very clear, firstly, about the psychological demands our



accounts of the varieties of such experience involve; and, secondly, about the contexts in which such demands are satisfied.

We can understand contemporary aesthetic psychology in terms of what I will call the “broad” and “narrow” approaches. Each approach can be understood as a set of views about what renders an experience aesthetic and the psychological capacities and mental states required to instantiate or possess that character. In narrow aesthetic psychology only a fairly limited range of experiences qualify as aesthetic because the psychological requirements for aesthetic experience serve to *restrict* the contexts in which such experiences are possible. This serves to exclude many forms of everyday experience because they don’t satisfy those psychological requirements.

In contrast, broad aesthetic psychology considers a wider range of experiences to be aesthetic, either because broad theorists consider these psychological requirements to be met more often than narrow theorists believe, or because they hold a different view about the capacities and mental states required for aesthetic experience. In other words, broad and narrow theorists can disagree both about what renders experience aesthetic *and* about the psychology involved in doing so.

Much of contemporary philosophical aesthetics, I will suggest, has inherited the *narrow* approach to aesthetic psychology. I will argue that narrow accounts effect the exclusion of the everyday by adopting or assuming a problematic aesthetic psychology. Whether or not we ultimately consider everyday aesthetic experience plausible, this conclusion should be premised upon a clear understanding of the psychological framework underpinning aesthetic experience. I will argue, however, that our aesthetic psychology has been under-theorised.

In particular, my analysis will show that assumptions about attention and the forms of awareness required for aesthetic experience lie at the heart of a conflict between broad and narrow aesthetic psychology. Narrow theorists consider forms of epistemic, cognitive, or evaluative interest in appearances characteristic of aesthetic experience, and (implicitly or explicitly) hold that attention is necessary to secure the right kind of awareness for this interest. In contrast, broad theorists do not consider such interest exhaustive of all forms of aesthetic experience and so do not require attention to secure a form of awareness which can support it. In other words, broad and narrow aesthetic psychology disagree over the significance of attention in determining the possibility and extent of aesthetic experience. Each comes to a different set of conclusions about the aesthetic character of everyday experience as a result.

Most of those who adopt an implicitly or explicitly broader approach to aesthetic psychology work in the field of everyday aesthetics. As we have seen, in contrast to the characteristic target of narrow approaches—art, nature, contemplative experience, and appreciation—everyday aesthetics addresses the kinds of experience mentioned above: inattentive and distinctly un-contemplative experiences of daily life. This difference between, for example, inattentive sensory experience (Irvin, 2008a), on the one hand, and focused reflection on the relations between nonaesthetic and aesthetic qualities (Levinson, forthcoming), on the other hand, has led at least one everyday aesthetician to propose two separate domains: everyday aesthetics and art-centred aesthetics (Saito, 2007). One of the aims of this thesis is to analyse and resist this separation and begin to solve the apparent clash between everyday and art-centred aesthetics by framing it in terms of the role of attention in aesthetic psychology.

I will argue that we should reject the narrow approach to aesthetic psychology in favour of a broad approach which can do justice to everyday

aesthetic experience as well as the aesthetic experiences which are the characteristic target for aesthetic theory. However, my aim is not simply to argue in favour of the broad approach in one of its current manifestations. My analysis will show that both approaches to aesthetic psychology are problematic as they stand. In particular, what we find when we undertake the analysis of contemporary broad and narrow approaches is that attention and its relation to awareness are under-acknowledged and under-theorised in aesthetics. We will need to delve into the foundations of our aesthetic psychology in order to rebuild a stronger broad approach.

My approach enlists the resources of empirical as well as philosophical psychology. I use work on perceptual organisation and the constitution of objects in experience to argue for a foundational concept of aesthetic perception as the perceptual representation of individual objects possessing (or constituted by) qualities of appearance. I then use this model and contemporary philosophical and empirical work on attention, consciousness, and cognition to argue that aesthetic perception is possible in the *absence* of attention, but that richer forms of aesthetic engagement—including the appreciative activities targeted by the narrow approach—*do* require attention. This dual philosophical and psychological methodology allows us to begin to remedy the under-theorisation of attention in aesthetics and to reconcile the broad and narrow approaches by establishing a continuum of aesthetic perception running from the unattended to the attended: and thus to find a place for everyday experiences in aesthetic psychology.

The first task is to understand why an interest in everyday aesthetic experience and its relationship to accounts of paradigmatic aesthetic experience should lead us to questions about aesthetic psychology and, specifically, the role of attention in that psychology. I argue in the first chapter that one of the central conflicts between everyday and art-centred aesthetic experience can be

understood as a disagreement about the range of experiences which may be qualified as aesthetic, which can itself be traced to differing views about the psychological capacities required for experiences with aesthetic character. I introduce the distinction between broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology in order to analyse the oft-unacknowledged differences in contemporary accounts about the psychological capacities required for aesthetic experience and the consequences of such views for the range of experiences which qualify as aesthetic.

In establishing the distinction I examine the foundations and motivation of the narrow approach in Kant's account of the judgement of taste (Kant, 2000). I argue that Kant placed conditions on our aesthetic psychology because he wanted to ground the subjective universality of the judgement of taste and that this serves to narrow the range of aesthetic experience. I contrast this with the broader aesthetic psychology of John Dewey (Dewey, 2005), who rejected Kantian contemplation in favour of an experience which is continuous with everyday life and, in doing so, planted the seeds of everyday aesthetics.

Having established the origins of broad and narrow aesthetic psychology, we are well placed to understand their contemporary manifestations. I argue that in contemporary aesthetics the central conflict between the narrow and broad approaches to aesthetic psychology lies in a disagreement about the role of attention and the forms of awareness required for aesthetic experience. Indeed, time and again attention emerges as the fault line running between broad and narrow aesthetic psychology. Whereas narrow accounts focus on absorbed and attentive experiences leading to aesthetic judgements, broad aesthetic psychology (exemplified here by everyday aesthetics) frequently *emphasises* both a lack of (or divided) attention to the objects and contents of experience as well as a vagueness in our awareness of them. I conclude by considering the significance of the aestheticisation of perception for the relationship between

everyday and so-called “art-centred” aesthetics, the forms of aesthetic experience each discusses; and the implications of broad aesthetic psychology and the role of attention for our understanding of the aesthetic experience of art and criticism.

Once it has been suggested that attention and its relationship to awareness lie at the heart of the disagreement between broad and narrow aesthetic psychology, we need to analyse the role attention plays in these approaches. In chapter two I introduce a tool for analysis which I call “the attention condition” that we can use to understand the ways in which contemporary accounts consider attention significant. After introducing a “common-sense” concept of attention with which to analyse some examples of each approach I argue that narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology involve an attention condition on aesthetic experience. That is, narrow accounts make the aesthetic character of perception, experience, or appreciation conditional on the presence of attention. I argue that this requirement is based on the assumption that attention is required in order that we are *aware* of the right kind of *content* in the right kind of way. I conclude that nothing in our analysis thus far merits making *all* aesthetic character dependent on attention, *even if* the kinds of cognitive or epistemic interest characteristic of narrow accounts—and rejected by broad accounts—might require attention.

My analysis of the role of attention in contemporary accounts emphasised the under-theorisation of the relationship between attention and awareness and their significance for aesthetics. We need a better understanding of the relationship between the different elements of our aesthetic psychology as well as of attention itself. In chapter three I argue for a model of aesthetic psychology founded on *aesthetic perception*: we must place at the centre of our aesthetic psychology an account of the manner in which we perceive and organise the material of sense. Via a discussion of perceptual organisation and

the problem of how we achieve coherent perceptual experience of a world of objects—the “binding problem”—I argue for a minimal concept of aesthetic perception as the perceptual representation of individual objects possessing sensible properties. I call this minimal concept “bare aesthetic perception.”

Through a discussion of Baumgarten and, especially, Kant’s concept of purposive organisation and aesthetic response, I argue that we can understand the constitution of bound perceptual representations as the purposive organisation of sense by a subject receptive to and in expectation of an ordered world. I then sketch the structure of aesthetic perception in terms of bare and rich aesthetic perception: the latter requires attention and involves more complex and determinate representations than bare aesthetic perception. I suggest that aesthetic appreciation—the characteristically narrow form of aesthetic engagement—depends on rich aesthetic perception and thus on attention.

At this point we need to deploy contemporary philosophical and psychological work on attention in order to understand firstly, whether *bare* aesthetic perception goes on in the absence of attention and, secondly, why the appreciative activities which depend on rich aesthetic perception require attention and the kinds of consciousness and cognition it supports. Chapter four begins by exploring the complexities of contemporary work on attention. I argue that the question of what is possible in the presence and absence of attention is anything but straightforward given the great diversity of definitions and approaches to attention in empirical psychology and the philosophy of mind. Nonetheless, if used carefully this work can help us understand the relationship between bare and rich aesthetic perception.

I set about this by examining the relationship between several different concepts of consciousness, focusing on the dissociation between *phenomenal*

consciousness (the “what-it-is-like-ness” of experience) and *cognitive* consciousness (the access and use of phenomenal content in reasoning and report). I argue that narrow aesthetic psychology conflates phenomenal and cognitive consciousness; and, moreover, that the aesthetic character of perception depends on *phenomenal* rather than cognitive consciousness. Using empirical work on attention and consciousness I then argue that we have the right kind of phenomenal consciousness in the absence of attention for bare aesthetic perception, whilst rich aesthetic perception and cognitive access require attention.

In the second half of chapter four I turn to the relationship between attention and cognition. Narrow aesthetic psychology is characterised by epistemic or cognitive conditions on aesthetic experience: aesthetic experience is characterised as a way of *knowing* the world. I discuss two accounts which understand attention in terms of rational and epistemic access to and engagement with perceptual experience. I suggest that the ability to think demonstratively is required for rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation and consider two approaches which make demonstrative thought dependent on attention.

Finally, I address the question of whether feature binding—which I argued in chapter three is the core of aesthetic perception—goes on in the absence of attention. I argue that problems of feature binding exist and may be solved on at least three levels: computational information processing, perceptual experience, and conceptual thought. Bare aesthetic perception requires solving the binding problem at the level of *perceptual experience*, and rich aesthetic perception at both this level *and* that of conceptual thought. I argue that solving the binding problem—and thus perceiving aesthetically—at the level of perceptual experience does not require attention: thus establishing a broad aesthetic psychology. There is thus no attention condition on bare aesthetic

perception, but there is one on rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation.

In chapter five I consider some of the most significant challenges, advantages, and implications of my account of aesthetic perception and attention. I focus on two sets of related challenges: firstly, the identification of the aesthetic character of perception and my distinction between bare and rich aesthetic perception; and, secondly, some potential challenges to my account of aesthetic perception which focus on the aestheticisation of perception and consequent apparent demotion of aesthetic value. I argue that my account of aesthetic perception identifies the philosophical core of aesthetic experience, and emphasise that bare aesthetic perception is to be understood as a *minimal* form of such perception rather than as an attempt to capture all forms of aesthetic engagement. This approach has the benefit of creating a continuum of aesthetic perception which runs from bound perceptual experience to the rich and sophisticated forms of appreciation targeted by narrow aesthetic psychology.

I respond to the challenge that the consequent pervasiveness of the aesthetic in perception *trivialises* the aesthetic and threatens the normative core of aesthetic judgement by arguing that we should separate questions of aesthetic perception from those of aesthetic value: my account separates appreciative activities concerned with normativity and value from the question of the aesthetic character of experience whilst retaining the concern with appreciation at the level of rich aesthetic perception. Nonetheless, we can connect aesthetic perception and aesthetic value on my account. I return to the everyday concerns with which we began via a consideration of the relationship between attention, qualities of appearance and certain fundamental human values. I argue that far from banishing aesthetic value to the sidelines, my account places it at the centre of our lives.



In the final section of chapter five I consider the implications of my account of aesthetic perception for our attentive and inattentive experiences in daily life, emphasising the shifting relationship between bare and rich aesthetic perception in the experience of home. Next, I consider the relationship between everyday and art-centred aesthetics. I argue that my account undercuts those who consider either that the two domains are separate, or that art-centred aesthetics should simply be extended to account for the everyday. Finally, I explore one way in which my account of aesthetic perception affects how we understand an aesthetic theory of the creation of artworks. I suggest that reading an aesthetic theory of art in the light of my account also has consequences for our understanding of the aesthetic appreciation of art and criticism.

This thesis aims to understand the way our minds work in an aesthetic context. I will argue that aesthetic perception is pervasive and that attention plays a significant role in shaping our aesthetic psychology. We live in a world of appearances and in the perceptual representation of these appearances lies the foundation of our aesthetic engagement with the world: on this foundation we can build complex forms of aesthetic thought, communication, and appreciation. To that extent mine is both a clarificatory and a revisionary argument: We must better understand our aesthetic psychology and the project of doing so—via the resources of contemporary philosophy of mind and empirical psychology—leads to a revision of the limits of aesthetic perception and the role of the aesthetic in everyday life.

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# Chapter One

## Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Psychology

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There is a widespread assumption that if one is interested in the visual, one's interest must be limited to a technique of somehow treating the visual. Thus the visual is divided into categories of special interest: painting, photography, real appearances, dreams and so on. And what is forgotten—like all essential questions in a positivist culture—is the meaning and enigma of visibility itself.

*About Looking*

John Berger<sup>7</sup>

### 1.1 Introduction

The aims of this opening chapter are firstly, to explain why an interest in everyday aesthetics should lead us to questions about the psychological foundations of aesthetic experience—i.e. aesthetic psychology—and, secondly, to argue that one of the central and unacknowledged points of tension between the aesthetic psychology of art-centred and everyday aesthetics lies in assumptions about attention. I will begin by tracing the origins of the project in this thesis to questions about the kinds of aesthetic experience possible in everyday life and their apparent incompatibility with art-centred accounts of aesthetic experience. I argue that this can be understood as an unacknowledged disagreement about the psychological capacities and mental states required for or involved in experiences with aesthetic character. I call the different views about the psychology required for aesthetic experience the “broad” and “narrow” approaches to aesthetic psychology and begin to show that disagreements about the role of attention in aesthetic experience lie at the heart of the tensions between them. The guiding thought of this chapter—and of this thesis—is that neither everyday aesthetics nor contemporary art-centred

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<sup>7</sup> (Berger, 2009, p. 45).

aesthetics has done a good job of addressing the psychological foundations for their respective extension and limitation of aesthetic experience. It is the aim of this thesis to begin to solve this problem.

## 1.2 Everyday aesthetics and aesthetic experience

The origins of this thesis lie in an interest in the kinds of aesthetic experience possible in everyday life and the way that those experiences relate to the forms of experience theorised by art-centred aesthetics. In recent years aestheticians have turned their attention to aspects of our lives often neglected by philosophical aesthetics. As the name implies, everyday aesthetics or “the aesthetics of daily life” seeks to understand the aesthetic character or aesthetic value involved in everyday life.<sup>8</sup> This might be understood negatively as concerning the aesthetic character of things outside the established domains of the fine arts or natural environments. As Thomas Leddy writes, in everyday aesthetics “We are thinking...of the home, the daily commute, the workplace, the shopping center, and places of amusement” (Leddy, 2005, p. 3). He continues,

The issues that generally come up have to do with personal appearance, ordinary housing design, interior decoration, workplace aesthetics, sexual experience, appliance design, cooking, gardening, hobbies, play, appreciation of children’s art projects, and other similar matters. (Leddy, 2005, p. 3)

So everyday aesthetics can be understood in relation to its characteristic subject matter. The “everyday” is the ordinary, the routine, and the habitual: it concerns the kinds of objects, environments and activities found outside the art

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<sup>8</sup> For the main trends, positions, and historical background in everyday aesthetics or the “aesthetics of daily life” see (Berleant, 2010); (Brady, 2005); (Carlson, 2011); (D. Davies, forthcoming); (Dowling, 2010); (Irvin, 2008a, 2008b, 2009); (Korsmeyer, 1999); (Leddy, 1995, 2005, 2012b); (Light & Smith, 2005); (Melchionne, 2013); (Naukkarinen, 2013); (Novitz, 2001 [1992]); (Rautio, 2009); (Saito, 2005, 2007); (Sartwell, 2003); (Scruton, 1979, 2007, 2009, 2011).

gallery, theatre, concert hall and nature reserve.<sup>9</sup> However, everyday aesthetics can also be understood as concerned with forms of aesthetic experience quite unlike the “standout” experiences of art and nature found in art-centred aesthetics. For example, in a paper titled “The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience” Sherri Irvin argues that,

...particular moments and local experiences have an aesthetic quality about them. Being in the room you are in right now with its particular visual features and sounds; sitting in the way that you are sitting, perhaps crookedly in an uncomfortable chair feeling the air currents on your skin—all of these things impart a texture to your experience that...should be regarded as aesthetic. (Irvin, 2008a, p. 30)

Irvin suggests that a great deal of our ordinary experience possesses aesthetic character or “texture” rather than just those special or standout experiences associated with the appreciation of art or nature. Similarly, Yuriko Saito writes that “In the realm of “the aesthetic,” I am including *any* reactions we form toward the sensuous and/or design qualities of any object, phenomenon, or activity...[Responses] that propel us toward everyday decision and actions, *without any accompanying contemplative appreciation*” (Saito, 2007, pp. 9,11, my emphasis). Irvin and Saito, along with a number of others (e.g. (Lee, 2010)), discuss diverse experiences but what they have in common is a rejection of the

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<sup>9</sup> However, the danger of treating “everyday aesthetics as something of a catch-all, a default third basket for what is not comfortably characterized as fine art or natural beauty” is a real one (Melchionne, 2013). Kevin Melchionne suggests that, “Instead of an expansive catch-all, everyday aesthetics is restricted to the aspects of our lives marked by widely shared, daily routines or patterns to which we tend to impart an aesthetic character” (Melchionne, 2013). He thus resists the breadth implicit in Leddy’s non-art and non-natural specification. (See also Dowling, 2010; Melchionne, 2011; Naukkarinen, 2013). Thus, for Melchionne, not everything that is everyday is aesthetic, and not everything that is aesthetic outside of the gallery and nature reserve is everyday. This “dual character” is special and limited, in general, to “food, wardrobe, dwelling, conviviality, and going out. Nearly all of us eat, dress, dwell somewhere, socialize, and go out into the world for work or errands on a nearly daily basis” (Melchionne, 2013).

attentive and contemplative models of aesthetic experience found in art-centred aesthetics.<sup>10</sup>

Art-centred accounts of aesthetic experience differ in their characterisations of the aesthetic element of experience and the requirements they lay down in order that our experience be called “aesthetic”. Nonetheless, as we shall see, what these accounts have in common is a focus on attention to objects and their qualities and the responses we have to them, often accompanied by a particular attitude or motivation for attending that serves precisely to exclude the everyday. For example Robert Stecker describes aesthetic experience as “the experience of *attending in a discriminating manner* to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things, attending to these for their own sake or for the sake of this very experience”. (Stecker, 2006a, pp. 4, my emphasis) Similarly, Noël Carroll (Carroll, 2006a, 2012), Jerrold Levinson (Levinson, 1996b, forthcoming), David Davies (D. Davies, forthcoming), Gary Iseminger (Iseminger, 2006), and others, emphasise the attentive, focused, often reflexive nature of aesthetic experience. Many, like Stecker, also emphasise the importance of experience or attention “for its own sake”, detached from the everyday, the practical, or the self-interested.

So, even at this relatively early stage it seems that one very useful way of understanding the difference between paradigmatic experiences of art and nature, on the one hand, and the everyday, on the other, is by appeal to our habits of attention and inattention. The everyday is perhaps best understood as involving a regular inattentive interaction with objects, practices, and environments. As Ben Highmore points out “Beds, chairs and clothes accommodate us: most of the time they receive our “daily inattention”. We don't notice them, but we do interact with them” (Highmore, 2011, p. 58).

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<sup>10</sup> See (Saito, 2007) chapter one for discussion of the special or standout experiences characteristic of art-centred aesthetics.

Compare Carroll's characterisation of aesthetic experience in an introductory textbook as "attention with a certain dedicated focus or delimited content— aesthetic properties and forms" (Carroll, 1999, p. 201).

This stark contrast between the inattentive, un-contemplative experiences or responses of everyday aesthetics and the attentive and contemplative experiences of art-centred aesthetics might lead one to think that we are dealing here with experiences which are different not simply in degree but in kind. The forms of awareness involved both of the objects of aesthetic experience and the subject's response to them, seem sufficiently different in each case as to resist accommodation within the same framework. Indeed, the differences between everyday and so-called "art-centred aesthetics" have led Saito to suggest that the two should be separated into different domains (Saito, 2007). More problematically, the everyday aestheticians's commitment to a more pervasive form of aesthetic experience makes it relatively straightforward for the art-centred aesthetician to simply reject it: everyday aesthetic experience, it might be argued, is so radically different a form of experience as to be simply changing the subject from appreciative, reflective, and valuable experience of perceptual forms and qualities to some vague sensory experience of the world around us. (E.g. (Dowling, 2010).)

Nonetheless, the case for exploring the nature and value of aesthetic experience in everyday life is compelling. A great deal of our lives has been neglected by the focus of philosophical aesthetics on so-called "standout" experiences of art and nature. As Saito argues, "whether regarding history, landscape, objects, or experiences, the ordinary and mundane that are often overlooked need to receive equal attention as the dramatic and extraordinary" (Saito, 2007, p. 49). Similarly, Irvin writes that "unless art and nature are construed quite broadly, they play a comparatively small role in our everyday lives" (Irvin, 2008a, p. 29). Addressing this oversight is the central motivation

behind work in everyday aesthetics. Indeed, Saito, Irvin, and Arnold Berleant, amongst many others, argue that the cultivation of such aesthetic awareness would result in more satisfying lives and greater understanding of the moral, social, and ecological value of such phenomena.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not those further ambitions may be fulfilled, it is desirable to understand how far into our everyday life and thought the aesthetic penetrates.

How are we to understand the relationship between everyday and art-centred approaches to aesthetic experience? This thesis had its genesis in the realisation that one way in which to begin to reconcile the two fields and to provide a framework for everyday aesthetics was to consider the psychological foundations of the experiences each considers so important. Everyday aesthetics has failed to provide a clear psychological framework in which to situate the extension of aesthetic experience. Similarly, art-centred aesthetics has failed to adequately articulate the psychology underpinning the forms of awareness involved in aesthetic experience. This means philosophers in each field operate with differing assumptions and end up talking past one another: each seems to mean a different thing by “aesthetic” and by “experience”.<sup>12</sup> As we will see, this has led to accusations that everyday aesthetics has trivialised the aesthetic by compromising the appreciative core of art-centred accounts of aesthetic experience. Conversely, those working in everyday aesthetics accuse art-centred theorists of exclusivity and elitism. An assessment of the psychology operative in both fields is required in order to understand what’s really going on here. In short, what kinds of experiences can we have and what makes them aesthetic? In answering that question we can begin to reconcile the everyday and mainstream aesthetics.

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<sup>11</sup> See chapters two and five of (Saito, 2007); (Irvin, 2008a, 2008b); and (Berleant, 2010). See also (Melchionne, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the debate between Christopher Dowling (Dowling, 2010) and Kevin Melchionne (Melchionne, 2011) in which each seems to possess a markedly different understanding of the aesthetic and the constitution of aesthetic value in everyday life.

### 1.3 The psychological foundations of aesthetic experience

What do we mean when we talk about “the psychological foundations of aesthetic experience” or, more broadly, “aesthetic psychology”? When philosophers discuss psychology we are often thinking about the kinds of mental states, mental events, or dispositions involved in the area under discussion. For example, *moral* psychology is characteristically concerned with the nature of human agency and the relationship between reason, judgement, desire, evaluation, and motivation in the moral sphere. Hume’s question in *A Treatise of Human Nature* about the grounds of moral motivation and the relationship between the passions, reason, and action is a question about our moral psychology; and his answer “that reason has no influence on our passions and actions” (Hume, 1985, p. 509) is a psychological one, having to do with what he understood to be the faculties and dispositions of the mind. From his moral psychology Hume reaches broader ethical conclusions about the nature of duty, merit, virtue, and vice. Likewise, Kant’s resistance to the role of desire or inclination, and his privileging of rational cognition in his moral psychology is part of his account of human nature and leads to conclusions about the nature of duty, agency, and goodness (Kant, 1993).<sup>13</sup>

In a similar manner to the way in which moral psychology aims to understand the operations of the mind in a moral context, aesthetic psychology seeks to understand the mental states and events involved in aesthetic thought and activity. Part of Kant’s project in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kant, 2000) is to delineate the faculties of the mind involved in aesthetic judgment in a manner compatible with his understanding of sensory perception, reason, and

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<sup>13</sup> Each approach remains viable in contemporary ethics and draws on and produces different accounts of human nature and the place of morality within such a picture. See, for example, (Blackburn, 1998) and (Korsgaard, 2008).



the laws of nature. In order to do this he began with the kinds of experiences we have in nonaesthetic and aesthetic contexts: more specifically, with the kinds of *pleasures* we gain from the senses and from the good. How can we differentiate pleasure in the beautiful from pleasure in “the agreeable”—sensory gratification from wine, say? For, Kant thinks, pleasure in the beautiful seems to us to have some significance beyond the individual, beyond mere preference. From this question—and from the resources of his critical philosophy—Kant develops his aesthetic psychology and a theory of aesthetic judgement.

More recently, philosophers have turned to empirical work to inform their philosophical psychology and in relation to broader questions in their respective domains. As John Doris and Stephen Stich write in relation to the empirical turn in moral psychology, “Questions about the psychological contours of actual human lives demand empirically substantiated answers” (Doris & Stich, 2014).<sup>14</sup> Or, at least, answers which are not clearly contrary to empirical psychology. One of the most extreme examples of this turn is the Quinean exhortation to naturalise or replace epistemology with psychology (Quine, 1969). The Churchlands’ eliminative project provides another extreme example (Churchland, 1981), but, as we shall see, attention to empirical work is now entrenched in the philosophy of mind and perception.<sup>15</sup>

Despite arguably originating in the late Nineteenth Century with Gustav Fechner (Seeley, 2014), the idea of an empirical or naturalised aesthetics gained traction in the early years of the Twenty-First. (See (Schellekens, 2012) for an overview.) This trend can be understood, firstly, from the perspective of the empirical sciences targeting art and aesthetic experience in experimental work (so-called “empirical aesthetics”) for whom, as Elisabeth Schellekens writes, “the role, purpose, and importance of art and beauty are to be accounted for

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<sup>14</sup> See (Doris & Stich, 2014) for an overview of empirical approaches to moral psychology.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, (Mole, Smithies, & Wu, 2011a), (Prinz, 2010), and (Dennett, 1991).

within a framework of psychological evolution and neurological development” (Schellekens, 2011, p. 225); and, secondly, as philosophers seeking empirical guidance and substantiation for traditionally “armchair” problems. In the former camp lie the neuroscientific or “neuroaesthetic” approaches of Semir Zeki (Zeki, 1999), V. S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999); the more explanatorily modest empirical psychology of I. C. McManus (McManus, 2011); and the evolutionary psychology of Geoffrey Miller (Miller, 2001).

In the latter camp, the philosopher Jesse Prinz explicitly frames his inquiry into aesthetic psychology as “an exercise in naturalised aesthetics”, seeking to understand “what kind of mental state [aesthetic] appreciation is” (Prinz, 2011a, p. 72) with reference to neuroimaging studies and the neurobiology of emotion; Aaron Meskin and his colleagues avail themselves of the methods of empirical psychology in order to understand the effect of exposure to artworks on aesthetic judgements of them (Meskin, Phelan, Moore, & Kieran, 2013); and Noël Carroll and Margaret Moore study the relationship between movement, music, and dance with reference to cognitive science (Carroll & Moore, 2011).

Now, *which* questions (if any) admit of empirical investigation and substantiation and at what level of explanation they may do so is a difficult question in aesthetic psychology and the empirical approach to aesthetics and the philosophy of art in general (Currie, 2003; Zangwill, 2009a). Not everyone welcomes the influence of the empirical, arguing that the normative or evaluative nature of many questions in aesthetics does not suit it to the reductionist methodologies of the sciences. For example, Peter Lamarque writes that “empirical facts about the psychological states of actual people and empirical theories about such states will not illuminate what is of *value* in individual works of literature” (Lamarque, 2011, pp. 298, my emphasis).

Yet, even if we are happy to admit the significance of empirical work on and for traditionally philosophical questions, undertheorised and simplistic concepts of art, aesthetic experience, aesthetic pleasure, aesthetic value and the relation between them frequently undermine the methodologies and conclusions of empirical aesthetics; although, as Schellekens points out, philosophers have hardly reached agreement on these issues themselves (Schellekens, 2011). John Hyman warns of “extravagant generalisations about art” in the work of Ramachandran and Zeki (Hyman, 2010, p. 260) and McManus of the “utter failure of grand theories of evolutionary psychology or neuroaesthetics” to explain the variety of aesthetic preferences for, in his case, Mondrian paintings and the cropping of photographs (McManus, 2011, p. 186).

All of this must be kept in mind when we reach the empirical work—and empirically informed philosophy of perception and mind—I wish to make use of in chapters three and four. I will not be considering empirical work which specifically targets aesthetic value or experience: that is, empirical aesthetics. Instead I will focus on work on attention and consciousness which we may then relate to the account of aesthetic perception I propose. This is a thesis firmly situated in philosophical aesthetics, but which nonetheless seeks to develop an empirically informed aesthetic psychology in the light of the concerns many have about the relationship between philosophical and scientific explanation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Aesthetic psychology is thus much broader in range than the questions I focus on. As I mentioned, I will not be addressing empirical work which specifically targets aesthetic experience or the experience of art. I have reservations about a lot of empirical work which purports to examine or illuminate the experience of beauty, aesthetic value, or to reveal the foundations and purpose of artistic endeavour. However, that is too large an issue to address here. See (Turner, 2006) and (Schellekens & Goldie, 2011) for two collections which examine the question of the relationship between empirical and philosophical approaches to the mind and its aesthetic and artistic modes.

## 1.4 Broad and narrow aesthetic psychology

How are we to begin developing this aesthetic psychology? I have suggested that we can understand the clash between everyday and art-centred aesthetic experience as a manifestation of underlying but unacknowledged disagreements about our aesthetic psychology. So a good place to start is with the kinds of *assumptions* about our aesthetic psychology operative in contemporary accounts of aesthetic perception, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic appreciation. Analysing these assumptions with recourse to contemporary empirical and philosophical work on attention can help us toward a better account of our aesthetic psychology, and thus toward a better understanding of aesthetic experience.

To this end, I suggest that we should understand approaches to the operation of the mind in an aesthetic context as either *broad* or *narrow*. Put simply, broad aesthetic psychology considers a wide range of our mental life to be involved with or to have aesthetic character. In contrast, narrow aesthetic psychology considers a narrower range of our mental life to be involved with or have aesthetic character. Each approach has this consequence as a result of implicit or explicit views about the psychological capacities, mental states, and forms of awareness required for aesthetic experience. I will argue that the majority of art-centred aestheticians hold implicitly narrow theories of aesthetic psychology whilst everyday aestheticians hold implicitly broad theories.

Each approach can be understood as a set of views about what *makes* an experience aesthetic and the psychological capacities and mental states required to instantiate or possess that character. We can understand the clash between the broad and narrow approaches as a disagreement about the psychological threshold of aesthetic experience: when have we reached the tipping point where nonaesthetic experience becomes aesthetic? A narrow approach to

aesthetic psychology is one which considers (i) that the requisite psychological processes or capacities for aesthetic experience (or some similar concept) are such that specific conditions must be satisfied in order that (the) experience qualify as aesthetic and (ii) that these conditions are not commonly satisfied in daily life and thus that a narrow range of experiences possess aesthetic character.

In other words, in narrow aesthetic psychology a fairly limited range of experiences qualify as aesthetic because the psychological requirements for aesthetic experience are only met in particular circumstances. For example, we will see that attention is frequently a necessary condition for aesthetic experience in narrow aesthetic psychology. In the absence of attention our experience or perception cannot be aesthetic: this and other conditions serve to narrow our aesthetic psychology.

A broad approach to aesthetic psychology is one which considers *either* (i) that the requisite psychological processes or capacities for aesthetic experience (or similar) are such that specific conditions must be satisfied in order that experience qualify as aesthetic and (ii) that these conditions are frequently satisfied in daily life and thus that aesthetic experience (or similar) is common; *or* that the requisite psychological processes or capacities for aesthetic experience (or similar) are such that the aesthetic is always involved in experience to some extent.

So, broad aesthetic psychology can be understood either as denying that the conditions of narrow aesthetic psychology truly constrain aesthetic experience or that these conditions are satisfied more often than might be thought. Alternatively, a broad approach might reconstrue aesthetic perception or experience in such a way as to involve it in the psychological processes and capacities which underlie or constitute perceptual experience in general. The

first form of the broad approach might agree with narrow aesthetic psychology on the kind of capacities required for aesthetic experience and disagree on when such capacities are involved or instantiated. The second form involves a different account of aesthetic perception or aesthetic experience as well. My account takes this latter approach. It is open to both forms of the broad approach to deny the necessity of attention for aesthetic experience, but they may do so for different reasons.

## **1.5 The foundations of broad and narrow aesthetic psychology**

To begin to understand how contemporary philosophical aesthetics is shaped by the broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology we should investigate the foundations of each. We'll begin with the narrow approach and focus on the way in which Kant's aesthetic psychology places conditions on aesthetic experience. The origins of the broad approach are more recent and lie in the work of John Dewey, whose *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 2005) can be seen as a reaction to the aesthetic psychology of Kant and his Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century successors.<sup>17</sup> This should equip us to tackle the modern forms of each approach.

### **1.5.1 Kant and the narrowing of aesthetic psychology**

Rather than engage in a piece of Kant scholarship or exegesis, I'm going to highlight one aspect of the Kantian approach which both demonstrates the way that extra-psychological aims can effect aesthetic psychology and, in particular, lays the foundation for contemporary narrow approaches. I'll focus on *disinterest*, a concept which did not strictly originate in Kant's work, but which he gives a distinctly psychological reading: by which I mean that, in Kant,

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<sup>17</sup> I have in mind here Arthur Schopenhauer in the Nineteenth Century and Edward Bullough (Bullough, 2008) and Clive Bell (Bell, 2011) in the Twentieth.

disinterest is treated as a particular operation of the faculties of the mind; an aspect that, I suggest, serves to narrow the range of aesthetic experience.

Prior to Kant, to take disinterested pleasure in beauty meant roughly something like making sure that pleasure in an object was not self-interested or associated with one's well-being; or, perhaps, that the object was not judged according to its fittingness for use. Pleasure in beauty should be, in some sense, contemplative rather than practical. As it developed in the Eighteenth Century "Taste" is the sense or faculty which discerns beauty.<sup>18</sup> As George Dickie puts it, "the theory of taste was eighteenth-century philosophy's attempt to give an account of [beautiful, sublime, delicate, and so on] objects and of the pleasure and displeasure taken in them" (Dickie, 1996, p. 3). By setting out certain conditions for the "judgement of taste", Kant and his predecessors began to articulate a distinct experience: an aesthetic experience. One of the first to theorise taste, Francis Hutcheson, summarises the features of the aesthetic and aesthetic experience which began to develop in the Eighteenth Century, and to which Kant responded.

This superior power of perception is justly called a sense, because of its affinity to the other senses in this, that the pleasure does not arise from any knowledge of principles, proportions, causes, or the usefulness of the object; but strikes us at first with the idea of beauty .... And further, the ideas of beauty and harmony, like other sensible ideas, are necessarily pleasant to us, as well as immediately so; neither can any resolution of our own, nor any prospect of advantage or disadvantage, vary the beauty or deformity of an object. (Hutcheson, 2008, pp. 91-92)

Hutcheson isolates the *feeling* of beauty from knowledge of use, origin, and principle, highlighting the immediacy and necessity of pleasure in the beautiful.

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<sup>18</sup> Taste is also a central feature of Frank Sibley's mid-twentieth century work. Quite what Sibley means by taste is part of his interest, but he means roughly the ability, capacity, or sensitivity required to perceive certain qualities and to apply aesthetic terms to them. Taste is some capacity to judge or discriminate aesthetically. See (Sibley, 2001b).

This noncognitive state—pleasure—is central to the development of aesthetic experience and the question of how we approach and grasp the world aesthetically. In this thesis I will move the aesthetic away from its association with pleasure whilst retaining its subjectivity: that is, the central concept of the aesthetic will be an activity of mind, but not one I approach as a form of pleasure, disinterested or otherwise. Before we get to that point, however, let's look more closely at the way in which Kant's distinctive development of disinterest serves to narrow our aesthetic psychology and place conditions on aesthetic experience.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.5.1.1 Psychological conditions on aesthetic experience: Disinterest

Kant wanted to understand the judgement of beauty: the judgement of taste. In particular, and in response to the perceived failure of Hume's standard of taste, in order to secure something like an intersubjectively valid judgement of taste, Kant sought to articulate the conditions under which a judgement of beauty may be properly made and asserted. So, one way to construe Kant's programme is as the project to understand the operation of the mind in an aesthetic context and to connect that psychological account with the claim to intersubjective or universal validity of the judgement of taste.<sup>20</sup> For Kant, the way to do this was to distinguish a particular form of *disinterested* pleasure in the representation of the form of an object by the subject. "Taste", he wrote, "is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a

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<sup>19</sup> On Eighteenth Century aesthetics and disinterestedness see (Stolnitz, 1961), (Townsend, 1987), and (Guyer, 2005a). (Dickie, 1996) contains detailed—and sometimes scathing—analyses of Eighteenth Century theories of taste, beginning with Hutcheson.

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Malcolm Budd identifies one of Hume's failings as precisely the absence of a theory of aesthetic psychology in which to ground his claims about the supposed uniformity of human responses to qualities "naturally fitted" to give us pleasure. (Budd, 1995, p. 20) But see Dickie's determined defence of Hume in chapter five of (Dickie, 1996).



satisfaction or dissatisfaction **without any interest**. The object of such satisfaction is called **beautiful**" (5: 211).<sup>21</sup>

Why does Kant identify a certain kind of pleasure and why must it satisfy this condition of "disinterest"? Kant is starting from what he takes to be the *phenomenology* of the judgement of taste or the experience of beauty. Such an experience is pleasurable: the experience *satisfies* the subject in some way; and this pleasure is part of what it means to judge something beautiful. Hume had got this far (Hume, 2008), but Kant did not think that Hume had succeeded in freeing aesthetic judgement from the idiosyncrasies of the individual.<sup>22</sup> This is despite Hume and Kant agreeing that the distinctiveness of *aesthetic* judgement lies in its subjectivity—in the role of *feeling*—and in our expectation in making such a judgement that others should (rather than will) agree with it.

When we call something beautiful, the pleasure that we feel is expected of everyone else in the judgment of taste as necessary, just as if it were to be regarded as a property of the object that is determined in it in accordance with concepts; but beauty is nothing by itself, without relation to the feeling of the subject. (5: 218)

The judgement of taste is therefore not a cognitive judgement...but is rather aesthetic, by which is understood one whose determining ground **cannot be other than subjective**. (5: 203)

Kant's task, then, is to reconcile the *subjective* grounding of aesthetic judgement with its putative universality. In other words, Kant needs to connect his aesthetic psychology with his theory of the subjective universality of aesthetic judgement. (See (Guyer, 1997), chapter three.) He does this by

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<sup>21</sup> All quotations from the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* are from Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews's translation (Kant, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> On Hume see (Budd, 1995), (Levinson, 2006b), and (Guyer, 2005b) amongst many others. Levinson's paper has an extensive list of useful references.

appealing to disinterested pleasure. This appeal serves to narrow our aesthetic psychology and aesthetic experience. Let's see why.

The first thing to point out is that Kant doesn't really individuate kinds of pleasure *except* with reference to their grounding or source. As Budd points out, pleasure "is a reaction to how the world is represented to the subject, rather than a representation of a possible state of affairs" (Budd, 1995, p. 17). Therefore, it is not the pleasure which must be assessed, but its *ground*. This is important for Kant, because we take pleasure in many things and most of them are unsuitable either as grounds for a judgement of beauty or the suggestion that *others* should take pleasure in them too if they approach them in the right way. This is because pleasures can arise as the result of the satisfaction of a desire or preference, which is something idiosyncratic: such pleasures arise from the inclinations of the individual rather than the form of the represented object. Kant calls this "satisfaction in the agreeable" or "gratification" and it is the kind of pleasure we take in our favourite wine or colour (§3).<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to pleasures in the agreeable and in the good (which pleases through reason, see §4), which "are always combined with an interest in their object" as a result of their "relation to the faculty of desire", "the judgement of taste is merely **contemplative**, i.e., a judgment that, indifferent with regard to the existence of an object, merely connects its constitution together with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure" (5: 209). The point is that for Kant, as Savile points out, beauty is "a concept that is essentially tied to human responses" (Savile, 1993, p. 3) and so Kant needs to be able to distinguish the response which grounds the judgement of taste from others: he turns to *disinterest*.

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<sup>23</sup> To this extent, Kant's rejection of inclination in the deduction of the intersubjectivity of the judgement of taste is analogous to that found in his grounding for duty.

As Nick Zangwill puts it, for Kant, “pleasure is disinterested when the route from the representation of the object to the response of pleasure entirely bypasses desire. Pleasure in the beautiful is a response to the representation and to the representation alone” (Zangwill, 1992, pp. 149-150). That response is understood as the free, harmonious play of the cognitive powers of imagination and understanding: a harmony which arises from the lack of a concept under which to subsume the representation of the object. Which freedom from determinate concepts also distinguishes the representation of the object in the judgement of beauty from nonaesthetic judgements which seek to bring representations under particular rules or concepts of the understanding.<sup>24</sup>

In order to decide whether or not something is beautiful, we do not relate the representation by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather relate it by means of the imagination...to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure. (5: 203)

The combination of the free play of the faculties and disinterested pleasure serves to narrow Kant’s aesthetic psychology because the contexts in which those conditions are satisfied are fairly limited. As Zangwill emphasises, Kant is identifying a particular route from the representation of the object to the response of pleasure. That route must not involve desire or any personal connection to the object. (Such a connection might exist, but it cannot be the determining ground of the judgement.) It is also worth emphasising that aesthetic experience is restricted by Kant’s insistence on the relation of the representation of an object to the subject via a *feeling*: a noncognitive, nonrepresentational mental state. It is not enough, in other words, to attend disinterestedly to the appearance of an object: we do not come to the judgement of taste via disinterested attention. (Although, as we shall see, later thinkers

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<sup>24</sup> I am focusing here on disinterest rather than the nonconceptual representation of the object in the judgement of taste. Suffice it to say, this emphasis on freedom from determinate concepts is also a narrowing factor in Kant’s aesthetic psychology.

appeal to something like this). Rather, aesthetic judgement, for Kant, requires representation via disinterested feeling. Affectless aesthetic judgement doesn't make sense on Kant's account.

So, Kant provides a framework for aesthetic experience (or the judgement of taste) with which to satisfy the extra-psychological interest in grounding the universality of the judgement of taste. This is by no means a complete account of the judgement of taste, but I hope it has highlighted the connection between Kant's understanding of the nature of aesthetic judgement and his aesthetic psychology. It is the attempt to balance the origin of the judgement of taste—or aesthetic experience—in feeling with its universal validity which leads to a narrow aesthetic psychology because the conditions in which such a subjective response could even begin to make a claim on others are few. Kant needs to retain the apparatus of feeling in the individual whilst isolating such feeling from the distinctive aspects of any particular individual. Disinterest is one way in which he does this.<sup>25</sup> However, a corollary of specifying so particular a mental operation is the narrowing of the range of aesthetic experience.

### **1.5.2 Dewey and the origins of broad aesthetic psychology**

John Dewey wrote about aesthetic experience in the early Twentieth Century, by which time the idea that some form of disinterestedness or distance is required for aesthetic experience and aesthetic appreciation had become fairly standard. We can see its influence in theories of "psychical distance" (Bullough, 2008), the aesthetic attitude (Stolnitz, 1969), and significant form (Bell, 2011). Dewey traced this separation of the aesthetic from other forms of experience to Kant's aesthetic psychology and the isolation of aesthetic pleasure. "Thus", he writes, "the psychological road was opened leading to the

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<sup>25</sup> An assumption about the uniformity of human response to appearances when isolated from the faculty of desire is another. See (Allison, 2001) chapter seven.

ivory tower of “Beauty” remote from all desire, action, and stir of emotion” (Dewey, 2005, p. 263). Now, whether or not this is a fair reading of Kant’s aesthetic psychology, Dewey considers this remoteness of the aesthetic something of a disaster.

[We] have, as the record of this chasm, accepted as if it were normal, the philosophies of art that locate it in a region inhabited by no other creature, and that emphasize beyond all reason the merely contemplative character of the esthetic...There is much applause for the wonders of appreciation and the glories of the transcendent beauty of art indulged in without much regard to capacity for esthetic perception in the concrete....[This] deeply affects the practice of living, driving away esthetic perceptions that are necessary ingredients of happiness, or reducing them to the level of compensating transient pleasurable excitations. (Dewey, 2005, pp. 8-9)

Dewey’s aim is to rebalance the relationship between the individual and their environment in aesthetic experience. He considers the distance and disinterest implicit in a contemplative model of aesthetic experience problematic both in terms of the aesthetic psychology it presupposes and the forms of life it devalues. On my terms, Dewey objects to the narrowness of Kant’s aesthetic psychology. Dewey is particularly significant for this discussion because he has some claim to be the “grandfather of everyday aesthetics” (Leddy, 2012b, p. 44). Indeed, despite his writing eighty years ago, Irvin considers Dewey’s “the most general and well-developed existing account of the possibility of aesthetic experience in everyday life” (Irvin, 2008a). Dewey’s is not straightforwardly a broad aesthetic psychology, but his significance lies in the attempt to undermine the narrowing conditions of the Kantian model. Let’s begin by considering Dewey’s understanding of how aesthetic experience develops.

### 1.5.2.1 From experience to aesthetic experience

Dewey's starting point is very different from Kant's. In *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 2005) Dewey begins with the experience of everyday life.<sup>26</sup> Only by understanding "the ordinary focus and conditions of experience that we do not usually regard as esthetic" (Dewey, 2005, p. 2) can we understand the nature of the production and appreciation of art. "In order to *understand* the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens" (Dewey, 2005, p. 3). Art and its experience begin in ordinary human experience. We can already see a clear difference here between Kant's isolation of aesthetic experience and Dewey's insistence that art and the aesthetic begin in daily life and experience. This doesn't mean that aesthetic experience isn't differentiated from everyday experience for Dewey, but the manner of its differentiation is very different from the Kantian isolation of pleasure in the beautiful. Dewey never identifies any particular faculties or mental states required for or involved in aesthetic experience.

The watchword of Dewey's aesthetics might be "continuity": he doesn't accept the kinds of compartmentalisation found in Kant's psychology. Experience ebbs and flows, it "consists of phases in which the organism falls [in and] out of step" (Dewey, 2005, p. 12) with the environment. Our interactions with our surroundings are driven by our animal and higher needs, involving adjustments and adaptations to hostile environments, building rhythms, balance, harmony and order. It is precisely because we live in such a world of "movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions" (16) that our experience is capable of possessing what Dewey calls "esthetic quality". It is the

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<sup>26</sup> For an overview of Dewey's aesthetics focusing on *Art as Experience* see (Leddy, 2013) and (Leddy, 2012b, p. 77ff).

achievement of harmony, of equilibrium which provides the most intense experiences of which we are capable. This "heightened vitality...is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things" (18) and contains the promise of aesthetic experience. By its very nature, then, Dewey's concept of experience is a dynamic continuous relation between the individual and their environment.

What gives an experience "aesthetic quality"? Dewey begins by introducing the idea of "*an* experience". Often experience is inchoate and disordered, interrupted and at odds with itself. However, within the continuous interchange between a subject and their surroundings there are occasions on which the material of experience "runs its course to fulfillment" (36). "*An* experience" is "integrated and demarcated in the general stream of experience" (37) by virtue of a sense of consummation or closure: the kind of experience arising from the solving of a problem or the completion of a game. Such experiences don't simply end, they come to a well-rounded close. As Dewey writes, "Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency" (37). This concept of the integrated, self-contained, complete and internally consistent experience is not coextensive with aesthetic experience—intellectual enquiry can involve this kind of consummation—but is necessary for it. Such experience is diverse yet unified, involving distinct yet free flowing elements which form a unified whole. All experience contains the possibility of becoming *an* experience and achieving unity by virtue of a single pervasive quality: "the institution of a felt harmony" (45).

So an aesthetic experience is *an* experience. More than this, however, an aesthetic experience must involve a felt harmony which serves to individualise it in addition to its consummation or sense of closure. The *aesthetic* in experience refers, for Dewey, "to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying"

(49). It is not the objects experienced but the manner of experience in which they figure which mark aesthetic experience. Indeed, “any practical activity will, provided that it is integrated and moves by its own urge to fulfilment, have esthetic quality” (41). However, whilst all experience contains such promise, the “esthetic experience” is still a distinctive form of experience: *an* experience. Its subject matter and occasion might be various but its phenomenology is specific and individuating.

### 1.5.2.2 Dewey’s aesthetic psychology

Aesthetic experience is a form of heightened, intensified feeling or experience for Dewey. He shares this much with Kant and many others. However, by placing desire, action, and emotion at the core of a concept of aesthetic experience which emerges from ordinary experience Dewey effectively argues for something like a broad aesthetic psychology. He argues that “The very dominance of intense sensuous qualities in esthetic objects is itself proof, psychologically speaking, that appetite is there” (Dewey, 2005, p. 266). This is quite different from Kant’s insistence that the pleasure in the representation of an object must bypass the faculty of desire in order to ground an aesthetic judgement.

We can see here Dewey’s critique of an approach to aesthetic experience and aesthetic perception that develops from the Kantian distinction between the judgement of taste and the agreeable. As we have seen, for Kant “[the] agreeable is that which pleases in sensation” and is a question of the *gratification* of the subject and their interests. The agreeable is grounded on a private feeling restricted to the individual, and is thus distinguished from the beautiful, our satisfaction in which arises without interest and, so it is argued, thus carries with it an intersubjective weight—a “subjective universality”—that the



agreeable cannot claim. Dewey rejects Kant's understanding of pleasure and his isolation of the aesthetic from action and desire.

One trouble with the Kantian psychology is that it supposes all "pleasure," save that of "contemplation," to consist wholly of personal and private gratification. Every experience, including the most generous and idealistic, contains an element of seeking, of pressing forward. Only when we are dulled by routine and sunk in apathy does this eagerness forsake us. (Dewey, 2005, p. 265)

Now, Dewey does endorse something like the view that aesthetic perception excludes the practical, but only insofar as "by "practical" is meant an action undertaken for a particular and specialized end outside of perception, or for some external consequence" (Dewey, 2005, p. 267). The idea here is that some "ulterior" motive may disrupt the otherwise unified experience by interfering with the institution of a *single* individualising quality. However, despite this, Dewey firmly rejects a view of "contemplation" founded on disinterested pleasure.

One of the central characteristics of modern manifestations of the narrow approach to aesthetic psychology which will emerge below is the pairing of *attention* and concepts descended from Kantian disinterestedness as conditions for aesthetic experience. Whilst Kant's concept of disinterest qualifies pleasure rather than attention, many later views develop accounts of attention "for its own sake" as the prerequisite for aesthetic experience. My argument will be that such accounts utilise an undertheorised concept of attention, but this is not exclusive to narrow approaches. Dewey writes that "Attentive observation is certainly one essential factor in all genuine perception including the esthetic" (Dewey, 2005, p. 263). His aesthetic psychology, broad as it may be when compared to Kant's, is nonetheless narrowed by the identification of attentive observation as a necessary condition on aesthetic perception and the forms of awareness characteristic of *an* experience with aesthetic quality.

Nonetheless, what Dewey emphasises is the way in which the potential for aesthetic experience or aesthetic perception is ever-present. He considers the psychological capacities operative in daily life and ordinary experience to be those involved in aesthetic experience; and his conditions serve to differentiate aesthetic experience from ordinary experience only insofar as the pervasive quality of the experience individuates it. It doesn't make sense, for Dewey, to separate the agreeable and the beautiful, because he doesn't accept the way in which Kant isolates one form of representation via feeling from another. In resisting the compartmentalisation of experience Dewey opens the way for broad aesthetic psychology and everyday aesthetics.

### **1.6 Contemporary broad and narrow aesthetic psychology: Attention**

One of the main aims of this thesis is to demonstrate how a proper understanding of the role of attention in aesthetic life facilitates the resolution of the tensions between the broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology. We will have much more to say about attention in the next chapter, where I will analyse broad and narrow aesthetic psychology in terms of an "attention condition" for aesthetic experience and aesthetic perception. Understanding the nature of the attention condition—the manner in which the absence and presence of attention constrains aesthetic experience—will allow us to construct a map of our aesthetic psychology which explains how the kinds of aesthetic engagement characteristic of the broad approach and everyday aesthetics can lie on a continuum with the more complex appreciative elements of the narrow approach. In what remains of this chapter I will briefly show how contemporary approaches differ with respect to the role of attention and the forms of awareness they consider characteristic of aesthetic experience.

### **1.6.1 Narrow approaches in contemporary aesthetic psychology**

We will begin by considering some examples of narrow accounts of aesthetic experience and aesthetic appreciation. Two things in particular will emerge: firstly, taking a narrow approach to aesthetic psychology does not entail a particular account of the nature of the aesthetic or what makes experience *aesthetic*; and, secondly, that the necessity of some kind of *attention* for awareness or perception of the aesthetic features of objects and our experience of them is a common condition for aesthetic experience on the narrow approach. Similarly, the broad approach contains no single account of the nature of the aesthetic or our experience of it. Yet, the role of attention and the conditions for our awareness or perception of the aesthetic are markedly different from the narrow approach.

Recall that a narrow approach to aesthetic psychology is one which lays down psychological conditions on experience which serve to restrict the range of experiences which qualify as aesthetic. I highlighted that this involves a view about what *renders* an experience aesthetic and the psychological capacities and mental states required to instantiate or possess that character. Narrow theorists can occupy fairly different positions about such matters: what makes them narrow theorists is the view that both the aesthetic and psychological elements contrive to restrict the range of experiences we may call aesthetic. Narrow aesthetic psychology is often implicit in accounts of aesthetic experience, aesthetic perception, or aesthetic appreciation. We need to excavate it.

#### **1.6.1.1 Narrow accounts of aesthetic experience**

A complete account of aesthetic experience will tell us something about the subject and their experience in combination with what that experience is of. It may be that it is something about the subject which makes experience aesthetic, or it might be that something about the object(s) of their experience is

responsible. Most likely some combination of subject and object serves to characterise aesthetic experience. How do accounts cash out the aesthetic element of experience? Broadly, a theory of aesthetic experience might appeal to any of the following either individually or in combination as the distinctively and/or necessarily aesthetic aspect of any given experience or state of mind:

- The phenomenology or “what-it-is-likeness” of experience.
- The structure of experience.
- The object(s) of experience.
- The content of experience.
- The value or evaluative stance of experience.

Any given theory is likely to rely on a combination of these and to place them in differing relations, with one proving to constrain or underpin another. A phenomenological account, for example, is often less likely to be concerned with the correctness or appropriateness of aesthetic experience than it is in characterising the quality or “feeling” of the experience itself. Such an account is often coupled with a structural element detailing how experience develops and is demarcated from non-aesthetic experience. Dewey’s aesthetic experience can be understood as a phenomenological and structural account on these terms. Moreover, for Dewey, it is the phenomenology and structure of such experience, in combination with the objects and practices which arise from and elicit such experiences, which help us to explain the *value* of art and our experience of it.

In contrast, a different account might emphasise the representation or scrutiny of particular properties or qualities of appearance, perhaps on the basis of a certain kind of attention. Such views certainly do not ignore the phenomenology or structure of aesthetic experience, but are more likely to be concerned with the correctness or appropriateness of experience because they

are orientated towards features of the world that we can, in theory, all experience or know.

For example, Jerrold Levinson writes that “pleasure in an object is aesthetic when it derives from apprehension of and reflection on the object's individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to the structural base on which it rests” (Levinson, 1996a, p. 6). We can see in Levinson’s characterisation of aesthetic pleasure a combination of a particular phenomenology and the demand that it derive from the right kind of content: content which is apprehended “for itself”. Levinson specifies a certain kind of *awareness* of a particular form of *content* grounded in the right type of approach to objects and their qualities. He identifies *attention* as central to the form of awareness characteristic of aesthetic experience:

By *aesthetic attention* is meant attention focused on an object's character, or otherwise put, its perceivable forms and properties, for their own sake, in their full individuality, apart from the utility of so attending, on whatever content emerges from such forms and properties, and on relationships among such forms, properties and contents. (Levinson, forthcoming)

Attention to an object’s appearance “for its own sake” is central to aesthetic experience on many narrow accounts. Such attention is a descendant of Kant’s notion of disinterest and is meant to ensure that the subject’s awareness is focused on the properties of the object such that any pleasurable response or any judgement of the merit or value of the object refers only to it and not to idiosyncrasies of the subject. We will go into this further in the next chapter, but we can see that, for Levinson, attention is enlisted to provide the content of experience by virtue of focusing on “perceivable forms and properties” *and* to play a role in ensuring the appropriateness of the subject’s response to such properties.

In an otherwise fairly dissimilar account, Gary Iseminger writes, “Someone is *appreciating* a state of affairs just in case she or he is *valuing for its own sake the experiencing of that state of affairs*” (Iseminger, 2006, p. 99). Iseminger identifies as aesthetic a particular evaluative stance towards the content and objects of experience, requiring not only that experience involve a certain kind of valuing of its objects, but also a more reflexive valuing of one’s own experience of value.<sup>27</sup>

However, attention to and awareness of the “right kind” of content are not indissolubly linked to non-instrumental or “for itself”-type conditions in narrow accounts. Noël Carroll has argued that “an aesthetic experience can be identified in terms of its *content*, without referring to affective states like pleasure, disinterested or otherwise, or to evaluative postures, such as finding the experience of such properties to be valuable for their own sake” (Carroll, 2006a, pp. 91, my emphasis). This content includes “the formal structures, aesthetic and/or expressive properties of the work and/or of the manner in which those features interact with each other and/or address the cognitive perceptual, emotive, and/or imaginative powers of the subject (Carroll, 2006a, p. 89). This list should remind us of Levinson’s account of aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic attention in its content, but diverges from it in insisting on the irrelevance of a particular phenomenology, evaluative orientation, or structure beyond the appropriate representation of aesthetic content.

#### **1.6.1.2 Narrow psychological conditions on aesthetic experience**

Central to the examples of narrow accounts above are conditions which must be satisfied in order for particular properties or qualities of objects to be perceived and represented by the subject; for those properties and qualities to be responded to appropriately; and for the subject’s response to their own

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<sup>27</sup> See (Walton, 1993) for a similar account of aesthetic appreciation.

experience to be appropriate. In particular, we have seen the importance of attention to the qualities of objects, another example of which is Robert Stecker's "minimal conception" of aesthetic experience: "the experience of *attending in a discriminating manner* to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things, attending to these for their own sake or for the sake of this very experience" (Stecker, 2006a, pp. 4, my emphasis). Stecker agrees with Carroll in the demand for discriminating attention, but disagrees with him (and others) in his emphasis on attending to or valuing the experience and its objects "for their own sake".<sup>28</sup>

So the importance of attention on the narrow approach is not limited to a particular account of the "aesthetic-making" element of experience or perception. Attention plays a role in providing the right kind of content whether or not our awareness of or response to that content must then satisfy some further "for its own sake"-type condition. We will explore this in detail in the next chapter where I will argue that an "attention condition" on aesthetic experience is characteristic of narrow aesthetic psychology and that a commitment to such a role for attention in securing the right kind of awareness for aesthetic experience is one point of conflict with many examples of broad aesthetic psychology. Our question must then be whether attention *is* required in order to secure the aesthetic character of aesthetic experience or aesthetic perception; or whether we can envision a form of aesthetic engagement in the absence of attention. We will need to turn to contemporary psychological and philosophical work on attention and consciousness to begin to resolve this.

Broadly, however, we can at this stage identify attention and the forms of awareness which it supports as one of the requisite psychological capacities in

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<sup>28</sup> The debate between Carroll and Stecker over the sufficiency of content for aesthetic experience and the necessity of valuing "for its own sake" is a lengthy one. See (Carroll, 2001, 2006a, 2006b, 2012) and (Stecker, 2001, 2006a, 2006b).

narrow aesthetic psychology. In several cases attention is the foundation for further and more complex forms of engagement, such as the kind of reflexive valuing of one's own experience that Iseminger identifies and calls aesthetic appreciation (or the "aesthetic state of mind"). This kind of appreciative mental activity is distinctively narrow and contrasts with the broader accounts in contemporary aesthetic psychology to which we now turn.

### **1.6.2 Broad approaches in contemporary aesthetic psychology**

It is important to understand that the disagreement between the broad and narrow approaches is not simply about the "aesthetic-making" character of experience. Indeed, a broad and narrow theorist might agree on the distinctively aesthetic aspect of experience: a certain form of phenomenology, say. Where the approaches differ is in the psychological processes and capacities experiences must involve for the "aesthetic-making" element they consider necessary.

For example, the broad theorist Yuriko Saito explicitly agrees with Carroll's content view, arguing that the aesthetic aspect of experience is supplied by the features and qualities of objects and phenomena perceived by the subject (Saito, 2007, p. 11). Saito, however, whilst agreeing with the significance of *content*, wishes to extend this beyond Carroll's examples of the aesthetic experience of art to "those responses that propel us toward everyday decisions and actions, without any accompanying contemplative appreciation" (Saito, 2007, p. 11). In other words, Saito wishes to preserve the significance of content in qualifying an experience as aesthetic, but also to change the way in which we understand the possible forms of engagement with that content.

This rejection of attentive and contemplative appreciation as necessary for aesthetic experience or aesthetic perception is distinctive of the broad approach to aesthetic psychology. It prompts the same question we asked of narrow



aesthetic psychology: what constitutes and is required for the kinds of states and forms of awareness characteristic of aesthetic experience? What kinds of responses to aesthetic features is Saito talking about? What level or form of *attention*—if any—to such features is required? What kind of awareness of those features or of our own responses is involved on Saito’s view? It is far from clear that these questions have been answered or clearly formulated by any account.

### 1.6.2.1 Broad aesthetic psychology, everyday aesthetics, and attention

It is striking how consistently attention of some kind serves to distinguish both everyday aesthetic experience from art-centred aesthetic experience and broad aesthetic psychology from narrow. For example, recall Irvin’s argument that

...particular moments and local experiences have an aesthetic quality about them. Being in the room you are in right now with its particular visual features and sounds; sitting in the way that you are sitting, perhaps crookedly in an uncomfortable chair feeling the air currents on your skin—all of these things impart a texture to your experience that...should be regarded as aesthetic. (Irvin, 2008a, p. 30)

Irvin makes this argument on the basis of an adaptation and attenuation of Dewey’s scheme for *an* experience, arguing that each satisfies the conditions he sets down for the institution of “felt harmony” and thus an experience possessing aesthetic character.<sup>29</sup> The idea of “aesthetic texture” isn’t entirely clear and Irvin discusses diverse examples, but the “imparting” of such texture to experience seems very different from the kind of appreciative activity characteristic of the narrow approach. In particular, there is no mention of attention “for its own sake”. Irvin—a broad theorist—is discussing a quite

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<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere Irvin makes the argument that itches and scratches are legitimate aesthetic phenomena. (Irvin, 2008b).

different form of awareness from, for example, Levinson's attentive aesthetic experience.

This is one of the reasons it is useful to consider the ways in which broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology intersect with the philosophy of art and everyday aesthetics. The connection between attending, noticing, interacting, and the aesthetic is a key aspect of the problematic relationship between everyday aesthetics and traditional philosophical aesthetics. Clarifying those connections and thus beginning to reconcile everyday and traditional aesthetics is one of aims this thesis. Indeed, I suggest that it is with reference to attention rather than to the problematic domains of the everyday, art, and nature that we should seek to understand experiences of the diverse candidates for aesthetic engagement.

Yet, despite the significance of attention for both fields, we should not overstate the similarity of the debate between broad and narrow aesthetic psychology, on the one hand, and everyday aesthetics and art-centred philosophical aesthetics, on the other. It is important to appreciate that the distinction between the broad and narrow approaches is not that between everyday aesthetics and the philosophy of art over, for example, paradigmatic objects of aesthetic experience. A narrow theorist might be quite happy, for example, to add Leddy's "everyday surface aesthetic qualities" (Leddy, 1995) to their ontology whilst retaining their interest in the "special" or "stand-out" experience of them. Indeed, a narrow theorist like Roger Scruton, who wishes to retain a contemplative element to aesthetic experience is nonetheless eager to adequately theorise the aesthetics of daily life. Scruton argues that "there is a kind of *disinterested contemplation* that is involved even in the most practical matters, and which is an integral part of knowing what we are doing and doing it well' (Scruton, 2007, pp. 239, my emphasis) and that aesthetic choices play a central role in the life of rational beings as "part of the attempt to match our

surroundings to ourselves and ourselves to our surroundings” (Scruton, 2009, p. 82).<sup>30</sup> In other words, the two sets of distinctions may cut across one another.

Nonetheless, the distinct accounts proposed by philosophers of art and everyday aesthetics to explain the kinds of experience involved in their domains often reflect the underlying disagreements between narrow and broad accounts. This is part of the reason the question of the nature of our aesthetic psychology is particularly pressing. Whether broad or narrow in our aesthetic psychology, we should be able to give an account of what we think is involved in having such a psychology, and in which contexts the aesthetic enters into experience. If we can do *that*, then we can also make some headway with the question of the relationship between the philosophy of art and everyday aesthetics.

### **1.6.3 Strengths and weaknesses of broad and narrow aesthetic psychology**

Each approach to the breadth of our aesthetic psychology has its strengths and weaknesses. The great strength of the broad approach is its ability to place the aesthetic at the heart of our lives in a manner which promises to retain the continuity of the kind of aesthetic responses Dewey and everyday aestheticians discuss with those that narrow theorists seek to analyse. As we have seen, philosophical aesthetics has focused on standout experiences of art and nature, neglecting the everyday, un-contemplative experiences of daily life. Broad aesthetic psychology is well placed to approach the question of the penetration of the aesthetic into daily experience.

Nonetheless, the narrow approach is correct in seeking to understand why and how it is that we seek to appreciate, analyse, and value the aesthetic features of our lives: be that art, nature, or the everyday. We do contemplate

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<sup>30</sup> See also (Scruton, 1979, 2011).

objects and their features; we talk about them, seeking to understand them, their effects on us and others; we argue about them and produce reasons in favour of our judgements. Such activities underpin everything from the business of criticism to the decoration of our homes. It seems plausible that part of the reason narrow accounts emphasise a certain set of prerequisites for aesthetic experience is that the satisfaction of those prerequisites puts us in a position to make and articulate aesthetic judgements or critical verdicts with some claim on others. That, it seems, requires a certain level of attention and awareness. This seems to be missing in many examples of the broad approach. In fact, the supposed inability of broad aesthetic experiences to furnish descriptions for use in aesthetic judgements has been cited as a reason to doubt their aesthetic status (D. Davies, forthcoming).

A related worry, articulated by Christopher Dowling, is that everyday aesthetics—and, by extension, broad aesthetic psychology—elides the Kantian distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful and thus includes many experiences which, whilst significant in some sense, are nonetheless nonaesthetic because they fail to involve “the normative aspect that renders certain judgements of particular interest to others” (Dowling, 2010, p. 240). The worry here is not that broad aesthetic experiences fail to furnish aesthetic descriptions—although they might—but that an account like Saito’s or Irvin’s which admits a wide variety of sensory experiences loses the fundamental distinction between idiosyncratic sensory experiences (the agreeable) and those which transcend the subject’s response (the beautiful). Such an account, it is argued, renders the aesthetic trivial or critically uninteresting. It is the critical aspect, Dowling and others argue, that aesthetics should seek to understand.

Indeed, part of what Kant sought to explain was the way in which we communicate our experience of beauty. Likewise, narrow accounts seek to understand and reflect the manner in which we feel justified in articulating and

urging upon others the attributions and judgements we make in aesthetic experience, often by grounding our response in disinterest or attention “for its own sake”. This interweaving of the phenomenological, epistemic, and evaluative is a key and attractive attribute of many narrow theories because it attempts to explain the intuitions and behaviour which surround paradigmatic aesthetic experiences. Yet, as we have seen, whilst such narrow accounts may do a good job of capturing what is distinctive about a certain form of aesthetic experiences of art or nature, they are unable to address the kinds of concerns highlighted by everyday aestheticians and other broad theorists.

Both approaches to aesthetic experience and aesthetic psychology capture something important about aesthetic life. However, both approaches also seem unable to deal with the other’s characterisation of our aesthetic psychology. For the broad theorist the narrow approach renders aesthetics rarefied, removed from the business of living in the world, whereas for the narrow theorist the broad approach sacrifices the distinctive and valuable aspects of the aesthetic which make it worth pursuing in the first place. We thus find ourselves at something of an impasse, seeking to accommodate the intuitions of both broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology.

The way out of this impasse lies in a shared characteristic of contemporary approaches to aesthetic psychology. The *weakness* of both approaches lies in the failure to develop accounts of aesthetic psychology which support the limits—or lack thereof—they place on aesthetic experience. In particular, neither approach adequately theorises the kinds of attention and awareness required for the various forms of aesthetic engagement proposed. Yet it is precisely the role of attention in aesthetic experience which most frequently emerges as the distinguishing feature of broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology. We need to remedy this.

## 1.8 Conclusion and Implications

We have seen that one of the motivations for broad approaches to aesthetic psychology lies in the suggestion that many everyday aesthetic experiences apparently take place either without our attending to and reflecting upon their aesthetic qualities or those of their objects; or they involve activities and environments to which we pay little if any attention at all, which again seems to contravene the attentive, contemplative, reflective, and reflexive tendencies in many narrow theories of aesthetic experience. For example, Kevin Melchionne writes that “the aesthetic virtues of the home are usually background qualities that affect our experience of the space without calling attention to themselves” (Melchionne, 1998, p. 199). Irvin suggests that several experiences of which we are barely conscious have an “aesthetic texture”: “simply producing a sensation *without reflecting on it*” (Irvin, 2008a, pp. 31, my emphasis). In these everyday accounts lie the hints of a broad aesthetic psychology. We need to understand the nature of such unattended experience and the forms of aesthetic experience of which we might be capable in the absence of attention.

Indeed, the everyday aesthetician’s interest in a pervasive and unattended aesthetic aspect to life is one that Saito articulates more clearly when she suggests that “Sometimes our aesthetic interests and concerns generate memorable aesthetic experiences, while other times they simply lead to further thoughts, judgements, or actions, without inspiring special moments that stand out from the flow of our daily affairs” (Saito, 2007, p. 9). As we have seen, it is with this lack of attention to appearances that so many narrow accounts of aesthetic experience, appreciation, and the perception of aesthetic qualities must take issue.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> There is a clear split between those who are willing to expand the range of objects and environments which support aesthetic experience, judgement, and value whilst maintaining that this must involve attention to those phenomena, and those who wish not only to expand

We can understand the role of attention in this disagreement in terms of the aspects of experience mentioned earlier. Attention, it might be claimed, is necessary for one or all of the phenomenology, structure, objects, content, and value of experience to be in place such that it be aesthetic. This appeal to attention is often underpinned by the belief that a certain kind of *discrimination* of aesthetic properties or qualities is required in order that our experience or perception be aesthetic; and that such discrimination requires attention. As we have seen, several theories require or urge that aesthetic responses be grounded in the discrimination of aesthetic qualities and the relations between those qualities and the nonaesthetic qualities from which they arise. Alternatively, the reflexive valuing of one's own experience of certain features ("appreciation") implicitly requires attention to the aesthetic qualities of the experience of that which we value. Others require that the discrimination of the perceptual manifold must be such that we can deploy descriptions of it in aesthetic judgement. The capacity for such discrimination and description, it is claimed, requires attention (D. Davies, forthcoming). In other words: the kind of awareness required for aesthetic experience and aesthetic appreciation requires attention on the narrow approach to aesthetic psychology.

I will argue that one way to resolve this disagreement is to adopt a broad approach to our aesthetic psychology, but to make this approach sophisticated enough to support the more complex phenomenological, cognitive, epistemic, and evaluative elements that narrow theorists demand. This won't be easy because we will have to deal with those accounts which want to reserve the aesthetic for the more complex or demanding forms of engagement. We will

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this range of objects and environments, but also the kinds of experience which we have of them. In the former camp are narrow theorists like (Budd, 2008; Dowling, 2010; Iseminger, 2006; Levinson, 1996b, forthcoming; Parsons & Carlson, 2008; Scruton, 2011; Sibley, 2001d). In the latter, (Berleant, 2010; Dewey, 2005; Irvin, 2008a, 2008b; Leddy, 2012b; Lee, 2010; Melchionne, 2011; Novitz, 2001 [1992]; Saito, 2007; Sartwell, 2003).

have to show why it is that those complex forms are *instances* of a broader aesthetic psychology rather than the fundamental concepts in terms of which aesthetic life should be explained.

Such a project will involve formulating and answering some pressing questions about the nature of attention, aesthetic perception, and the kinds of awareness and accessibility involved in different kinds of engagement with the world. Thus we will focus on our aesthetic psychology, and do so by considering our aesthetic perception and its relation to attention, the kinds of awareness involved in aesthetic perception, and the manner in which we graduate from unattended everyday aesthetic life to full-blown appreciative experiences of the world and its contents. To that end, in the next chapter we will focus on what I call “the attention condition” and show how it serves to both produce and solve problems for the broad and narrow theorist.

### **1.8.1 Implications**

Any discussion of aesthetic experience, the concept of the aesthetic, and aesthetic psychology will have consequences not only for its own subject matter but for debates and accounts which draw on them. In this section I want to briefly discuss some of the implications my account will have both for its own subject and for wider debates in aesthetics.

I will argue for a broad aesthetic psychology founded on a concept of aesthetic perception very different from the concepts of aesthetic experience to be found in contemporary literature. This concept of aesthetic perception locates the aesthetic character of perceptual experience in the assembly of perceptual representations of the external world and its contents. As a consequence aesthetic perception—and aesthetic character—is pervasive in perceptual experience and, I will argue, prior to the deployment of attention to either the objects of experience or our responses to those experiences. This



immediately undermines those accounts—some of which we have already encountered and whose analysis we will undertake in the next chapter—which seek to locate the aesthetic character of experience in a particular stance or approach to the world, such as the experience of the features of objects or our response to them “for their own sake”.

This pervasiveness of aesthetic perception has as a consequence the aestheticisation of everyday experience whether or not it is attended. Not only does this mean that our aesthetic psychology is broad, but that everyday aesthetics should be construed as studying one of the foundational and most significant forms of aesthetic experience of which we are capable. My account should thus serve to rebalance the dialectic surrounding everyday aesthetics and the philosophies of art and nature by placing the experiences they discuss on a continuum of aesthetic perception modified by attention.

However, for all that my account places aesthetic experiences of art, nature, and the everyday on a continuum with one another, it would be strange and implausible were there to be no differences between them. By distinguishing two different forms of aesthetic perception on the basis of attention I make it possible to understand paradigmatic experiences of art and nature as rich and appreciative forms of aesthetic perception capable of supporting aesthetic judgement, criticism, and communication. This has a number of consequences both for aesthetic experience and accounts which draw on it or related concepts.

Firstly, as I have suggested, the aesthetic character of experience can no longer depend on either psychological elements or evaluative stances subsequent to the deployment of attention or the forms of thought and mental activity which depend on attention. This includes anything which approximates to an “aesthetic attitude” (Stolnitz, 1969) or the insistence of a concept of

disinterestedness or experience “for its own sake” as conditional for aesthetic perception or experience.

However, secondly, it might still be the case that such conditions have a place in an account of aesthetic judgement. One of the consequences of locating the criterion of aesthetic perception in the assembly of perceptual experience is that questions of aesthetic character become separated from questions of aesthetic evaluation or judgement. We saw that Kant attempted to connect his theory of aesthetic psychology with his account of aesthetic judgement by narrowing the former to serve the needs of the latter. I have resisted that move and, consequently, have separated the question of aesthetic perception from that of aesthetic evaluation. This means that it might still be the case that, should we wish to preserve the normativity of aesthetic judgement, further conditions may need to be placed on aesthetic perception so as to ensure its appropriateness and protect against idiosyncrasy. My argument is that such conditions must be understood to be issues for aesthetic judgement rather than aesthetic perception. The working out of such conditions is a plausible extension of the work in this thesis.

Thirdly, if I alter our concept of aesthetic experience, how are we to understand the role of such experience in theories which attempt to use the concept in the definition or analysis of other phenomena? For example, according to aesthetic concepts of art we are to understand artworks as objects intended to function as (amongst other things) sources of aesthetic experience where “aesthetic experience” is frequently cashed out in terms of contemplation, absorption, intense feeling, intrinsic value, and detachment from practical ends.<sup>32</sup> Such views may also, but not necessarily, consider the

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<sup>32</sup> See (Beardsley, 1983), (Anderson, 2000), and (Iseminger, 2004). For a variation which focuses on the intention to realise aesthetic properties rather than aesthetic experience see (Zangwill, 2007).

value of art to lie in this function or capacity. Aesthetic theories of art vary and are subject to a number of objections which I won't discuss here.<sup>33</sup> As this thesis develops, however, it will become apparent that my non-evaluative concept of pervasive aesthetic perception complicates any attempt to understand art in terms of it, although it may not rule out a modified aesthetic theory according to which artworks aim at a certain form of (suitably specified) attentive aesthetic appreciation.

Fourthly, the way in which I will develop the role of attention in aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation will affect the way we understand the relationship between aesthetic perception, evaluation and criticism. As will become apparent, whilst I do not consider attention necessary for aesthetic perception, I do consider it necessary for the form of aesthetic perception (which I call "rich aesthetic perception") which supports appreciative activities such as the analysis and evaluation of formal features or qualities and knowledge of the origins of the emotions or feelings experienced in response to the appearance of objects.

I offer no fully worked-out theory of appreciation or criticism, but I think it suggestive of the function of criticism that aesthetic perception as I conceive it may be the fundamental concept with reference to which our aesthetic framework should be developed: it suggests, firstly, that the aim of the critic is to draw our attention to a particular set of appearances so that we perceive them in a certain way; and, secondly, that this attention is required in order that we understand both the reference of the critic's statement and have access to

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<sup>33</sup> For an overview, see (S. Davies, 1991) and (Stecker, 2003). The historical alternative is exemplified by, amongst others, Jerrold Levinson (Levinson, 1979, 1989, 1993).

and knowledge of the grounds of our own perceptual experience of the objects or qualities in question.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This brief characterisation of the aims of criticism draws on (Sibley, 2001a, 2001b).

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## Chapter Two

### The Attention Condition

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I feel that art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. A stillness which characterizes prayer, too, and the eye of the storm. I think that art has something to do with an arrest of attention in the midst of distraction.

*The Paris Review: The Art of Fiction No. 37*

Saul Bellow<sup>35</sup>

#### 2.1 Introduction

I suggested at the end of the last chapter that a productive way to understand the tension between the broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology is in terms of attention. Attention is a fundamental psychological capacity involved in perception, thought, and action. Thinking about the role of attention in aesthetics is thus to engage in aesthetic psychology. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the roles attention plays in some examples of broad and narrow accounts. It is characteristic of narrow aesthetic psychology to make aesthetic perception, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic appreciation conditional on attention of some kind. Conversely, a broad approach is less likely to consider attention necessary for all aesthetic engagement.

I will argue that some prominent narrow accounts make problematic assumptions about the necessity of attention for all aesthetic experience, whilst broad accounts do little better in explaining why attention is not required for all aesthetic experience. I will conclude that we need to be much clearer both about the roles attention plays in experience—*aesthetic and otherwise*—as well as the different forms of aesthetic engagement of which we are capable. Ultimately, I will argue that attention is necessary for some but not all forms of aesthetic

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<sup>35</sup> (Bellow, 1966).

engagement. However, before we get to that we will need a better understanding of attention as well as a model of aesthetic psychology in which to situate it. The latter task is one for the next chapter. Here we will focus on the attention condition and its role in broad and narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology.

## 2.2 A common-sense concept of attention

Before we tackle the role of attention in broad and narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology we need to outline a concept of attention with which to approach them.<sup>36</sup> The following is a common-sense concept of attention which will allow us to analyse those accounts.<sup>37</sup>

Nearly every work on attention begins with the following quotation from William James's *The Principles of Psychology*:

Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, of consciousness are of its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others, and is a condition which has a real opposite in the confused, dazed, and scatterbrained state... (James, 1980, pp. 403-404)

More recently, Christopher Mole has written the following:

We can expand upon [James's] remark like this: For minds like ours, in environments like ours, more than one sequence of mental states is possible. We end up with the train of thought that we actually have partly by chance, but partly because certain things catch our attention, and partly because we direct our attention onto certain things. A theory of attention is an attempt to give an account of this nonrandomness in

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<sup>36</sup> For overviews of attention and an introduction to these kinds of questions, see (Mole, 2009), (Watzl, 2011b, 2011c), and (Wu, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Later chapters will show that this concept needs much refinement and can be challenged in various ways. Those refinements should not affect the conclusions of this chapter.

our coming to have the train of thoughts that we in fact end up with. It is an attempt to explain the selectivity of our mental engagement with the world. That is what psychologists working on attention seek to explain. (Mole, 2011a, pp. 1-2)

Whether or not everyone really knows what attention is, our use of the concept in everyday life seems to follow certain patterns.<sup>38</sup> As James and Mole write, attention seems bound up with the selectiveness of perception and thought. We listen to and watch a presentation, focus on the speech and argument of the speaker, choose the seat we wish to take: each of these shapes and is shaped by shifts in attention. Attention and consciousness seem intimately related: there is a sense in which our consciousness is shaped by our attention and inattention. Our experience changes as our attention wanders. Attention can be caught involuntarily by a shout, a flashing light, an itch. Writing this sentence requires a complex combination of attention to its meaning, its place in a series of arguments which are themselves part of a larger single argument, as well as visual attention to the words on the screen of my computer, and the task of typing—all whilst a cat sits behind the screen and does its best to distract.

Thus selectivity, nonrandomness, focalisation, and a sense of the shaping of our mental lives seem to underlie the common-sense concept of attention. More than that, and as the examples above suggested, attention apparently aids and underpins perceptual and mental *discrimination*. As Wayne Wu writes, the phenomenology of attention “to what is perceived involves not just a way of perceptually locking on to a specific object. It is a way of cognitively locking on to it as well” (Wu, 2011, p. 93). The common-sense notion thus has both

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<sup>38</sup> Such patterns are open to dispute, but I shall try not to prejudice the question of the folk psychology of attention or its consistency here. We will address the viability of folk-psychological concepts of attention and its relation to consciousness in chapter four. On the question of whether there is a substantive or unambiguous folk-psychology of attention see (Mole, 2008), (De Brigard & Prinz, 2010), and (De Brigard, 2010).

phenomenological and epistemic (or functional) senses: items within the focus of attention *seem* different for the subject as well as being somehow *clearer* or more available for report, scrutiny, and claims about their nature. That is, attention seems to bring an alteration in both the nature of our experience and what we know or can reason about. Whether the former phenomenological sense depends on the latter epistemic or vice versa is a question we will leave open for now.

One way in which we might cash out the effect of attention on phenomenology (and, for some, its effect on perceptual or representational content) is by saying that attention makes the attributed properties of its object(s) more *determinate* (Nanay, 2009). Being the determinate of a determinable property can be understood as one way of being that property; and the determinate of one property can be the determinable of another: thus being red is determinate of being coloured but determinable of being scarlet. So, Nanay writes,

If I am attending to the colour of my office telephone, I attribute very determinate, (arguably super-determinate) properties to it. If, as it is more often the case, I am not attending to the colour of my office telephone, I attribute only determinable properties to it (of, say, being light-coloured or maybe just being coloured). (Nanay, 2009, p. 266)

So, one way of understanding the effect of attention is as aiding discrimination by making determinable properties more determinate.<sup>39</sup> There is, on Nanay's account, a phenomenological (and representational) difference between properties within and outside the focus of attention.

The common-sense concept is thus also importantly *contrastive*: "whatever occupies one's attention is in the foreground, rather than the background, of

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<sup>39</sup> For more on the determinate-determinable relation see (Funkhouser, 2006).



conscious experience” (Smithies, 2011a, p. 249). To put it another way, attention renders the properties or objects it focuses on more determinate whilst those it does not focus on remain determinable. (Although, we should note that we might attribute more determinate properties non-perceptually via memory, for example). This is part of what James means by our withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others. He writes, “Interest alone gives accent and emphasis, light and shade, background and foreground—intelligible perspective” (James, 1980, p. 402).

Again, this has both a phenomenological and an epistemic sense: certain things seem to occupy the centre of awareness, sometimes quite literally occupying the centre of our visual field or seeming to be the focus of one's auditory experience. Consider, for example, the experience of listening to a jazz trio and choosing to focus on the bass. We don't cease to hear the piano and drums, but our phenomenology seems to alter, the bass seems to come to the fore as we attend to it. We might model this in phenomenal terms by saying that the piano and drums have become *peripheral* to the bass, which is now at the centre of our consciousness, whilst the other instruments are at the fringe of consciousness (or, as is more likely, some suitably intermediate point) (Watzl, 2011a). We might, therefore, be in a different epistemic position regarding the bass and its auditory and musical qualities than we are in relation to the piano and drums: our consciousness might, for example, be more fine-grained as a result of the centrality and selection of the bass.<sup>40</sup>

Another distinction is important here: that between something *catching* our attention and our attention being intentionally directed toward something.

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<sup>40</sup> It is important to point out that the example is not about shifting visual attention toward the bass: that would very plausibly supply more information about the nature of the bass-player's activity; but this would also entail a very clear change in the nature of the experience. The example above, in contrast, focuses on a phenomenal shift as the result of shift in auditory or mental attention.

Salient stimuli such as a fast moving object, a flash of bright colour, or some personally significant stimulus such as our name *involuntarily* capture our attention, perhaps bringing about a bodily movement, a shift in our stream of consciousness, or both. Alternatively, we may *choose* to attend to a computer screen and to reflect on what we are typing; or we might look more closely at the left hand corner of a painting, or the distribution of blue across the canvas. This voluntary-involuntary distinction is an important one in the common-sense concept of attention and is central to attention research in general.

So, according to the common-sense conception, attention is involved in the selectivity of engagement that characterises perception, mental life, even action. Contemporary debates about the role and nature of attention have been concerned with the kind of rational, cognitive, and behavioural access attention gives us to perceptual experiences. They have also been concerned with the kinds of consciousness possible in the presence and absence of attention. How does attentiveness shape our phenomenology: is consciousness possible *outside* of attention? What kind of access do we have to perceptual and other phenomena outside of the focus of attention? We will address these questions in detail later. For now we will use the common-sense concept of attention to analyse broad and narrow aesthetic psychology. Let's begin by formulating what I call "the attention condition".

### **2.3 The attention condition**

The idea underlying the attention condition is that attention constrains and underpins the elements and operations of our aesthetic psychology. Particular forms of the condition go a long way toward modelling the breadth or narrowness of any given account. The accompanying justification for that form of the condition should approach a complete account of that particular mental state: why it is the mental state that it is, what that involves, and why it is or is

not necessary for attention to be deployed in the instantiation of that mental state. The divisive issue between broad and narrow accounts is usually whether attention is necessary for our possession of *aesthetic* mental states.<sup>41</sup> Two typical examples of the attention condition might be the following:

The attention condition for aesthetic experience

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for aesthetic experience that we attend to the object(s) or content(s) of that experience and/or to the experience itself.

The attention condition for aesthetic perception

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for aesthetic perception that we attend to the object(s), properties, qualities, or features perceived. (Alternatively, that the perception of the object and/or its qualities themselves requires attention.)

Notice that these conditions do not specify whether it is the *aesthetic* aspect which requires attention or the particular state, process, or experience it seeks to analyse: *aesthetic experience* or *aesthetic perception*. (It might, of course, be both.) We could frame similar statements for almost any term a theorist might choose: aesthetic appreciation, the aesthetic state of mind, aesthetic judgement, aesthetic response, aesthetic pleasure, and so on.

### 2.3.1 Forms of the attention condition

With this distinction between attention securing aesthetic character and its supporting particular mental states or experiences in mind we might reframe

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<sup>41</sup> There might be an attention condition of one sort or another on a great many mental states unconnected to aesthetic psychology. Its intuition and form is such that elements of the philosophy of mind, moral psychology, and epistemology might all be analysed in terms of the attention they involve or demand and, crucially, the cognitive, rational, and communicative processes thereby implicated. In chapter four we will see how this is the case with, amongst other things, demonstrative thought.

the attention condition for aesthetic experience and perception in terms of what attention is thought to secure:

The attention condition for aesthetic experience<sub>1</sub>

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for an experience to be distinctively or characteristically *aesthetic*, that we attend to the object(s) or content(s) of that experience and/or to the experience itself.

The attention condition for aesthetic experience<sub>2</sub>

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for a form of aesthetic engagement to be an aesthetic *experience*, that we attend to the object(s) or content(s) of that experience and/or to the experience itself.

The attention condition for aesthetic perception<sub>1</sub>

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for an episode of perception to be distinctively or characteristically *aesthetic*, that we attend to the object(s), properties, qualities, or features perceived.

The attention condition for aesthetic perception<sub>2</sub>

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for a form of aesthetic engagement to be an episode of aesthetic *perception*, that we attend to the object(s), properties, qualities, or features perceived.

It will be my contention that the forms of the attention condition implicit in most narrow accounts are mistakenly framed as the first formulation rather than the second: that is, such accounts mistakenly claim that attention is necessary for any instance of aesthetic engagement and, thus, that our aesthetic psychology is beholden to attention in a strong sense, rather than holding that

attention is necessary for some but not all aesthetic mental states. I will argue that we must be more sophisticated in our understanding of the place of attention in our aesthetic psychology. The role of the variants of the attention condition will be to help us to understand which elements of our aesthetic psychology and the practices which emerge from them require attention and which do not.

In the next chapter I will argue that the aesthetic enters our psychology much earlier than is often thought. I will outline an account of aesthetic perception in which the core concept of the aesthetic is bound up with the representation of individual objects possessing integrated properties of appearance. I will argue that this goes on in the absence of attention and that attention serves to modify aesthetic perception and make aesthetic *appreciation* possible. In other words, I will argue that there is no attention condition on aesthetic perception (of one sort), but that there is such a condition on aesthetic appreciation.

The more nuanced forms of the attention condition allow for complex relationships between different mental states and aesthetic character. For example, if some form of attention is required for aesthetic experience, then it might be thought likely that attention is required for aesthetic perception as well. However, whether or not the attention condition for aesthetic experience entails the attention condition for aesthetic perception is not a generalisation we can make *unless* we hold one of the following: a) all aesthetic experience involves perceiving *aesthetically* rather than some nonaesthetic perception which we then respond to in a manner which constitutes aesthetic experience; b) aesthetic experience just is aesthetic perception and vice versa; and c) aesthetic experience is always straightforwardly perceptual.

Similarly, if what it is for an experience to be aesthetic is that we perceive aesthetically during that experience; and what it is to perceive aesthetically

ineliminably involves attention, then aesthetic experience will inherit the attention condition as it applies to aesthetic perception. What this shows is that we need to be clear about the relationships between these respective states as elements within our aesthetic psychology because each variant implies something different about the role of attention.

## **2.4 The attention condition and aesthetic psychology**

The great strengths of approaching the division between broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology in terms of an attention condition are, firstly, that the emphasis on attention and inattention reflects the differences between the examples and analyses of each approach; and, secondly, that we can then use the condition(s) to explore the elements of any proposed aesthetic psychology and dig out its aesthetic and attentional presuppositions. In this chapter we will do this using the common-sense concept of attention. Later we will bring the battery of contemporary approaches to attention to bear on the question of its role in aesthetic psychology.

The key distinction between the broad and narrow forms of the attention condition is in where they consider the aesthetic to enter our psychology. For narrow accounts, attention is necessary in order for our mental states or experiences to deserve the qualification “aesthetic”: this might be because the aesthetic is understood as involving a particular form of scrutiny of perceptual qualities, a particular evaluative stance toward such scrutiny, or an affective or emotional response toward those qualities and our scrutiny of them. In other words, on the narrow approach, something about the aesthetic engagement with and response to appearances requires attention.

For broad accounts, attention constrains *which* aesthetic mental states are instantiated, but there are experiences or mental states with aesthetic character in the absence of attention. So, if mental states or experiences require a form of

perceptual discrimination or response in order that they be aesthetic, the broad approach does not consider that discrimination or response to require attention. In terms of the common-sense concept of attention, broad approaches do not require the selection and/or foregrounding of the objects of aesthetic experience. In short, in broad aesthetic psychology the aesthetic overflows attention; in narrow aesthetic psychology it does not.

#### **2.4.1 Narrow aesthetic psychology and the attention condition**

We'll begin by looking at the role of attention in narrow approaches, firstly, because these are the dominant forms of account in contemporary philosophical aesthetics and, secondly, because it will be useful to see how broad approaches resist narrow constraints on aesthetic engagement. Narrow forms of the attention condition characteristically make attention necessary for any and all forms of aesthetic perception, aesthetic appreciation, and aesthetic experience. Where they differ is in which terms or concepts they use to characterise aesthetic engagement and in what they consider to be the *aesthetic* aspect of such engagement. In other words, narrow aesthetic psychology always requires attention, but does so for different reasons. Sometimes those reasons derive from the belief that the aesthetic aspect of a state requires attention and sometimes from the belief that the state or experience itself requires attention. Sometimes, of course, it is both.

The common-sense concept of attention plays a significant role in some central narrow accounts of aesthetic perception and experience. Some kind of focusing or concentration of consciousness accompanied by a (perhaps willed) withdrawal from other elements of one's surroundings and one's consciousness are highly characteristic of narrow approaches to aesthetic experience. That is, in many theories of aesthetic experience one is simultaneously open and receptive to some elements of experience whilst suppressing others. For

example, Monroe Beardsley argues that “the painting and the music invite us to do what we would seldom do in ordinary life—pay attention *only* to what we are seeing or hearing, and ignore everything else. They summon up our energies for an unusually narrow field of concern” (Beardsley, 1981, p. 528). Later, he wrote that, “a person is having an aesthetic experience during a particular stretch of time if and only if the greater part of his mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which his *primary attention* is concentrated” (Beardsley, 1982a, pp. 81, my emphasis). In what can be understood as a development of Beardsley's view, Jerrold Levinson writes that

to appreciate something aesthetically is to *attend to its forms, qualities, and meanings for their own sakes*, and to their interrelations, but also to attend to the way in which all such things emerge from the particular set of low-level perceptual features that define the object on a nonaesthetic plane. (Levinson, 1996b, pp. 6, my emphasis)

What we find in Beardsley and Levinson is an association between the presentation in experience of objects, an apparent focalisation or narrowing of consciousness both in itself and in regard to the presented qualities of the objects, their pleasurable appreciation, and the deployment of *attention* as somehow central to (or in some sense identical with) this perceptual and mental operation. This is characteristic of the role of attention in the narrow approach and reflects both the Kantian background to contemporary aesthetics as well as Twentieth Century developments of the “aesthetic attitude”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jerome Stolnitz famously (yet more cautiously than is often allowed) defined the aesthetic attitude as “disinterested and sympathetic attention to any object of awareness whatever for its own sake alone” (Stolnitz, 1969, p. 19). By “disinterested” Stolnitz means “that we do not look at the object out of concern for any ulterior purpose which it may serve” (20). In a fairly familiar manner, then, Stolnitz excludes utilitarian, cognitive, acquisitive, causal, or sociological interest. Rather, “the aesthetic attitude “isolates” the object and focuses upon it—the “look” of the rocks,



The common-sense understanding of attention is used to point toward some crucial aspect of an experience or object; be that a certain family of properties, our engagement with them, or the development of mental states involving some reciprocal relationship between the two. That is, attention is invoked in narrow aesthetic psychology to secure one or both of the right kind of *content* and *awareness* for aesthetic experience. Attention also seems to be the way in which content and awareness are approached in the right kind of way: recall Beardsley's specification of mental activity "united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object". Attention, here, is implicated in appropriately grounding the pleasure as well as the content of aesthetic experience.

This is enough to demonstrate why broad approaches encounter opposition from narrow ones. For the narrow approach attention is key in somehow causing experience to focus or narrow in the appropriate phenomenological, epistemic, or evaluative sense. Attention underpins contemplation, the awareness of interrelations, and their being valued "for their own sake": all of which might be thought necessary for aesthetic experience. On such a view *unattended* experiences and objects cannot qualify as aesthetic *even if*, for example, they involve aesthetic properties or qualities.

That is, even if we allow that there are aesthetic properties, qualities, features, or descriptions in everyday life, or that such features affect experience in some way, their being perceived or experienced *as aesthetic* requires attention: which serves to narrow our aesthetic psychology. Attention is required in order

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the sound of the ocean, the colors in the painting" (20). In another marked similarity to the commonsense concept of attention he writes that "the object is not seen in a fragmentary or passing manner, as it is in practical perception, e.g., in using a pen for writing. Its whole nature and character are dwelt upon" (20). By "*sympathetic*" attention Stolnitz means that we must "accept the object "on its own terms"," we must appreciate its individual quality (21).

that we be aware of such qualities in the right kind of way. Indeed, if we recall the list of ways in which a state of mind might be distinctively aesthetic, then we can see that, regardless of which option we choose—phenomenology, structure, object(s), content, value—construing attention as the gate-keeper for aesthetic perception, experience, or appreciation rules out a broad aesthetic psychology.

However, that narrow accounts use the term “attention” and its cognates by no means implies that each draws on a theory of attention or its role in aesthetic experience. It is precisely because attention seems to admit of common-sense readings that we find it deployed in accounts of aesthetic experience. So when we speak of “X’s account of attention” or something similar, we must be clear that this is often—although not always—something implicit and based on assumptions or intuitions about the relationship between attention and awareness. That this is a problem was part of the argument of the previous chapter. With this in mind, let’s look a bit more carefully at contemporary narrow views.

#### **2.4.1.1 Attention and content**

As we mentioned earlier, narrow accounts involving an attention condition differ in what they consider attention to secure such that their particular choice of mental state is aesthetic. The key issue is what they consider the “aesthetic-making” element(s) of our mental lives to be. Is it a question of the content or objects of such states, of our affective and evaluative response to them, of the experience we have whilst so responding, some combination? Is attention required for any or all of these?

A narrow content-orientated attention condition can be seen in the work of Noël Carroll. He argues that “an aesthetic experience can be identified in terms of its content, without referring to affective states like pleasure, disinterested or

otherwise, or to evaluative postures, such as finding the experience of such properties to be valuable for their own sake” (Carroll, 2006a, p. 91). His is a deflationary account because he rejects any single unifying criterion for aesthetic experience; but he remains a narrow theorist about aesthetic psychology because he demands attention for the perception of aesthetic content. In his consideration of the ways in which we perceive aesthetic properties he writes,

We may attend to these properties either directly or apperceptively. That is, we may either attend to the sadness in the dance or we may attend, at one remove, to the way in which the organization of the elements of the choreography elicits the impression of sadness from us. *Either way, the experience is an aesthetic experience in virtue of the objects upon which our attention is focused.* (Carroll, 2012, pp. 173, my emphasis)

Carroll is using attention in different senses here.<sup>43</sup> We can attend to the qualities of the artwork either as appearing (in some suitable sense) in the work; or we can attend to our responses as they are elicited by the qualities of the work. Our experience is aesthetic in virtue of its content and that content is secured via direct or indirect attention to the aesthetic properties of its objects. The reflexivity involved in Carroll’s apperceptive aesthetic experience is one which he could not secure in the absence of focused attention to our own mental states and affective responses. Carroll’s account, whilst it rejects the necessity of disinterest or valuing “for its own sake”, requires a sophisticated and attentive engagement with the objects of perception and the experiences they elicit.

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<sup>43</sup> Carroll also thinks attention is involved in other art-appropriate responses which may well operate alongside aesthetic experiences. He writes that “by characterizing aesthetic experiences of artworks in this way I am not saying that these are the only kinds of experiences that artworks qua art do afford. Artworks, on my view, may legitimately invite a wide range of other kinds of experiences, including moral, cognitive, religious, political, and sexual ones. My point is rather that...Aesthetic experience concerns how those points and purposes are embodied or advanced. The moral, cognitive, religious, and so on content of the work is more of the nature of what is embodied” (Carroll, 2012, p. 174).

Yet we should ask whether Carroll's view is more plausible not as an account of *aesthetic experience* but as an one of *aesthetic perception* understood as the perceptual (or apperceptual) *attribution* of one or more of a disjunctive list of aesthetic and expressive properties. This is important, because we are aiming to understand the role of attention in the different elements of our aesthetic psychology; and it seems plausible that we might want to distinguish the perceptual attribution (or representation) of qualities—i.e. aesthetic perception—from aesthetic experience or aesthetic appreciation.

Why distinguish between aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience in this way? To perceive something is, it is usually thought, to experience that thing. But what do *aestheticians* tend to mean by "experience"? Something *more*, I suggest, than just perceptual experience. As we will see, to suggest that an experience involves the aesthetic in some way is not the same, for many aestheticians, as saying that this experience is an "aesthetic experience". On many accounts of aesthetic experience to characterise an experience as "aesthetic" is to suggest that its *dominant* character is aesthetic. Indeed, most accounts demand precisely this of an experience in order that it merit the term "aesthetic experience". This is part of what attention is meant to be securing in narrow aesthetic psychology.

One of the benefits of distinguishing aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience lies in the way it allows us to resist the need to qualify an entire experience as aesthetic—through some "for its own sake"-type condition, for example—before, say, aesthetic qualities may play a role in experience. We may then ask whether aesthetic perception may occur in conditions which preclude or do not amount to aesthetic experience.

So, one way of thinking about Carroll's account might be as a view about aesthetic perception rather than aesthetic experience. His view is that it is the

perception or discrimination of aesthetic properties that makes for aesthetic experience. This, he says, is all we can ever mean by “aesthetic experience”. Carroll’s most plausible response to the suggestion that he is describing something else—something we might more properly call aesthetic perception—would be to point out that experiences are characterised by their contents and, thus, an experience with aesthetic content is characterised by that content, and hence should be called an aesthetic experience.

However, such a response is only plausible because Carroll is presuming that the content in question is *already* the focus of our attention: we are *already* looking at the painting, listening to the concert, reading the poem. As such, it is unproblematic to suggest that our experience should be characterised by the aesthetic content Carroll identifies. His assumption is that this content serves to characterise experience precisely because we are attending to it and its nonaesthetic bases.

So, what we actually need to identify in the content-orientated account is, firstly, a question about the way in which we characterise experience: how do we decide when an experience doesn’t simply *involve* the aesthetic, perhaps through the perception of aesthetic content, but should be *characterised* as “aesthetic experience”; secondly, what role does *attention* play in mediating that transition, if transition it be, between aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience? Is Carroll really talking about aesthetic *perception*, but doing so with the assumption that such perception always involves attention and should thus be characterised as aesthetic experience by virtue of attention’s focusing of perceptual experience?

Is the view that aesthetic *perception* requires attention plausible? In the reflexive case of perceiving the aesthetic properties of an artwork via attention to our own responses this seems plausible. However, the question of whether

*all* aesthetic content requires attention to be perceived remains open. (As, of course, does the question of the correct characterisation of aesthetic perception.) If this is correct then we must resist Carroll's equation of aesthetic perception with aesthetic experience even before we have decided whether he is right to eliminate the phenomenological, affective, and evaluative conditions that others have placed on aesthetic experience.

Why is this significant? Well, firstly, because the relationship between key elements in our aesthetic psychology is one of the concerns of this thesis: Carroll appears to suggest that aesthetic perception amounts to aesthetic experience. I will suggest that things are more complex. Secondly, if we resist the equation of aesthetic perception with aesthetic experience or aesthetic appreciation, and can establish that the former might take place in the absence of attention, then we will have made a substantial step toward a broad aesthetic psychology. The key question, of course, is whether a content-orientated account *must* involve an attention condition on aesthetic perception. I will suggest that we can frame a different account of aesthetic perception which does not involve an attention condition in either its aesthetic or perceptual guises.

#### **2.4.1.2 A non-minimalist account of aesthetic experience**

Carroll's narrow account centres on his content criterion for aesthetic experience. The apprehension of this content, he suggests, requires attention. Other narrow accounts make similar demands but do so on the basis of additional criteria. Let's look now at a narrow view which demands more than content and thus makes a stronger claim on attention.

Jerrold Levinson is committed to both a substantive or "non-minimalist" account of aesthetic experience and an attention condition on such experience. Indeed, on his account, it is aesthetic attention which provides the material for

aesthetic perception, which may then develop into aesthetic experience. Levinson characterises a “minimalist” conception of aesthetic experience like Carroll’s as “one according to which aesthetic experience is just experience in which there is perception or cognition of aesthetic and/or formal properties of some object” (Levinson, forthcoming). He suggests that such a view is unable to explain why aesthetic experience is normally considered rewarding, valuable, or worthwhile. Indeed, in his discussion of the shortcomings of minimalist accounts Levinson nicely pinpoints the concern we have been addressing:

[When] artworks are mediocre, or landscapes are ordinary, it is not clear that we are having *aesthetic* experience of them when we register some of their formal and/or aesthetic properties...That is to say, their mediocrity or ordinariness may be enough to preclude the aesthetic mode of experience, understood as one normally comporting some measure of absorption and satisfaction. But even when artworks are outstanding and landscapes are impressive, it is implausible to maintain that we have aesthetic experience of them every time we adequately register any of their formal or aesthetic features. Aesthetic experience is not as common as all that! (Levinson, forthcoming)

Levinson requires more than the perception of aesthetic properties in order to speak of aesthetic experience: more than content. Aesthetic experience is *special*. Mediocre objects do not engage us in the right way; and nor, necessarily, do masterpieces. Mere registration—or mere perception—of certain properties does not suffice: for aesthetic experiences are uncommon and valuable, and those properties are fairly common. Simply noting the formal structure of a poem or the composition of a painting is not sufficient, for Levinson, to engender or merit the term “aesthetic experience”. To call this aesthetic experience *debases* the concept: “Wouldn’t it be more honest to just call such noting a *perceptual experience*, or even more simply, a *perception*, in which some

property, formal or aesthetic, is being apprehended?" (Levinson, forthcoming).<sup>44</sup>

We are starting to see the kind of structure a narrow theorist like Levinson may build. Some form of perception sits at the foundation of aesthetic experience, but more is required before we start characterising or qualifying our experience as aesthetic *even if* we have apprehended or represented qualities or features which might form the appropriate content of such experience. We now have two questions: Why shouldn't such perception be regarded as aesthetic; and what kinds of conditions does a narrow theorist like Levinson place on our experience in order that such perception turns into aesthetic experience? We will start by considering the second question, which should lead us naturally to the first.

#### **2.4.1.3 Aesthetic attention and aesthetic perception**

Levinson's narrow account of aesthetic experience is built on two other concepts of aesthetic engagement: aesthetic attention and aesthetic perception. He writes that,

Aesthetic experience is experience involving aesthetic perception of some object, grounded in aesthetic attention to the object, and in which there is

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<sup>44</sup> The commitment to either the inherent worth or the neutrality of aesthetic experience represents a real divide between many aestheticians: one which cuts across the domains of art, nature, and the everyday. It also tends to go hand in hand with a commitment to either a substantial/non-minimal or a minimal account of aesthetic experience (or more specific concept). Levinson insists on retaining a concept of aesthetic experience that involves such experiences being "inherently worthwhile", although he is careful to emphasise that this value is not to be understood in terms of pleasure, even as he insists on the centrality of "responding hedonically, affectively, or evaluatively, in a positive manner" in aesthetic experience (Levinson, forthcoming). In this he agrees with an everyday aesthetician like Thomas Leddy (Leddy, 2012b) but disagrees with Yuriko Saito. Indeed, Saito explicitly endorses an approach analogous to Carroll's (Saito, 2007, pp. 10-11). Once again the question of the *value* and *valuing* involved in aesthetic experience and the category of the aesthetic in general comes to the fore. This is something we will have to address in order to understand the role of the aesthetic in everyday life, but for now, let me say that I am not committed to an inherently positive or honorific conception of the aesthetic or aesthetic experience in general.



a positive hedonic, affective, or evaluative response to the perception itself or the content of that perception. (Levinson, forthcoming)

Aesthetic experience, for Levinson, requires aesthetic attention to an object, which grounds the aesthetic perception of it, which in turn supplies the appropriate content when suitably related to our response; a response which must be positive in the right kind of way with respect to the object and our experience of it. He divides these elements in two: “the right sort of *attention or perception* at the core of the experience” and “a positive *response or reaction* toward that core attending or perceiving, one of a hedonic, affective or evaluative nature” (Levinson, forthcoming).

It seems that Levinson’s “aesthetic perception” is different from the perception of formal qualities in the way we have been discussing. He thinks something further is required to merit the term: something which narrows his account of our aesthetic psychology. Likewise, by “aesthetic attention” is meant something more than that we attend to something. Let’s consider what Levinson means by aesthetic attention and aesthetic perception and the relations in which he places them in his aesthetic psychology.

By *aesthetic attention* is meant attention focused on an object’s character, or otherwise put, its perceivable forms and properties, for their own sake, in their full individuality, apart from the utility of so attending, on whatever content emerges from such forms and properties, and on relationships among such forms, properties and contents. *Aesthetic perception* can then be understood as the upshot of aesthetic attending, a perceptual engagement with an object in which both the imaginative capacity and the embodied corporeality of the perceiving subject should be understood to play a role... (Levinson, forthcoming)

Levinson makes aesthetic attention (and hence attention in general) prior to aesthetic perception and, consequently, prior to aesthetic experience. In other words, Levinson subscribes to an attention condition on aesthetic attention (by

definition), aesthetic perception, and aesthetic experience. However, the relationship between attention, *aesthetic* attention, and aesthetic perception is not entirely transparent. His position seems to be that aesthetic attention is both the perceptual and reflective orientation to a particular family of properties or qualities *as well as* the intention or disposition to exclude concerns such as function. He thus builds in a “for its own sake”-type consideration from the very beginning, which means that the subsequent hedonic, affective, or evaluative response inherits the same exclusion of the functional and instrumental. This distinguishes his view from Carroll’s because the content account firmly rejects the need for a “for its own sake”-type condition on our attention to aesthetic qualities.

Now, Levinson’s “aesthetic attention” is a fairly broad sense of attention amounting to both perceptual and mental selectivity and something very similar to an aesthetic attitude, something which conduces to aesthetic experience without amounting to it. Attention itself is not sufficient: “For”, Levinson writes, “attentiveness, in whatever degree, is not all there is to regarding or approaching something aesthetically. There is also the *manner* in which one’s attention is directed, in turn partly a function of what *motivates* such attention, as well as one’s willingness to be affected by what such attention discloses. In addition, there may be differences in the *quality* of the attention itself” (Levinson, forthcoming). Thus Levinson modifies attention by demanding a suitable mental orientation or disposition, which should remind us once again of the aesthetic attitude and the suppression of concerns such as the functional or personal significance of the objects of experience.

This receptivity or attitude is a key element and needs to be separated from straightforward attention. Levinson’s aesthetic attention is a combination of attention and attitude: it is a question of disposition and perceptual orientation. Whilst it makes little sense to speak of attention as the kind of thing which can

be aesthetic, we might, it seems, consider the grounds for our attending (and for our maintaining that attention) as being so. Indeed, this seems to be the case on Levinson's own terms: "The aesthetic attitude is a matter of being *disposed* to attend, perceive, respond or experience in a certain manner; it is not itself as such a *kind* of attending or perceiving or responding or experiencing" (Levinson, forthcoming). Hence the modification of attention such that we attend to the right sort of thing in the right kind of way.

So, if aesthetic attention is the combination of orientation (i.e. attention) and attitude, what is aesthetic *perception*, which seems to stand halfway between the initial selective engagement with the world and the full-blown aesthetic experience? It seems that Levinson must be construing aesthetic perception as a success term. Aesthetic attention sets us up for "perceptual engagement" of a fairly sophisticated sort: one which involves our imaginative capacity and "embodied corporeality"; and if that engagement takes place, then we have perceived aesthetically. (Although we have not had an aesthetic experience as yet). So far this is similar to Carroll's content-orientated view, in which aesthetic experience is the appropriate perception of aesthetic properties. The key difference, of course, is Levinson's insistence that aesthetic attention be "for its own sake".

Whilst Levinson make it clear that aesthetic attention is necessary for aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience, he certainly does not think aesthetic attention *sufficient* for aesthetic experience.

For aesthetic *attention* is one thing, and aesthetic *experience* another, and bigger, thing. That attention is directed to certain aspects of an object, namely, formal and/or aesthetic ones, and to relations among them, may perhaps be enough to justify categorizing such *attention* as aesthetic attention. But that aesthetic attention is occurring is not enough, I submit, to justify categorizing the experience of which it is part as an aesthetic *experience*. (Levinson, forthcoming)

Levinson, on our terms, places another attention-involving condition on aesthetic experience: the second response-orientated element. Aesthetic experience, then, involves an attention condition on aesthetic perception such that we are provided with appropriate content; but it also involves a further affective, hedonic, or evaluative response which must also involve attention. This condition is aimed at securing the right kind of awareness of that content: attention must be directed both *inward* toward our response and to facilitate the narrowing of awareness or the exclusion of nonaesthetic concerns; and *outward* to the object and its qualities.

By a positive *hedonic, affective* or *evaluative* response or reaction to the perceptual experience being had is meant responses or reactions such as the following: enjoying or savoring such perceiving, being moved by what one is perceiving, registering an emotion in relation to what one is perceiving, valuing the perceptual activity, admiring what is revealed in the perceptual experience being had, and so on. These instances hopefully suffice to give an adequate idea of the sort of response or reaction required to turn an occasion of aesthetic *perception* into an occasion of aesthetic *experience*. (Levinson, forthcoming)

This is a fairly diverse list unified by the constancy of our response's reference to perceptual experience and the positive nature of this response. The role of this range of responses seems to be to secure the overall characterisation of our experience as aesthetic and, once again, builds in the inherently *positive* nature of the aesthetic to which Levinson is committed. The aesthetic content seems to be provided, for Levinson, by the first element of aesthetic attention and aesthetic perception. This provides, as it were, the *aesthetic*, whereas the second element provides the *experience*. This is a vital point in our consideration of aesthetic psychology: we are interested in what *makes* experience aesthetic and the psychological capacities or mental states required to instantiate or possess that character.

The key requirement for Levinson appears to be the “for its own sake” criterion on all stages of our aesthetic psychology: if attention, perception, and experience are not focused on aesthetic qualities and our responses to them for their own sake—if other considerations and ends impinge—then we lose the right to qualify the entire state as aesthetic. Carroll rejected this, arguing that we need only characterise our mental states by their content, not by the manner in which we entertain that content. Our question then became whether attention should be construed as necessary for that content to be perceived. That is, is there an attention condition on aesthetic perception in either the aesthetic- or perception-qualifying forms of the condition? Might it be that case that aesthetic perception does not require attention whilst other, more developed, or more psychologically complex states and experiences *do*?

We should consider the possibility that a narrow account like Levinson’s characterises a “non-minimal” concept of aesthetic experience whilst failing to do justice to other forms of aesthetic engagement like aesthetic perception or aesthetic response. Levinson allows that we perceive aesthetically prior to or separately from aesthetic experience: it is his second element of response rather than some further perception which renders *experience* characteristically aesthetic.<sup>45</sup> Why, then, should aesthetic *perception* require attention? I suggest that Levinson demands attention because he does not distinguish aesthetic *perception* from aesthetic *appreciation* in the right way, and thus places an attention condition on aesthetic perception where none is required.

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<sup>45</sup> In this Levinson may be revealing his debt to, amongst others, Monroe Beardsley who, despite acknowledging the kinds of concerns Levinson does in his understanding of aesthetic perception also maintained a commitment to a phenomenological criterion of aesthetic experience. (See (Beardsley, 1981) and the developments in (Beardsley, 1982b).) Beardsley, in turn, was one of the few prominent Twentieth Century aestheticians to be influenced by Dewey.

## 2.4.2 Towards a broad aesthetic psychology: Distinguishing aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation

In the next chapter I will develop a map of our aesthetic psychology in which one of the key divisions is between aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. I will argue that there is no attention condition on the former, but that there is one on the latter. In order to lay the groundwork for that account I will argue here that Levinson's narrow account fails to adequately distinguish aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. In particular, this account makes linked epistemic and awareness demands of aesthetic perception which are too strong: by which I mean that Levinson specifies ways of knowing and being aware of objects and their properties which are unnecessary for aesthetic perception, but which are quite plausibly required for aesthetic appreciation.

Levinson's account of aesthetic perception is fairly demanding. As we have seen, he specifies that aesthetic perception is grounded in a complex notion of aesthetic attention which involves focus not simply on the perceivable forms and properties of an object and the content which emerges from them, but also "on relationships among such forms, properties and contents". This becomes clearer if we analyse a different formulation of Levinson's view.

Elsewhere, Levinson seeks to analyse distinctively aesthetic *pleasure* rather than "aesthetic experience" as such. In a foreshadowing of his characterisation of aesthetic experience, he writes that "pleasure in an object is aesthetic when it derives from apprehension of and reflection on the object's individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to the structural base on which it rests" (Levinson, 1996b, p. 6). This pleasure, it seems, is part of the response-element of his later characterisation of aesthetic experience.

We can understand Levinson's model of aesthetic appreciation as being one of bringing certain concerns to the foreground of awareness. We direct our

“attention to the relation between content and form—between what a work represents or expresses or suggests, and the means it uses to do so” (Levinson, 1996b, p. 10). This phenomenal contrast amounts also to a cognitive one as we focus mental resources on detecting and understanding the formal, semantic, and expressive dependency relations that hold between the object's non-aesthetic and aesthetic properties. After all, Levinson's is an *epistemic* theory of aesthetic experience. He describes a kind of non-inferential recognition: apprehending and reflecting on the individual character and content of both the object and the experience.<sup>46</sup>

So, for Levinson, it is not sufficient for aesthetic pleasure that a positive hedonic tone or feeling which accompanies the perception of an object is grounded in the perception of the natural or nonaesthetic properties of the object. Rather, in addition to this grounding, Levinson requires, firstly, the perception of the aesthetic features or properties which depend on those nonaesthetic properties, and, secondly, the subject's understanding of the fact of that relation and reflection on that relationship between base and structure. Aesthetic pleasure cannot simply accompany our apprehension and reflection: it must derive from it somehow, it must be pleasure in that relation and its effect. This grounding is meant to militate against mere or purely sensory pleasure: not pleasure *from* perception, but pleasure *in* perception, thus ensuring the appropriateness of our response.

In other words, in order for their pleasure to be qualified as aesthetic, Levinson's subject must be *aware* of the relationship between an object's nonaesthetic and aesthetic properties and reflect on the character which emerges from that relationship. It seems plausible to suggest, too, that this awareness gives the subject access to the grounds of their pleasure: they should

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<sup>46</sup> See (Carroll, 2006a) for an analysis of Levinson's account as an epistemic one.

be able to say what *caused* their pleasure. More than this, they must know that the grounds for their pleasure are appropriate: their attention to and perception of the object and their response to it were grounded in its appearance for its own sake.

It is the demand for this kind of awareness and the epistemic or cognitive access it brings to the grounds of our pleasure which explains the presence of an attention condition in Levinson's work. The relationship between attention, awareness or consciousness, and cognition is one we will explore thoroughly later, but the significance of that relationship for aesthetic psychology should be emerging as we analyse Levinson's narrow account. Attention provides the right kind of content and, in concert with an aesthetic attitude, guarantees the right kind of awareness. Recalling the common-sense concept of attention, then, focusing attention on an object and its qualities underpins the right kind of phenomenology and the right kind of cognition: we know and take pleasure in the appearance of the object for itself.

But is this knowledge of or reflection on the grounds of our pleasure a necessary condition for all aesthetic experience? We should note that Levinson has a tendency to elide aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic appreciation. As Malcolm Budd points out, Levinson demands too much in his requirement that aesthetic pleasure—and, we should add, aesthetic perception—requires reflection on the relationship between the character of an object and its base. Even if aesthetic *appreciation* involves such a level of understanding of the relations between an object's aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties it seems too demanding that their apprehension or their having an effect in experience should not be sufficient to secure aesthetic pleasure or, more broadly, aesthetic perception (Budd, 2008, pp. 40-41).



For example, our taking pleasure in the delicacy of a cup, the grace of a vase, the rolling or craggy, textured landscape before us need not arise from reflection on the way that those qualities arise from the relationship between the properties of the object. Our pleasure in those effects precedes our understanding of the ways in which they manifest. We have perceived those qualities of delicacy and grace, they have played a role in experience; but we need not say that we are aware of or have reflected on the structures which support them. Those qualities *caused* our pleasure, but we may not yet understand them or have even tried to. Perhaps we never will.

Indeed, we don't usually suggest that pleasure in or arising from something needs to be founded in reflection on or understanding of that thing. It is often the case that taking pleasure in an object or experience is what spurs us to reflect on its nature and perhaps to deepen our pleasure or to see that our initial delight was ill-founded. As Budd writes, "it is important to recognize that the relation of substructure to superstructure may be an essential *determinant* of one's pleasure in a work, and one's pleasure may be pleasure in the superstructure as embodied in the substructure, *in the absence of any reflection on that relation*" (Budd, 2008, pp. 42, my emphasis). That is, it is important to separate the response from the grounding of the response, even if, epistemically speaking, we are better off with the more demanding account because it allows and accounts for our *appreciative* activities of analysis and evaluation.

This reflects a general concern we might have with narrow aesthetic psychology: that the privileging of the epistemic interest in the *grounding* of a response comes at the cost of other forms of aesthetic engagement. That this epistemic demand requires attention is plausible, but we should not think that the characteristically appreciative activities involved in understanding the grounds of our response characterise *all* aesthetic engagement. It is understandable, given the widespread concern with appropriate and

intersubjective aesthetic judgement, that attention is valued as a means to secure appropriate and reliable discrimination: but we might construe that as a constraint on judgement and intersubjectivity rather than on the aesthetic character of experience or perception.<sup>47</sup> Those judgements might require knowledge of the grounds of our aesthetic response, but such judgements may not exhaust what it is to have an aesthetic experience: and the epistemic constraints on aesthetic experience—and aesthetic psychology—which arise from trying to theorise such judgements need not extend to all forms of aesthetic engagement.

That is, we might adopt a model of aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation in which it is only the latter which is involved in making judgements of aesthetic *value* (or merit) with some claim to intersubjectivity. Whilst many narrow accounts target this kind of critical activity—and argue that broad aesthetic psychology risks trivialising the aesthetic by its loss—one way to establish a continuum of aesthetic engagement is to develop a model of aesthetic psychology in which aesthetic appreciation occupies one end and aesthetic perception the other. Different points on the continuum might have different relationships to attention as a result of their differing relationships to our awareness of and cognitive or epistemic access to the objects and responses we perceive. This would mean that we can preserve the substantive and critical

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<sup>47</sup> What we mean by “apprehension” may also be a source of confusion. “To apprehend” can mean a variety of significantly different things. On the one hand, we might simply mean perception “of an object's individual character and content”, but on the other hand, we might mean an understanding or mental grasping of this character and content. Yet, perception and understanding are not the same thing even if we hold that a certain level of understanding of some object or phenomenon is required in order that we perceive some of its properties. It might well be the case that certain of an object's properties require understanding before they can be perceived, but this is far from always being the case; and until we have a clear view of what we mean by understanding—knowledge of art historical tradition, iconography, author's biography, historical context, scientific knowledge, state of human interference, and so on—the relationship between perception and understanding will remain unclear.

concept of aesthetic appreciation narrow accounts prefer: but it need not exhaust our aesthetic psychology.

#### 2.4.2.1 A place for aesthetic appreciation

So, the suggestion that his understanding of aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic perception is too demanding need not immediately undermine Levinson's account as a plausible view of aesthetic appreciation or the substantive and non-minimal conception of aesthetic experience. These, we might allow, involve cognitive processes and phenomenology that require attention. For example, the following characterisation is presented by Levinson as an elaboration of his view of aesthetic pleasure, but need not be taken as such:

...to appreciate something aesthetically is to attend to its forms, qualities, and meanings for their own sakes, and to their interrelations, but also to attend to the way in which all such things emerge from the particular set of low-level perceptual features that define the object on a nonaesthetic plane. We apprehend the character and content of an artwork—including formal, aesthetic, expressive, representational, semantic, or symbolic properties—not as free-floating but rather as anchored in and arising from the specific structure that constitutes it on a primary perceptual (or cognitive) level. *Content and character are supervenient on structure, and appreciation of them, if properly aesthetic, involves awareness of that dependency.* To appreciate an object's inherent properties aesthetically is to experience them, minimally, as properties of the individual in question, but also as bound up with and inseparable from its basic perceptual configuration. Features aesthetically appreciated are features understood as qualified by or even internally connected with their underlying bases. (Levinson, 1996b, pp. 6, my emphasis)<sup>48</sup>

As an account of (one sort of) aesthetic appreciation this seems plausible. Aesthetic appreciation plausibly requires a greater level of understanding of the object experienced than aesthetic pleasure or aesthetic perception. In aesthetic

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<sup>48</sup> The parenthetical “cognitive” is added so as not to exclude literature from Levinson's account which, whilst being grounded in perceptual experience of the words on a page is plausibly not best understood as having its aesthetic properties constituted by the arrangement of the text: at least, not in standard cases.

appreciation we need at least a minimal grasp of the structures that emerge from the low-level features of the object in question, both in terms of the interrelations of those structures and their relations with the features on which they depend. In this we seem to be well on the way toward the kind of experience that either amounts to or underpins an aesthetic judgement: an assessment of the aesthetic value of the work or object, often with reference to a description of its features and the relations between them which function as reasons for that judgement. The expectation here is that we can, if asked, point toward the features of the object that we find valuable (or not). That, as we shall see, plausibly requires attention.

Levinson emphasises the manner in which we come to know the object and, more specifically, a particular way of attending to its properties. Those properties must be perceived both as belonging to the object and as inextricably involved with “its basic perceptual configuration”: that is, with the arrangement of its nonaesthetic perceptual features. Once again, Levinson demands that we are *aware* of and reflect upon the dependency of the object's aesthetic properties/structure on the underlying features of the object. Budd's objection to this as a demand on aesthetic pleasure was that we need only take pleasure in the object's character as realised rather than in an awareness of the manner of that realisation. If we keep this in mind and take Levinson's account as characteristic of one form of aesthetic engagement then we can allow that the requirement for reflection on the relations between aesthetic and nonaesthetic qualities is a plausible distinction between aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation.

Does this epistemic concern merit the extension of an attention condition to all of our aesthetic engagement? Perhaps. As we shall see, on certain theories of the relationship between attention and *consciousness* attention is necessary for phenomenal consciousness and cognitive and epistemic access to the content of

consciousness. For these theories it is the selection of an object or space for our attention which renders our consciousness of them accessible to higher mental operations. To the extent that these higher mental operations are required for the kind of reflection and evaluation that Levinson and others require, they will demand the attention that renders them available for aesthetic scrutiny. Without them the complex and reciprocal perceptual, cognitive, and evaluative criteria he lays out could never be satisfied. As a result, it seems likely that the rational demands of aesthetic appreciation and judgement—the availability and deployment of reasons which make reference to aspects of the object and our experience of it—will be undermined. This is something we will address in chapter four when we consider contemporary approaches to attention.

Levinson's view is complex, but comes down to the question of what is required in order to perceive aesthetic features and then engage with them in the correct way. I suggested that his view is best understood as one about aesthetic appreciation rather than aesthetic perception; although this is complicated by the demanding model of aesthetic attention he claims is necessary for aesthetic perception. The issue we need to address is the assumption that attention (or aesthetic attention) is required for aesthetic perception. By making aesthetic attention the ground for aesthetic perception Levinson cuts out the possibility of aesthetic perception of any sort in the absence of suitably orientated attention. Yet this seems premature. It might be argued that this is the only manner in which to *appropriately* experience such qualities, but the appropriateness of our perception is not the same thing as the manner and content of the perception itself. Why, we should ask, can we not perceive aesthetically in circumstances where the appropriateness or evaluative significance of that perception is not an issue or simply not assessable *until we attend in a particular way*? This, I will argue, is a feature of unattended aesthetic perception.

## 2.5 Broad aesthetic psychology and the attention condition

The possibility that attention might not be required for all forms of aesthetic engagement opens the way for a broader approach to aesthetic psychology. In general, the broad forms of the attention condition reject the necessity of attention for aesthetic character but may well endorse its necessity for particular forms of aesthetic engagement like aesthetic appreciation. Recall Saito's view that we should consider aesthetic "any reactions we form toward the sensuous and/or design qualities of any object, phenomenon, or activity...[Responses] that propel us toward everyday decision and actions, without any accompanying contemplative appreciation" (Saito, 2007, pp. 9,11). Saito considers her approach analogous to Carroll's content view, except insofar as she has little interest in an attention condition on aesthetic response. (She is happy, I think, to allow that traditional "standout" or appreciative experiences might require attention).

Saito's account of everyday aesthetic experience is one which suggests that aesthetic features affect our experience in a variety of ways without requiring awareness of the aesthetic relations involved, nor of their effect on our experience *qua* aesthetic. The explicit analogy with the content view suggests that Saito's criterion for aesthetic engagement is the undemanding one of sensory perception of aesthetic qualities, thus placing neither a cognitive nor an evaluative condition on aesthetic perception. There is certainly no equivalent of Levinson's knowledge of the grounds of aesthetic response in Saito's broad account.

### 2.5.1 Inattention and the pervasiveness of aesthetic character in ordinary experience

Many broad theorists have a complex relationship with the attention condition and attention in general. It's not always clear either what broad

theorists refer to when they discuss attention or the role they think it plays in their account of aesthetic experience.<sup>49</sup> Sherri Irvin, for example, writes that “our everyday lives have an aesthetic character that is thoroughgoing and available at every moment, should we choose to attend to it” (Irvin, 2008a, p. 30); and, then, “Being in the room you are in right now, with its particular visual features and sounds; sitting in the way that you are sitting, perhaps crookedly in an uncomfortable chair; feeling the air currents on your skin—all of these things impart a texture to your experience that...should be regarded as aesthetic” (Irvin, 2008a, p. 30). It seems unclear whether Irvin is endorsing a broad aesthetic psychology or not. Is the *availability* of aesthetic character “at every moment” the suggestion that aesthetic character or “aesthetic texture” is present in the absence of attention and that we may choose to attend to that character; or is Irvin’s suggestion that in conditions of inattention there is only the *potential* for aesthetic character which is realised when we (choose to) attend? This matters because each reflects a different formulation of the attention condition with differing implications for our aesthetic psychology.<sup>50</sup>

At the very least, it seems that Irvin is not invoking the full sense of the common-sense concept of attention: her interest is not (in this instance) in the experiences we select and focus on, although she does think that we have a role in shaping such experiences. Many of Irvin’s examples have something

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, (Rautio, 2009) and (Lee, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> This also touches on a problem that permeates the discussion of broad approaches—and everyday aesthetics in particular—the problem that in studying such moments of what we might call *integrated* or *unattended* aesthetic experience—when the aesthetic aspect of experience is not something that is attended, contemplated, reflected upon, or even remembered—we strip them of their distinctively everyday or ordinary character. As Leddy writes: “any attempt to increase the aesthetic intensity of our ordinary everyday life-experiences will tend to push those experiences in the direction of the extraordinary. One can only conclude that there is a tension within the very concept of the aesthetics of everyday life” (Leddy, 2005, p. 18). Thus we arrive at the (somewhat cacophonous) distinction between *the ordinary extraordinarily experienced* and *the ordinary ordinarily experienced*. Our question must always be whether it is the former or the latter which involves aesthetic character, because that it is the distinction between the broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology.

absentminded about them: they go on alongside other activities, almost as forms of punctuation or inflection, helping to shape our broader experiences. It is worth quoting Irvin at length to illustrate this:

[Let] me describe a few things I have discovered I sometimes do. I run my tongue back and forth on the insides of my closed teeth, feeling the smoothness of their central surfaces and the roughness of the separations between them. In the middle of typing a sentence, when I am not sure what to say next, I turn to look out the window next to my desk, and I rest my right cheek on my cool knuckles while I watch the ducks that are swimming around in the small patch of lake that has already thawed near the shore. While walking down my dirt road, I study the various colours of the dirt and the tyre tracks that weave along it, and I contemplate how nice it would be to have a suit made out of a fabric with these gradations, with a subtle pattern that varies in texture and does not run too straight. I drink tea out of a large mug that is roughly egg-shaped, and I clasp it with both hands to warm my palms. When I am petting my cat, I crouch over his body so that I can smell his fur, which at different places smells like trapped sunshine or roasted nuts, a bit like almonds but not quite. I scratch my head with a mechanical pencil that allows me to part my hair and reach exactly the right spot on my scalp. I move my wedding ring back and forth over the knuckle that offers it slight resistance, and I jiggle it around in my right palm to enjoy its weight before sliding it back on. (Irvin, 2008a, pp. 30-31)

This is an extremely diverse list. Studying the colours and textures of a dirt road, and reflecting on their appropriateness for fabric is a clear example of attentive experience; as is smelling the fur of a cat (construed as intentional rather than passive). Other examples seem more accidental, accompaniments isolated only after the fact of their being experienced: resting a cheek on a hand; feeling the texture, shape, and weight of a warm mug; fiddling with a wedding ring.

Irvin argues that each “involves my imparting a certain shape or texture to a small part of my life, over and above any other goal I might be aiming to fulfil” (Irvin, 2008a, p. 31). This should remind us of Dewey’s phenomenological and



structural account of aesthetic experience. (Although, other examples seem to emphasise the features of experienced objects as well.) Indeed, it is on the basis of an adaptation of the Deweyan “*an* experience” that Irvin argues such experiences are bounded and unified in such a way as to satisfy the phenomenological and structural criteria for aesthetic experience. What is unclear here—as it was in Dewey—is the extent of our awareness of the “doing and undergoing” relation with the environment which underpins this experience. Moreover, Irvin’s attenuation of Dewey’s criteria for the unity and boundedness in *an* experience should leave us wondering at the extent of our awareness of having *an* experience with aesthetic quality.

Indeed, Irvin writes that “the reciprocal sensing and adjusting to alter the quality of perceptual experience is often done automatically, even unconsciously” (Irvin, 2008a, p. 34). That is, Irvin seems to be suggesting that the phenomenological or structural elements of our aesthetic psychology involved in its being *aesthetic* can occur in the absence of attention; or, at least, in the presence of a very diminished or divided attention: certainly nothing like the focused and absorbed state of mind demanded by the Levinsonian narrow theorist. This lack of clarity about the role of attention and nature of our awareness of aesthetic character is part of the problem we face when trying to analyse the relationship between narrow and broad aesthetic psychology.

Furthermore, it seems that Irvin is, at some points, interested in the *agency* involved in the shaping of our perceptual experience, and at others more concerned with the way the shape of the experience emerges from or is an aspect of some other activity on which our attention is focused. In general, Irvin, in common with many broad theorists, seems less interested in *properties* or *qualities* than she is in the structure or phenomenology of experience: being aesthetic is some manner of relation with the environment and our own

experience.<sup>51</sup> Irvin's view is distinctively broad in that her focus is not the epistemic or analytical one of discriminating and appreciating the relationships between aesthetic features in experience. The broad approach tends to be more interested in effects on experience whether or not we are in a position to analyse, evaluate, or communicate the elements of that experience or the features on which they might depend. As a result, her criterion for aesthetic character in experience is not subject to the kind of attention condition which arises from the linked concerns with awareness and epistemic and cognitive accessibility that we saw in Levinson's appeal to attention.

This implicit rejection of an attention condition founded on the kind of awareness or accessibility involved in aesthetic appreciation can be seen in Irvin's response to the thought that the phenomenologically vague and fragmented nature of many of her examples might detract from their being aesthetic:

This lack of vividness might be thought to disqualify the experience from having an aesthetic character. I submit, though, that there is no such disqualifying effect; indeed, the position of an aspect of experience on the spectrum between full attention and vague awareness may be a part of the experience's aesthetic character. (Irvin, 2008a, p. 36)

There is a sense that the aesthetic character of our experience is continuous with ordinary experience and, critically, that such aesthetic character might be partially *constituted* by the absence of or vagueness of attention: "The very fact of my vague awareness of a tantalizing smell in my environment may be part of the aesthetic texture of this moment; and that aesthetic texture would be quite different if I were fully and vividly aware of the smell" (Irvin, 2008a, p. 36). This is a crucial point at which the broad and narrow approaches part company, and they do so on the basis of the role of attention in our aesthetic psychology.

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<sup>51</sup> See (Novitz, 2001 [1992]), (Melchionne, 2011), and, to some extent, Saito (Saito, 2007).

### 2.5.2 Is “cognitive interest” required for aesthetic experience?

We have seen that on the narrow approach it is the epistemological and phenomenological aspects of aesthetic experiences that attention is thought to secure: attention underpins the discrimination of properties, facilitates our reflection on such properties, and brings them to the foreground of our experience. Attention also supports our knowledge of this process: our knowledge or awareness of the grounding of our response in the object and its qualities. The broad approach is less interested in this epistemic and evaluative element of experience.

The lack of a cognitive or epistemic interest is the root of David Davies’s objections to Irvin’s broad approach (and to broad approaches in general). Davies appeals to Frank Sibley’s analysis of aesthetic experience. For Sibley, not only is “a necessary element in any viable notion of aesthetic interest, contemplation, etc...some dwelling of thought on whatever is the object of attention” but “an explanation of why one is interested and in what, involves or consists in some kind of description of its qualities or character” (Sibley, 2001d, p. 230). That is, not only does Sibley assume the necessity of attention for aesthetic experience, but he also emphasises, firstly, reflection on the object and its qualities, and, secondly, the capacity to *explain* or *describe* the qualities or character of that object (Sibley, 2001b).

Again, we see the linked concern with a certain kind of awareness and epistemic or cognitive accessibility in aesthetic experience. We have to be able to reflect on and describe the objects of our experience. This is the heart of the disagreement about our aesthetic psychology that this thesis addresses: what form of awareness and what form of cognition is required in order that we may describe our perception, appreciation, experience as *aesthetic*?

For Sibley the cognitive dimension is crucial. As Davies writes, “Sibley insists...that we need to distinguish an aesthetic interest from other forms of sustained heightened attention to a perceptual manifold motivated by a desire to experience more fully the qualities of that manifold with no further ulterior motive” (D. Davies, forthcoming). As Davies reads him at least, Sibley requires attention to the object’s perceptual character and our experience of it, motivated only by the desire to experience that character as fully as possible.

Yet, not only does Irvin seem to reject these cognitive or epistemic aspects as necessary for aesthetic experience, she also suggests that it can be constitutive of the nature of an experience’s aesthetic character that it not be in the foreground: that it should be continuous with other aspects of experience. Indeed, it seems for Irvin that only certain *forms* of aesthetic engagement require attention. These are the forms of engagement we have been calling aesthetic appreciation.<sup>52</sup>

Davies takes issue with the suggestion that only certain forms of aesthetic engagement require attention, and in doing so pinpoints the central disagreement between broad and narrow approaches to attention and aesthetic character:

Sibley’s insistence on the need for cognitive involvement in genuinely aesthetic attention to qualitative features of the object of experience seems incompatible with Irvin’s suggestion that our everyday experiences can have an aesthetic character even when we are barely aware of those particular perceptual features of the manifold that please us. Tasteful discernment of features of a perceptual manifold, issuing in direct descriptions of the aesthetically relevant features of that manifold, seems to require active attention. It is not merely a matter of whether, in

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<sup>52</sup> Irvin argues that the kind of closure and unity in an experience that Dewey demands for his “esthetic experience” is misguided, but that such a demand can be understood as “framing and securing the objectivity of aesthetic judgment” (Irvin, 2008a, p. 37), something which her weaker sense of boundedness and closure can provide but which, presumably, still requires attention in the course of any particular aesthetic evaluation (Irvin, 2008a, p. 39).

line with Dewey's analysis of '*an experience*', we are conscious of the connection between what we do and what we undergo. It is also, as just noted, that without conscious attention to the manifold we cannot tastefully discern the aesthetic features that give it its aesthetic character, thereby furnishing ourselves with the rich direct descriptions that might enter into our aesthetic judgments. (D. Davies, forthcoming)

This is a crucial point: must we have "rich direct descriptions" available for use in aesthetic judgements as a result of conscious attention to the perceptual manifold? Is this cognitive requirement a condition on all aesthetic engagement? Does such a condition require attention?

The cognitive involvement required is a form of discriminating attention to the "perceptual manifold", thus making it the case by definition that this involvement requires attention. However, whether or not this cognitive involvement or scrutiny is necessary for aesthetic character of any sort is precisely what is at issue. Davies's and Sibley's view is that the cognitive requirement must be satisfied in order that we be able to deploy aesthetic descriptions in aesthetic judgements and know the grounds of our pleasure. Yet it was precisely on this basis that we distinguished between aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation in our analysis of Levinson's narrow account: the cognitive or epistemic demand does not, at least without further argument, seem to extend to all aesthetic engagement.

For Irvin, there is no attention condition on aesthetic character in experience, but there is one on the more complex and demanding state or process of aesthetic appreciation. This is because she considers the phenomenal character of experience to be the distinctively aesthetic aspect and is thus fairly undemanding about the complexity, boundedness, or vividness of such experience. The cognitive and evaluative sophistication Irvin considers characteristic of aesthetic *appreciation* is only one element of our aesthetic psychology; and one which does seem to require attention. This distinguishes

her broad approach from that of narrow theorists. She doesn't require anything resembling Levinson's aesthetic attention, Carroll's attention to aesthetic properties, or Davies's aesthetic-description-grounding attention.<sup>53</sup>

However, one of the problematic elements of Irvin's approach is exactly which aspect of our experience supplies or instantiates "aesthetic character". She goes into quite some depth about what is not required for aesthetic character, but it is never quite clear what is required for the positive claim. Establishing a criterion for aesthetic character without attenuating it to the point of trivialisation is a key challenge for any broad approach. In the next chapter I will suggest one way in which we might go about securing the aesthetic character of experience in the absence of attention by introducing a broad concept of aesthetic perception within which narrower attention-requiring states and stances can be positioned.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I analysed some key examples of broad and narrow aesthetic psychology in terms of attention. Narrow accounts make aesthetic engagement conditional on the presence of attention because of the kinds of awareness, reflection, and cognitive and epistemic accessibility they require. Attention supports characteristically appreciative activities like the scrutiny of a perceptual manifold, reflection on the relations between nonaesthetic and aesthetic properties, valuing and experiencing objects for their own sake, and the capacity to give reasons for judgements. The question that emerged in the course of the chapter was whether such appreciative activity is necessary for

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<sup>53</sup> This also distinguishes Irvin from other narrow theorists like Gary Iseminger, who require a highly reflexive approach to one's own experience: "Someone is appreciating a state of affairs just in case she or he is valuing for its own sake the experiencing of that state of affairs" (Iseminger, 2006, pp. 99, emphasis in original). Likewise, Kendall Walton requires that "'aesthetic' pleasures include the pleasure of finding something valuable, of admiring it. One appreciates the work. One does not merely enjoy it; one takes pleasure or delight in judging it to be good" (Walton, 1993, p. 504).

aesthetic character *or* only necessary for particular forms of aesthetic engagement: in this case, appreciation.

A broad approach is likely to opt for the latter option: the kinds of appreciative activity supported by attention and the forms of awareness and cognition it enables are only one aspect of a broader spectrum of aesthetic engagement.<sup>54</sup> I argued that this issue remains open and is made more difficult by the lack of clarity—especially in broad accounts—regarding the kinds of attention and awareness involved in aesthetic experience.

We need a better understanding both of the relations between the elements of our aesthetic psychology and of attention itself. The rest of this thesis will focus on the structure of our aesthetic psychology and the way in which contemporary work aids us in understanding the role of attention in aesthetic perception, appreciation, and experience. In the next chapter I will focus on developing an account of aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation with which to approach contemporary work on attention, consciousness, and cognition.

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<sup>54</sup> One possibility we haven't much mentioned is that of divided attention or a spectrum of attention from full, engrossed attentiveness to fleeting attention distributed amongst a large number of objects or tasks. It is likely that such distinctions within the broad and narrow approaches would serve to further divide accounts, with some proving to require full and focused attention, others a momentary foregrounding of aesthetic concerns, and still others nothing but a fleeting glance or sensory encounter.

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## Chapter Three

# An Outline of Aesthetic Perception

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White. A blank page or canvas. The challenge: bring order to the whole. (As he continues to speak, the white stage is transformed into a park on the island of La Grande Jatte. Trees descend onto the grass; a bottle glides into view; a cut out couple appear in the distance. The lighting gives the impression of early morning.) Through: design. Composition. Tension. Balance. Light. And harmony.

*Sunday in the Park With George, Act I, Scene One*

Stephen Sondheim

### 3.1 Introduction

Our discussion of the broad and narrow approaches and their relations to various attention conditions has reinforced the need for a map of our aesthetic psychology within which to situate attention and the variety of forms of aesthetic engagement of which we are capable. In this chapter I will outline a broad model of aesthetic psychology with which we may work to understand the role of attention, refining each as our understanding improves. I will argue that a broad notion of *aesthetic perception* is the fundamental concept in terms of which we should understand our aesthetic psychology. That is, if our question concerns the kinds of psychological states and processes which characterise the aesthetic activities of mind, then my answer will be that we must place an account of the manner in which we perceive and organise the material of sense at the heart of our aesthetic psychology. From that central account we may build a model which encompasses both broad and narrow forms of aesthetic perception and appreciation: a model in which attention will play a vital role.

### 3.2 What is aesthetic in aesthetic perception?

Our task is, firstly, to understand what aesthetic perception's being *aesthetic* involves and, secondly, what we mean by *perception*; particularly that variety



which amounts to aesthetic perception. Presumably not all perception, sensory or otherwise, is aesthetic even if aesthetic perception is pervasive in the way that broad accounts—and this account—argue. We need to find a criterion which, once satisfied, renders our perception aesthetic. With that account in hand we will be better placed to assess the role of attention in aesthetic perception; in particular, whether and how attention might be necessary for particular forms of aesthetic perception and thus how broad or narrow is our aesthetic psychology.

### **3.2.1 Representing the individual**

In this thesis we have encountered a number of proposals for the aesthetic aspect of perception, appreciation, judgement, and pleasure. Many of them focus on some form of discrimination, apprehension, or valuing of a particular collection of properties or qualities; an activity or set of activities which we saw required attention both to such properties as well as to our response(s) to them. Thus, Jerrold Levinson seeks more than the “registration” of aesthetic properties for their own sake in aesthetic experience, but nonetheless emphasises the importance of the apprehension of the web of relations between formal qualities and their dependence on nonaesthetic perceptual features (Levinson, 1996b, forthcoming). David Davies, drawing on Frank Sibley’s work (Sibley, 2001d), also emphasises the importance of discriminating attention to the perceptual manifold, arguing that only this kind of attention is capable of supplying the descriptions involved in aesthetic judgements (D. Davies, forthcoming). Similarly, Robert Stecker outlined a “minimal conception” of aesthetic experience involving “attending in a discriminating manner to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things, attending to these for their own sake or for the sake of this very experience” (Stecker, 2006a, p. 4). And again, Noël Carroll, whilst rejecting any unifying concept of the aesthetic, nonetheless requires attention to (historically or traditionally formulated) aesthetic and

expressive properties, understood as, amongst other things, the web of relations between perceptual features of the object in question (Carroll, 2006a, 2012). Finally, Roger Scruton, a little more broadly, identifies a concern with “the ways things present themselves” as central to aesthetic interest (Scruton, 2007, p. 246).

My aim in this chapter is to isolate the “aesthetic-making” element of our engagement with the world that lies at the heart of such views, but which is rarely developed in as helpful a way as it might be. This element has something to do with the constitution of objects in perceptual experience. More than this, it is bound up with the constitution of *appearances*. It is my suggestion that the key criterion for *aesthetic* perception is that we perceptually represent an object or set of objects as an individual (or individuals) possessing particular sensible properties. The central concept in aesthetics should be the representation (or apprehension) of an object, phenomenon, or environment as a particular instance or event (or set of such instances and events) in the external world which possesses or manifests qualities of appearance: size, shape, colour, texture, pattern, structure, composition, and so on in varying degrees of complexity.

This is not the Levinsonian position according to which we must be aware of the dependency of and relations between particular qualities and their nonaesthetic bases; nor is it the suggestion that we need to be able to draw on the representation of the object as an individual in possession of particular properties in order that we may deploy descriptions of them in aesthetic judgements; nor, again, is this the suggestion that we value such a perceptual representation either instrumentally or for its own sake. Indeed, this suggestion has far more in common with Scruton’s core idea that the aesthetic is fundamentally concerned with a subject’s interest in “the way things present

themselves”, which strikes me as being the core of an aesthetic approach to the world.

Beneath disagreements about the kinds of evaluative response, awareness, or discrimination involved in aesthetic perception, experience, or appreciation lies this fundamental concern with the perception of organisation and structure in the appearance of objects, persons, and phenomena; whether that involves artworks, performances, food, drink, the built environment, or the natural landscape. Indeed, one way to construe the disagreement between broad and narrow theorists is as a debate about when and how our engagement with these qualities of appearance and the objects which possess them becomes *aesthetic*.

In order for an interest in the manner of an object’s presentation to make sense, we require that the object be perceived as a particular instance—although, and we will expand on this, we need not understand an object as a particular instance of some broader category. This automatically involves representing the object and its qualities as the particular collection of interrelating qualities of appearance that it is. I emphasise the perceptual representation of individual or particular instances of sensible qualities because we seem to be consistently concerned in aesthetics with the manner in which a *particular* collection of properties or qualities appear and interrelate. (By “particular” I mean not a specific class of properties—“aesthetic properties,” for example—but a unique instance of a quality or feature.) It is this perceptual activity of the representation of object(s) and their qualities as individual which makes perception aesthetic rather than any evaluative stance, *reflection* on this representation, or attentive scrutiny of the object itself, although these latter states are derivative of and depend upon the central concept of aesthetic perception.

A particular vase is beautiful or ugly because of the way in which its shape, colour(s), pattern, glaze, texture, translucency or opacity, and apparent weight interact. If asked to justify our judgement that a vase is beautiful, we will point to these qualities and their interrelations (Sibley, 2001b). Such a vase need not be unique—we can imagine two identical and equally beautiful vases: indeed, they often come as pairs—but it will be an individual, a particular vase, which we must represent as *that* vase which possesses a particular collection of properties or qualities of appearance organised and related in this particular way.

What I contend is that it is this core concept of representation—the perceptual representation of objects possessing qualities of appearance—which we should use to pinpoint the aesthetic element of perception underlying the more complex and developed forms of engagement on which narrow theorists like Levinson and Carroll focus. The broad approach to aesthetic psychology helps push us toward this realisation by questioning the narrow focus on cognitive or epistemic engagement with appearances. However, one of the problems with broad accounts of everyday experience is that their specification of the aesthetic element becomes vague and merely sensory: they tend to brush off the question of *why* experience is aesthetic in favour of a discussion of its power or value in daily life. I aim to combat this vagueness whilst keeping a foot in both the broad and narrow camps by specifying a particular understanding of aesthetic perception as the representation of an individual in possession of particular qualities of appearance; an account which aims to do justice to the intuition of the pervasiveness of the aesthetic whilst retaining its power to develop into the paradigmatic experiences of art and nature addressed by narrow accounts.

I propose to divide aesthetic perception into what I will call “bare aesthetic perception” and “rich aesthetic perception”, each of which will be partially

defined by its relationship to *attention*. Bare aesthetic perception is characterised by a minimal satisfaction of the criterion for aesthetic perception outlined. As will become apparent, bare aesthetic perception both precedes and provides the foundation for rich aesthetic perception. Bare aesthetic perception is undoubtedly more controversial in this account of a broad aesthetic psychology as it includes elements which might be thought to undermine narrow characterisations of the phenomenology, evaluative stance, and cognitive states involved in aesthetic appreciation. Rich aesthetic perception, however, supports many of the paradigmatic mental states of aesthetic experience such as aesthetic evaluation, analysis, judgement, and the capacity for criticism and communication, which we might broadly label *aesthetic appreciation*.

It is not my aim to present an account of beauty or aesthetic value: I am concerned with what makes perception aesthetic, rather than aesthetically valuable or positive. I am clearly separating my account and criterion of aesthetic perception from the recognition of aesthetic value or the activity of aesthetic appreciation. The apprehension of or experiential constitution of aesthetic value (via some form of appropriately grounded aesthetic pleasure or reflexive valuing of experience) is not what makes perception or experience aesthetic on my account.<sup>55</sup> Instead, aesthetic perception, at its most minimal, is the perceptual representation of individual objects possessing sensible properties. This involves (at least!) two separate questions: how we (perceptually) represent objects, and how we represent them as individual objects possessing particular sensible properties such that perception is aesthetic. My suggestion will be that we represent perceptually “bound” objects at a particular stage of visual processing and that this drive to represent the world around us as ordered is a reflection of the kind of creatures we are.

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<sup>55</sup> Although see chapter five for discussion of the relationship between aesthetic perception and aesthetic value.

However, in order to understand what this notion of bound objects amounts to we must be clearer about what we mean by “perception” and how it relates to our questions about the nature of our aesthetic psychology.

### 3.3 Perception: Aesthetic and otherwise

What we mean by “perception” varies widely and we will make use of the full range of its meanings in what follows. The senses of perception in which we are most interested can be usefully understood in terms of *discrimination*. This discrimination has narrowly sensory and more broadly cognitive senses: firstly, the narrower sense in which we detect incoming stimuli via our sensory organs, process those stimuli, and—in several complex ways—produce organised representations of the environment and its contents. Secondly, the broader, sense of discrimination in which these representations become consciously accessible, memorable, and rationally manipulable; or, to put it another way, the sense of perception which brings insight, understanding, and deliberation.<sup>56</sup>

The empirical and philosophical study of perception is thus incredibly broad, running from experimental work on the biology of the sensory organs and the processes subserving and involving attention and awareness, to philosophical debates about the nature of our connection to the external world and the relationship between the intentionality and consciousness of perceptual experiences. We will draw on work which addresses the relationships of the different senses of perception and cognition, particularly that which seeks to understand the role of attention and attentional processes in the move from the

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<sup>56</sup> On the first sense see, for example (Brooks, In Press), (Palmer, 1999; Pomerantz & Cragin, In Press; Pomerantz & Portillo, 2010), (Schirillo, 2010).

The different senses of perception are emphasised by the related point, formulated here by Robert Stecker, but credited to Peter Lamarque (2010), that “the expression ‘perceptual features’ is ambiguous...It can mean a feature accessible to the senses with no background knowledge. Or it can mean any feature we can discern from perception no matter how much background information is required before we can do so” (Stecker, 2012, p. 356).

organisation and interpretation of sensory stimuli to phenomenological and cognitive consciousness and access to the upshot of such organisation.

This involves thinking about the nature of the connection between *sensation* or *sensory experience* and *perceptual experiences* or *perceptual states*. How do we move from sensation to perception; from the stimulation of the sensory organs to a sensory experience with, amongst others, visual, auditory, taste, touch, and smell characteristics? How does this sensation become a perceptual experience with an accompanying (or constitutive) phenomenology: an experience which is apparently *about* the world and our relationship to it? (See, for example, (Chalmers, 2004b).) In other words, how do we move from the stimulation of sensory receptors to an organised apprehension or representation of the world with both phenomenal character and intentional content; and what is the nature of the relation between that apprehension and the external world? I will suggest that aesthetic perception is intimately bound up with the process. Indeed, I will argue that the heart of aesthetic perception lies not in the *scrutiny* of the products of perception in the way that narrow theorists argue; but in the process of *producing* representations of the external world.

### **3.3.1 Problems of perception**

The questions we ask about the relationship between sensation and perceptual experience are complicated by the so-called “problem of perception” posed by perceptual illusion and hallucination. How, we might ask, can we think that we have reliable or direct access to the external world by means of sense perception if we can be undermined by a phenomenon like the Müller-Lyer illusion? This illusion leads us to experience two lines of equal length as if unequal: that is, we are subject to a perceptual illusion which leads us to mistake the qualities of objects before us. Moreover, in cases of hallucination we do not merely mistake the nature of an object, but are subject to a perception-

like experience in the absence of any corresponding mind-independent object. This has led many to reject the notion of “direct perception” in favour of various forms of “indirect perception” in which our perceptual experience of the external world is mediated by some form of representation or sense-data.<sup>57</sup>

However, we will not focus on the arguments from illusion and hallucination and the theories concerned with the nature of our perceptual relation to the world which arise from them. Rather, when in the next chapter we come to consider possible empirical challenges to the account of aesthetic perception I propose, we will discuss a different family of perceptual—specifically visual—phenomena. These challenges take as their focus experimental work which seems to indicate both pervasive *failures* of perception in the absence of attention and the related view that our inattentive phenomenal consciousness, rather than being rich and detailed despite our inattention, is in fact *sparse* and lacking in detail when unattended. This sparseness threatens to undermine my attempt to broaden our aesthetic psychology by appeal to the nature of the relationship between attention and perceptual organisation. Before we get to that, however, we will develop my account of aesthetic perception in greater detail.

### **3.3.2 Perceptual organisation and the binding problem**

One of my key claims is that aesthetic perception is intimately involved with the processes by which we produce ordered representations of the external world. This production of “assembled experience”—of apparently integrated, coherent experiences of the world around us—as Ronald Rensink calls it is not conventionally understood as an aesthetic matter although it would be considered a necessary foundation for aesthetic interest in the world by most

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<sup>57</sup> See (Crane, 2011) for an overview of the problem of perception and a variety of possible responses. For a collection of essays concerned with the nature of our perceptual relation to the external world see (Noë & Thompson, 2002).



(Rensink, 2013). A key task in the development of my account will be to adequately distinguish the aesthetic and non-aesthetic elements of such assembling. However, before that, we can begin to think about this assembling of experience by considering the significance of *perceptual organisation*.

[Perceptual organisation] is necessary because many objects in real world scenes do not project to a continuous region of uniform colour, texture and lightness. Instead, due to occlusion, variations in lighting conditions and surface features, and other factors, different parts of a single object often result in a mosaic of non-contiguous regions with varying characteristics and intervening regions associated with other, overlapping objects. These diverse and disparate image regions must be united (and segregated from those arising from other objects and surfaces) to form meaningful objects which one can recognize and direct actions toward. Also, meaning may appear not only in the shape of individual objects but in the spatial and temporal relationships between them. For instance, the arrangement of individual objects may form a higher-order structure which carries an important meaning such as pebbles on a beach to form a word. Perceptual grouping is one process by which disparate parts of an image can be brought together into higher-order structures and objects. (Brooks, In Press)

In other words, we need the ability to organise diverse stimuli so that we may perceive objects and scenes in the world: objects and scenes which do not strike the surface of the retina in complete or integrated images. The ability to organise these scenes provides the foundation for the perception of higher-order forms of meaning (meanings which may then affect earlier forms of organisation).<sup>58</sup> The challenge arising from the diversity of the processes and pathways by which such organisation occurs can be expressed as what empirical psychologist Anne Treisman calls “the binding problem”.

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<sup>58</sup> Work on the emergence of structure in perception and its relation to our phenomenal consciousness of organisation and meaning has roots in Gestalt psychology which, whilst not inaugurating the study of perceptual organisation, was a key influence on developments in the Twentieth Century. See (Wagemans, In Press).

For an overview of vision science from, as the title says, “photons to phenomenology” see (Palmer, 1999).

The binding problem in perception deals with the question of how we achieve the experience of a coherent world of integrated objects, and avoid seeing a world of disembodied or wrongly combined shapes, colours, motions, sizes and distances. In brief, how do we specify what goes with what and where? (Treisman, 1998, p. 1295)

Sensory information arrives in parallel as a variety of heterogeneous hints, (shapes, colors, motions, smells and sounds) encoded in partly modular systems. Typically many objects present at once. The result is an urgent case of...the binding problem. We must collect the hints, bind them into the right spatial and temporal bundles, and then interpret them to specify their real world origins. (Treisman, 2003, p. 97)

How do we assemble the properties we detect in diverse and specialised detection centres such that we represent and experience multifeatured objects? How are discrete features and locations *bound* and *integrated* to form coherent and enduring representations of visual scenes and the objects they contain? In other words, if we detect colours, shapes, motions, smells, sounds, separately how do we organise them into, say, a blue mug full of coffee moving toward us on a tray against a background?

This issue of binding or “feature integration” forms the first of two broad questions in the study of perception with which we will be concerned. The second question will be that of the role of attention and attentional processes in our awareness of and ability to cognitively and rationally access such perceptual representations.

### **3.3.3 Organisation and aesthetic perception**

I contend that we should construe aesthetic perception and the binding problem as intimately linked. Both are concerned with perceptual discrimination and organisation, but beyond that I suggested above that the key characteristic of aesthetic perception is that we perceptually represent an object or set of objects as an individual (or individuals) possessing particular instances

of sensible qualities. Thus not just *any* sensory state or representation of a colour, outline, texture, shape, size, and so on, will do: we need to represent features as belonging to, as *bound* to objects in time and space, as appearing in a certain way. Aesthetic perception is concerned with *particular* appearances and the binding problem is concerned with how we achieve that organised, assembled, experience of the world and its contents.

In other words, once we solve the binding problem we perceive aesthetically. Once the coffee mug is bound temporally and spatially, possessing colour, shape, size, and other sensible qualities—once its features are integrated—we have perceptually represented it as an individual in possession of particular sensible qualities of appearance.

However, we must be careful to distinguish this from the more primitive organisational processes which precede feature binding. These processes include the following:

- *Grouping and part-whole relationships*: determining which regions of an image go with which others to form unitary objects.
- *Figure-ground segregation*: determining which regions represent opaque objects blocking our view of (“occluding”) other, more distant objects; and which side of an edge is the figure side and which belongs to the ground continuing behind.
- *Perceptual coupling*: determining the appropriate relationship between two linked dimensions in the image. As an object moves away from us, the image it projects to our eye shrinks until it has vanished. If a medium-sized image strikes our retinas, did it come from a large object at a great distance, a small object at a short distance, or an intermediate-sized object at a moderate distance?

- *Multistability (bistable perception)*: some stimuli may be perceived equally correctly in two different ways. Interestingly, our visual system often alternates spontaneously, between possible interpretations, abruptly and unrelentingly flipping as though the stimulus were changing.

(Pomerantz & Portillo, 2010, p. 787)

The first of these pre-binding (and thus, on my account, pre-aesthetic) issues is tackled by the visual system according to certain principles of perceptual grouping. The relationship between these principles is debated: which comes first, how they constrain one another, and so on. The classical principles of grouping include the following:

- *Proximity*: the closer together any two elements are in an image, the more likely they belong to the same object.
- *Similarity*: the more alike any two elements are (more similar in color, size, orientation, distance, etc.), the more likely they belong to the same object.
- *Common fate*: the more similarly any two elements change over time (e.g., in their pattern of motion) the more likely they belong together.
- *Good continuation*: the more smoothly one edge or contour blends into another one, the more likely they are parts of a single contour.
- *Closure/convexity*: when connecting contours into objects, curves that can be assembled into closed or convex objects are more likely to belong together than ones that cannot.
- *Common region*: any two elements that are contained within a common region (e.g., encircled by a single contour) are more likely to belong to the same object.

- *Connectedness*: any two elements that are physically connected to one another are more likely to be parts of the same object than two that are not.

(Pomerantz & Portillo, 2010, p. 787)

Now, these are vital processes and principles, but they are not, on their own, sufficient to constitute either a solution to the binding problem or an outline of aesthetic perception. We must distinguish perceptual grouping and the principles which guide it from *binding*—the assembling of the features we discern through such processes into objects with locations—and thus from aesthetic perception, which I have argued is the representation of individuals in possession of particular sensible properties. This distinction between the perception of features and the *binding* of features (“feature integration”) is important and the root of much debate and empirical work, especially in relation to attention. (E.g. (Gillebert & Humphreys, In Press; Treisman, 1998).) We will focus on the relationship between feature binding and attention in the next chapter.

My suggestion is not that *all* perceptual organisation is aesthetic, but that the stage where we bind features to objects *is*. In other words, when we can bind features, we can perceive aesthetically even if, as we shall see below, this is not a very rich sense of aesthetic perception. This is what I call bare aesthetic perception and one of our key questions will be whether and how this goes on in the absence of attention.

In short, the binding problem and the question of when and how we perceive aesthetically are aspects of the same phenomenon. If aesthetics is concerned with the manner in which things appear, with representing the individual and its sensory qualities, and the binding problem is concerned with

the representation of a coherent or “assembled” world of bound objects—multifeatured objects with locations and properties which belong to them—then the two are intimately linked. Our question becomes one about the prerequisites for bound perceptual experience and, crucially, whether perceptually representing individual objects possessing sensible properties requires attention. This will be the concern of the next chapter.

For now, however, I want to flesh out the reasons for thinking about aesthetic perception and perceptual organisation as connected in this way and to suggest, with reference to an interpretation of Kant’s principle of purposiveness, how we might understand the organisational and representational processes at play in such perception.

### **3.4 Perceptual discrimination in aesthetics**

The centrality of perception in this model is in part a reflection of its significance in the history of aesthetics. The manner in which we represent and respond to the world in perceptual experience was the underlying concern of, for example, Baumgarten and Kant, each of whom we will consider below. The aesthetic has a role in our orientation toward the world through sense. That the world presents itself in certain ways to the subject, that objects and features appear in and affect experience has interlinked phenomenological and epistemological manifestations. To put it another way, aesthetics and perception are involved in our discriminating approach to the world: an approach which has both phenomenological and epistemological consequences.

Firstly, there is something it is *like* to experience the world and its contents. We describe the world in qualitative terms which aspire to characterise the texture of our experience: hence Sibley’s “It is with an ability to notice or see or tell that things have certain qualities that I am concerned” (Sibley, 2001b, p. 3). This ranges from descriptions of texture, colour, shape, smell, taste, timbre, and

pitch to the more complex and evaluatively weighted qualities of grace, unity, dynamism, and order exhibited and possessed by objects, environments, and individuals. Secondly, and relatedly, perception is a key way in which we find out about the world: it is a source of knowledge and belief, the origin and fulfilment of desire, the objects of emotion. The field appears to me to be green, rectangular (with perspective), flat, roughly textured by grass and thus, all else being equal, I consider myself to know or be justified in believing that it is green, rectangular, flat, and grassy. Perception situates me in the world.

Thinking of our concern with perception in terms of *discrimination* is useful because it is in precisely such terms that our aesthetic interest or approach to the world and our perceptual representation of it is often framed. This was one of the things we learnt in chapter two. Indeed, it is in terms of perceptual and rational or cognitive discrimination that “aesthetics” was first defined by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1735, although what writers have meant by both “aesthetics” and “perception” has shifted over the centuries. What has remained central in some form is the association between discrimination in aesthetic experience and sensory or sensible perception even as the emphasis placed on the role of the objects of experience, our representation of them, and the response which mediates or supplies that representation has altered.

### **3.4.1 Baumgarten and the analogue of reason**

Baumgarten’s aims were broader than those we tend to associate with contemporary aesthetics. In circumscribing a field or discipline of “aesthetics” (derived from the Greek “aisthesis”: sensory perception) Baumgarten sought to emphasise the cognitive value of sensory perception and to develop “a science of how things are to be known by means of the senses” (*Meditations* §cxv-cvvi. Quoted in (Guyer, 2005a, p. 3)) to complement a system of logic, describing

aesthetics as “the analogue of rational cognition”.<sup>59</sup> Hence his fuller description: “Aesthetics (the theory of the liberal arts, lower gnoseology, the art of beautiful thinking, the art of the analogue of reason) is the science of sensitive cognition”. (*Aesthetica* §1. Quoted in (Guyer, 2005a, p. 3).)

Following Christian Wolff (who followed Leibniz), Baumgarten held that sensory perception delivers *clear* (that is, recognisable or categorisable) but *confused* (not necessarily *analysable* or fully understood) representations of things which it lies in the capacity of the reason to know clearly *and* distinctly. This led Leibniz and Wolff to privilege reason and denigrate the sensory as routes to knowledge. Baumgarten also inherits the understanding of *pleasure* as the sensory (and therefore clear but confused) perception of *perfection* in objects, as well as the perfectionism inherent in such a conception of the objects of aesthetic experience. However, Baumgarten departs from his predecessors in an important way:

I cognize the interconnection of some things distinctly, and of others indistinctly, consequently I have the faculty for both. Consequently I have an understanding, for insight into the connections of things, that is, *reason (ratio)*; and a faculty for indistinct insight into the connections of things, which consists of the following: 1) the sensible faculty for insight into the concordances among things, thus sensible wit; 2) the sensible faculty for cognizing the differences among things, thus sensible acumen; 3) sensible memory; 4) the faculty of invention; 5) the faculty of sensible judgment and taste together with the judgment of the senses; 6) the expectation of similar cases; and 7) the faculty of sensible designation. All of these lower faculties of cognition, in so far as they represent the connections among things, and in this respect are similar to reason, comprise *that which is similar to reason (analogon rationis)*, or the sum of all the cognitive faculties that represent the connections among things indistinctly. (*Metaphysik*, §468 Quoted in (Guyer, 2008).)

Paul Guyer explains Baumgarten’s innovation in the following way:

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<sup>59</sup> See (Shusterman, 1999) and (Shusterman, 2000, pp. 263-267) especially.



[His] idea is that the use of a broad range of our mental capacities for dealing with sensory representations and imagery is not an inferior and provisional *substitute* for reason and its logical and scientific analysis, but something *parallel* to reason. Moreover, this complex of human mental powers is productive of pleasure, through the sensible representation of perfection, in its own right. (Guyer, 2008)

The key aspects of Baumgarten's approach to note for our purposes are the identification of the aesthetic with sensory perception, the binding of the sensory to the cognitive faculties in a parallel position to reason, and the concern of the aesthetic activity of mind with representations of the connections between things. This sense in which aesthetics is analogous to reason in its interest in and cognition of "the connections of things" is suggestive of later developments in which aesthetic judgement or understanding is given a key role in the development and understanding of reason itself. For example, Roger Scruton accords aesthetic taste a central place in practical reason because it is vital in our understanding of, amongst other things, appropriateness and the transformation of "the confusion of utilitarian reasoning" into an aesthetically guided manifestation of our chosen life-style (Scruton, 1979, pp. 241-243).<sup>60</sup>

It should be kept in mind that Baumgarten, his predecessors, and most of those who followed him had in mind visual and, perhaps, auditory sensory perception rather than what have been called the "lower senses" of touch, taste, and smell. The former "distal" senses are suited to the detachment and distance characteristic of contemplation and the supposedly unprejudiced perception of the objects of thought, whilst the latter "proximal" senses are condemned as (merely) bodily, the suppliers of sensual pleasures.<sup>61</sup> This cognitively inspired

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<sup>60</sup> See (Scruton, 1979), especially chapter ten, and (Scruton, 2007, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> The unfortunate distinction between "the sensuous" and "the sensual" was highlighted and rejected by (Berleant, 1964). The distinction is still operative in much of contemporary philosophical aesthetics. A recent restatement can be found in chapter seven of (Parsons & Carlson, 2008), whilst slightly older forms can be found in (Osborne, 1977) and chapter five of (Scruton, 1979). For recent rejections of the so-called "sense-hierarchy" see (Korsmeyer, 1999),

focus on the distal senses recurs in the narrow approach although it must be acknowledged—as we saw in Carroll’s content-orientated account and Levinson’s non-minimal account of aesthetic experience—that affect and bodily feeling is now allowed a greater role in aesthetic experience, although the restriction on the senses remains.

What we should take from Baumgarten is the association of the aesthetic with representation and insight into or cognisance of the interconnections, ordering, and structures of the deliverances of perception. In the narrow sense of perception this is a question of the representation of such interconnections, but on the broader sense of perception this extends to our awareness, understanding, and grasping of the world. (Hence the *analogue* of reason.) Baumgarten can thus be seen to gesture toward the different senses of perception that my model of aesthetic perception seeks to accommodate and explain.

### **3.4.2 Kant and purposiveness**

For Baumgarten the aesthetic, understood as the sensible element of cognition, is a central aspect of perception in both the narrow sense of perceptual representation and the broadest sense of the grasping of the connections between elements of the world, of memory, and images. This preoccupation with the aesthetic as central to making sense of sense, so to speak, emerges in the Transcendental Aesthetic of Kant’s first *Critique*, although his views on the significance and nature of the aesthetic in the constitution of

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(Brady, 2005), and much of Richard Shusterman’s development of “somaesthetics” (Shusterman, 1999, 2000).

the representation of the external world evolved by the time of the third *Critique*.<sup>62</sup>

As I have presented it, the question of how we go about constituting such a representation is one of the key ways in which our aesthetic and perceptual concerns coincide. My suggestion was that the aesthetic character of perception lies in the perceptual representation of an individual possessing particular qualities of appearance; and that this should be understood as an aesthetic characterisation of the binding problem in the study of visual perception. I emphasised that the concept of aesthetic perception should be separated from the apprehension of value or activity of valuing. Instead, I argued that when features are bound to objects such that those objects or phenomena can be said to appear in a certain way we perceive aesthetically and that this lies at the core of myriad accounts of aesthetic experience, perception, and appreciation. This takes us beyond Baumgarten, who was interested in the sensible operations which lead us to a representation of perfection, toward a form of perception which is concerned with particular appearances and their interrelations. But, if we are not concerned with the sensible representation of perfection—and thus lack this regulative end or ideal of perception when organising sensory stimuli—we must ask how and why it is that we go about organising the “stuff” of sense into the representations of perception, such that we bind features to objects and perceive aesthetically.

We have seen one way in which we can begin answering this question. The processes and principles of perceptual organisation underpin the production of bound features, but that is only part of the answer we need to understand

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<sup>62</sup> Sebastian Gardner describes this as “what the mind makes of its manifold of sensation” (Gardner, 1999, p. 67). See (Guyer, 1997), particularly chapter six on the relationship between Kant’s account of sensory perception in the first *Critique* and his theory of aesthetic judgment in the third.

aesthetic perception. How are we to understand the mind's drive to organise, to find and represent form and structure in the external world in the first place?

My answer draws on, amongst others, Rachel Zuckert's interpretation of Kant's project in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Zuckert argues that Kant is concerned to answer the problem of "the unity of diversity": the problem of the great variation in nature and the way in which we are to render such diversity intelligible without simply homogenising and thus undermining that diversity. She argues that Kant sought to identify a principle of judgement that would counter this "threat of diversity" and establish the unity of the diverse and thus make empirical knowledge possible. This, Zuckert argues, is the principle of *purposiveness without a purpose* (Zuckert, 2007).

Purposiveness without a purpose is a structure or principle of ordering by which we can judge, i.e., discriminate among, and "lawfully" combine or synthesize, the contingent, diverse aspects of empirically given nature, objects, or qualities. Purposiveness is, first, a unifying form of relations—of means to ends—that holds among parts to form a whole. These parts are, moreover, unified with one another and the whole, as diverse and contingent....

Purposiveness without a purpose is an order of means-end relations without an external purpose; it comprises reciprocal means-ends relations, in which each part is both means and end, in relation to other parts. Thus purposiveness without a purpose is the form of fully systematic, internal relations. Because this principle constitutes a unity among heterogeneous, contingent parts, without a separate purpose or concept (the means-ends relations are reciprocal, not directed to a particular end), it is also that by which we can judge (discern and unify) the particular, unconceptualized characteristics of nature. For in judging according to this principle, we do not need to know what the purpose of the whole is supposed to be, do not need to employ a concept of such a purpose, in order to find this whole intelligible, and its parts unified with one another. (Zuckert, 2007, pp. 14-15)

Recall that we are interested in the activity of perceptual organisation in the narrow and broad sense—perception as the organisation of perceptual stimuli and perception as understanding—and that we are trying to find a way to think about the ordering and relating of sensation and representation. Purposiveness without a purpose can help us do this because it provides a way to understand the organisational activity of the subject.

It is Zuckert's understanding of Kant that we are subjects who judge according to this principle of purposiveness without a purpose and who are always in anticipation of the resolution of the relation of parts to a whole. For Kant, Zuckert argues, this is our fundamental activity of judging, of representing the world in experience. In aesthetic experience we judge purposively without a purpose through our organisational anticipation of the future, representing the unity of a beautiful object's diverse properties formally rather than materially: that is, these are not causal but "reciprocal" relations of contrast and complementarity (Zuckert, 2007, p. 181). What matters here is that the perceptual representation of and search for an organised or ordered world need not require a prior concept or notion of what the purpose of the contents of such a world might be. (Although we will often have such a concept based on memory and inference.)

On Kant's view, our appreciation of beauty is the sole, pure, isolated case of our ability to represent unity in empirical diversity as such, without prior, empirical-conceptual distinction. Thus aesthetic experience is uniquely revelatory of this subjective judgmental activity, of the subject's self-legislated openness to the empirically given world and of the subject's irreducibly purposive character. (Zuckert, 2007, p. 11)

Now, Kant is interested in our actual judgements of beauty, in the "sole, pure, isolated case" of the representation of unity and the ensuing—or underpinning—harmony of the faculties thus undergone. Because of what he thinks—on Zuckert's reading—the appreciation of beauty reveals, Kant focuses

on “successful” instances of it. This need not, I suggest, be taken to entail that unsuccessful instances of aesthetic judgement, wherein we do not judge an object beautiful, are somehow “unaesthetic” or unpurposive: it would make little sense for Kant or Zuckert to occupy such a position, given their interest in delineating the principles and faculties of mind involved in judgement in general. Those principles and faculties do not disappear in the absence of beauty; they are peculiarly revealed in its presence. This means that we can think about the organisational activity of the mind involved in what Zuckert calls “the subject’s self-legislated openness” to the world even when that activity doesn’t manifest in a judgement of beauty. Purposive organisation and the anticipation of the resolution of the relationship of parts to a whole are not limited to instances in which the representation of the form on an object prompts the harmony of the faculties. They are constant activities of mind.

### **3.4.3 Purposiveness and the representation of the individual**

Rather than becoming caught up with beauty we should focus on the drive or principle which underpins Kant’s approach: purposiveness and the mind’s search for organisation in what William James called the “buzzing confusion” of sensory stimuli. This is the capacity for perceiving a heterogenous world as ordered and, as we have seen, can be construed as the foundation for Kant’s entire critical project. We need not go so far. What we are interested in is the way in which we actively seek to organise sensory stimuli in purposive ways. This will tend to implicate particular families of properties in aesthetic perception and involve us in long-running debates surrounding the nature of such properties.<sup>63</sup> What I want to emphasise here is that, in Zuckert’s words,

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<sup>63</sup> On the metaphysics and response-dependence of aesthetic qualities see (Levinson, 2006a, 2006c), (Matravers, 2005), (Zangwill, 2000, 2003), (Bender, 1996, 2001, 2003), as well as earlier discussions in (Goldman, 1993, 1995).

What is crucial for Kant's account of purposive form is that it involves our (imaginative) grasp of diverse, empirical properties of an object as interrelated, reciprocally complementing and contrasting with one another, not which sorts of such properties are to be so grasped. (Zuckert, 2006, p. 613)

That is, the key idea for Kant is of the mind's activity of organising diverse stimuli, placing them in ordered and intelligible relations whilst nonetheless retaining their diversity and, crucially, the individuality of the object which possesses and presents them. In focusing on this purposiveness of perceptual organisation and the ordering of subsequent perceptual representations we are also identifying the manner in which aesthetic perception consists in representing individuals with particular sensible qualities as well as understanding why that might be so. For purposive representation requires particular qualities and individual possessors of such qualities to organise: these are Kant's diverse, empirical, and contingent properties.

However, firstly, we need not adopt Kant's account of purposive form insofar as it demands unity; but only insofar as the principle of the active organisation of sensory stimuli or the perceptual manifold identifies a characteristic of perception itself: the process of the ordering of sense. We are taking a step back from the nature of the judgement of beauty to the characterisation of aesthetic perception in general, and its relation to perceptual organisation and the binding problem in particular.

Secondly, this representation of a unified or organised manifold is a "judgment" only in the thin sense of a perceptual representation of the world produced by an active operation of mind, however unconsciously. This is because, for Kant, any representation is an upshot of some form of judgement, some activity of mind, rather than something which simply pops into our head, mysteriously delivered from the external world (Zuckert, 2007, p. 290).

In other words, what I want to preserve in Zuckert's reading of Kant is the way in which our engagement with the world cannot but be organised as containing individual and interrelated objects whose parts or properties we bind together (to attempt) to form ordered or organised wholes. Zuckert's suggestion is that "[In] aesthetic experience we appreciate the object as an individual, as comprising all (or indeterminately many) of its sensible properties as inextricably interrelated or unified to make the object what it is: in other words, we appreciate what has been called an object's 'individual form'" (Zuckert, 2006, pp. 599-600). I think that this is true, insofar as it secures our representation of an individual object characterised by its interrelated and individualising sensible properties; but we need not then follow Kant—as Zuckert analyses him—toward an analysis of what being a beautiful object consists in or of the putative necessity of such judgements.<sup>64</sup> This is because we are interested in the processes and imperatives that constitute aesthetic response or aesthetic perception, and the relation of discrete stimuli to one another, rather than the evaluative judgement which may or may not be

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<sup>64</sup> For a more sceptical approach to purposiveness and its relation to formalism see (Guyer, 1997) chapters three and six. Guyer comes closest to the approach outlined above when he writes that, in order to understand Kant's argument in §10 of the third *Critique*,

we must attribute to Kant the view that knowledge requires not only the synthesis of representations of objects according to rules [as outlined in the first *Critique*], but also the production of objects themselves according to rules, and that where we cannot see a comprehensible object as due to our own action according to rules, we must postulate—though we cannot actually know—some other rule-governed agent as its cause. (Guyer, 1997, p. 196)

Where Guyer finds the most trouble for Kant is in this appearance of design, or undesigned design, the appreciation of which in the representation of the form of an object leads us to pleasure in the beautiful.

More promisingly, Anthony Savile understands "something's *being purposiveness without a purpose* [as] nothing other than its *being undesignedly functional for an end*" (Savile, 1993, p. 90) by which he means that, as with beauty, that the object's contingent nature accords with our faculty of judgment by chance, by "good fortune" rather than as some consciously chosen end.

My account is related to this, but leans more towards Zuckert in that our entire orientation to the world and its contents is premised on its contents being such that it and they can be related to one another and represented as such without a prior notion or concept of any end or function (although we will often have such a concept).



grounded in some form of pleasurable recognition of *unity* in an object which may then be demanded of others.

Thus we can construe the characteristically perceptual problem of binding features to the objects which possess them and the characteristically aesthetic question of the appearance of such objects not only as aspects of the same phenomenon, but as subject to a principle of purposiveness or open-ended organisation which serves to provide us with the object's "individual form" which may then be the object of aesthetic appreciation.

### **3.5 The Structure of Aesthetic Perception**

We are now in a position to go into more detail about the distinction between bare and rich aesthetic perception. What unifies them as aesthetic perception is their foundation in the perceptual representation of an individual in possession of particular properties, an activity of mind which we can understand as the organisation of the material of sense from the buzzing confusion of sensory stimuli. What distinguishes them is the complexity and determinacy of such representation and the accessibility and reflexivity of the perceptual and cognitive states of which each admits.<sup>65</sup> In the next chapter I will explain how this distinction is founded in differing relations to attention and why it is that attention should not be thought necessary for all aesthetic perception, even if the full, rich states associated with a narrower approach to aesthetic psychology demand attention.

#### **3.5.1 Bare aesthetic perception**

Bare aesthetic perception is the only kind of aesthetic perception which goes on in the absence of attention or at very low levels of attention. It is aesthetic

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<sup>65</sup> By "reflexivity" I mean the capacity to take one's own mental states as the objects of thought: For example, valuing one's own positive experience of a state of affairs in the manner of Walton aesthetic appreciation or Iseminger's aesthetic state of mind.

because it is involved in the purposive organisation of sensory representations such that their contents comprise individual objects possessing sensible qualities. That is, bare aesthetic perception satisfies our criterion for aesthetic status because it involves the representation of individual objects possessing particular (if not highly determinate) qualities. Such aesthetic perception is “bare” because the absence of attention limits the complexity of perceptual organisation and the rational or cognitive access possible at this level; something which will become clearer when we consider the interaction between attention, perception, and cognition. We might thus choose to call this “minimal” aesthetic perception. However, “bare” highlights the contrast between the richer form of aesthetic perception and serves to emphasise that this form of aesthetic perception really is *foundational* in aesthetic psychology: *bare* aesthetic perception is not intended to take the place of the rich and cognitively complex “aesthetic perceptions” identified by narrow theorists.

### 3.5.1.1 Aesthetic perception and Kant’s aesthetic response

We can illuminate the relationship between bare and rich aesthetic perception by considering the two kinds of reflective judgment Paul Guyer argues we must recognise in Kant’s theory of the judgement of taste. In §9 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant asks “in what way do we become conscious of a mutual subjective correspondence of the powers of cognition with each other in the judgment of taste—aesthetically, through mere inner sense and sensation, or intellectually, through the consciousness of our intentional activity through which we set them in play?” (5: 218).

That is, if it is the “mutual subjective correspondence of the powers of cognition”—or the harmony of the faculties of imagination and understanding—in which a judgement of taste is founded, what is the relationship between the *pleasure* which, for Kant, arises from such harmony

and our *awareness* of that harmony which is taken to be indicative of a judgment of beauty? Kant is asking, on Guyer's reading, whether and in what way we should distinguish between the sensory and the intellectual recognition of beauty. In other words, Kant's question is about the kind of *awareness* involved in the judgement of beauty: are we aware of the harmony of the faculties by way of some awareness of our own mental states, *or* is it the *pleasure* which arises from that harmony of which we are aware? We might construe this as a question about the kind of *access* we have to our own inner states: Kant wants to know if the harmony of the faculties is something of which we can be aware by anything other than the pleasure which such harmony occasions.

Kant is asking a question about the nature of our aesthetic psychology which is similar to ours to the extent that he is interested in the way that we represent and cognise the forms of objects aesthetically. Think of it this way: In this thesis we are interested in the relationship between attention and aesthetic perception; and one way in which we can understand our concern is in terms of the relationship between aesthetic perception and the kinds of awareness or consciousness of bound perceptual representations of which we are capable. One of my key arguments will be that attention changes the nature of our awareness of aesthetic perception and this change in the nature of our awareness is what I call the transition between bare and rich aesthetic perception.

How does this differing awareness of perceptual representations relate to Kant's question? Guyer makes a distinction which helps us here. For, he argues, we must distinguish between Kant's account of aesthetic *response*—a theory of mental states, processes, and their relations: an account of aesthetic psychology—and Kant's theory of aesthetic *judgment*, which is "a theory of the relations between judgments and their grounds". Crucially, Guyer points out, Kant's account of the aesthetic *response* does not require awareness of the

relations of the mental states which underpin it. In contrast, Kant's account of aesthetic *judgement* plausibly requires awareness of the relation between *reasons* and the judgments they ground (Guyer, 1997, p. 92).

Why might this help us? Guyer's distinction between Kant's account of aesthetic response—which is about our aesthetic psychology—and his account of aesthetic judgment—which is about reasons and their grounding—highlights the different relationship each might have to awareness and the way in which the perceptual activity involved in aesthetic response need not be *available* to the subject in order to be aesthetic. In other words, this kind of distinction helps us think about the difference between a set of mental states, processes and their relations, on the one hand, and our awareness of the relations between *reasons* and the grounds of aesthetic judgements. We can then ask a question about what it is in aesthetic thought which *requires* a certain form of awareness or access: is it aesthetic response (or aesthetic perception) *or* is it aesthetic *judgement* (which I call aesthetic appreciation).

This hopefully helps us begin to understand the relationship between bare and rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. One of my arguments will be that attention changes the relationship between aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation by virtue of changing the nature of our awareness or consciousness of perceptual representations. In the absence of attention we perceive aesthetically but we do so only minimally and such perceptual consciousness is unavailable to cognition and thus unavailable to aesthetic appreciation. I will argue that it is only when attended that we have cognitive and rational access to the objects of aesthetic perception and are thus able to *use* these representations in aesthetic judgements. In other words, the perceptual representations of bare aesthetic perception are unavailable to function as reasons in aesthetic judgement because their objects are unattended. Rich aesthetic perception, whilst still being a form of aesthetic response rather than

aesthetic judgement, requires attention and thus makes its representations available to cognition, and thus available for use as reasons in aesthetic judgements. I will argue for this relationship between attention and different forms of consciousness in the next chapter.<sup>66</sup>

Now, to explain Kant's account, Guyer outlines two distinct acts of the faculty of reflective judgement which underpin the declaration that an object is beautiful: firstly "the "unintentional" reflection which produces the pleasure of aesthetic response;" and, secondly "the other, that further and quite possibly intentional exercise of reflective judgment which leads to an actual judgment of taste" (Guyer, 1997, p. 97). My emphasis is necessarily different from Kant's because I do not focus on *pleasure* as the key indicator of an aesthetic response or the sign of the harmony of the faculties arising from "the estimation of the object" (§9). My account is affectively and evaluatively neutral, whereas Kant's focuses on the pleasure that indicates and grounds the judgment of beauty. Moreover, I have not adopted Kant's account of the harmony of the faculties occasioned by the representation of the form of the object as the ground for beauty and regulative or purposive ideal of perception.

However, the distinction between unintentional and intentional reflective judgement helps us to understand the distinction between bare and rich aesthetic perception, particularly insofar as I will argue that it is only in rich aesthetic perception that we access the *reasons* for aesthetic verdicts or judgments. That relationship between aesthetic response (aesthetic perception) and our cognitive access to and reflection on such a response—an awareness and reflection which can themselves shape ongoing and future aesthetic responses—is central for this thesis. Indeed, I will argue that it only really

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<sup>66</sup> My account of rich aesthetic perception must be distinguished from Kant's aesthetic judgment in that rich aesthetic perception remains an account of aesthetic psychology—of the mental states, processes, and relationships between them involved in aesthetic perception—even as it also addresses the accessibility of reasons involved in aesthetic judgements.

makes sense for us to discuss verdicts and judgments in the presence of attention and the rich aesthetic perception it supports.

It must be emphasised, however, that in discussing this distinction of Kant's (and Guyer's) between aesthetic response and aesthetic judgement I do not mean to equate bare aesthetic perception to the former and rich aesthetic perception to the latter. Aesthetic perception is an account of aesthetic response or the purposive representational activity of mind and not an account of the relations between reasons and aesthetic judgements. The aim here is to use Kant's questions about the forms of awareness of and access to aesthetic response and the relationship of that response to the reasons which ground the judgement of taste to clarify the distinction I wish to make between the mental states and processes involved in aesthetic perception and the availability of perceptual representations to aesthetic appreciation. Put simply, rich aesthetic perception makes aesthetic appreciation possible, but it does not itself amount to appreciation.

### **3.5.1.2 Bare aesthetic perception and everyday aesthetics**

Bare aesthetic perception is the natural foundation both for rich aesthetic perception and broad accounts of aesthetic psychology because it constitutes a pervasive form of aesthetic engagement with the objects and environments we encounter in daily life. Examples of bare aesthetic perception might include the experiences to which Sherri Irvin attributed "aesthetic texture". Recall Irvin's suggestion that,

Being in the room you are in right now, with its particular visual features and sounds; sitting in the way that you are sitting, perhaps crookedly in an uncomfortable chair; feeling the air currents on your skin—all of these things impart a texture to your experience that...should be regarded as aesthetic. (Irvin, 2008a, p. 30)

If we interpret these aspects of experience as unattended then they qualify as instances of bare aesthetic perception. Irvin writes that each “imparts a certain shape or texture to a small part of my life...” (Irvin, 2008a, p. 31) and this implicates bare aesthetic perception to the extent, firstly, that this is an example of the relating and ordering of sensory representations, and, secondly, that such elements then play a role in the periphery rather than the centre of conscious experience. (If they were attended, and they often are, this would amount to rich aesthetic perception.)

Let’s focus on the visual aspects of Irvin’s example: the unattended, peripheral visual features of a room of which we are barely conscious. Note immediately that Irvin writes of *particular* visual features: it seems important that we are discussing individual, uniquely instantiated features and qualities. This accords with my account of the importance of perceptual representation of individual objects possessing appearance qualities. I am unsure what Irvin means by “texture” in this example, but this should not matter too much for our purposes.

What visual features are we discussing? I am surrounded by patches of light and shade, differences in hue and brightness, associated with objects of different shapes, sizes, and textures, some of which resolve into a desk, chair, books, glasses, mugs, a lamp, a mouse, pen, paper, parts of my body, and so on. To the extent that these are qualities and objects which belong to one another, which are bound together as representations of multifeatured objects they are aesthetic. And to the extent that they are so represented in the absence of attention this is an example of bare aesthetic perception.

These are features of the room the perceptual representation of which affect my experience of it, which is what I think Irvin means by highlighting them. She seems interested in their effect on the shape or development of experience

as indicative of their aesthetic status. My view is slightly different. I am interested in the extent to which we are capable of assembling or binding experience in the absence of attention and—on the basis of my account of aesthetic perception—on the extent to which such representation is aesthetic.

Such a discussion is challenging because we are trying to isolate and discuss an aspect of experience and a form of aesthetic perception which is precisely to be understood as *unattended*, as resistant to discussion and isolation; but which is central to our everyday approach to the world, underpinning the assembled array of appearances which orientate us in and to the environment. Our preattentive estimation of the object—our binding of its features in space and time—is an ongoing perceptual activity which runs through experience, adding that texture of which Irvin writes.

One of the ways in which we can understand this continuous estimation or binding is the manner in which we are often struck first by the “feeling” or first impression of a space: we feel comfortable, uncomfortable, uneasy, constrained, or free to move in a room as a result of its layout, decoration, dimensions, lighting, and so on. Recall Kevin Melchionne’s suggestion that “the aesthetic virtues of the home are usually background qualities that affect our experience of the space without calling attention to themselves” (Melchionne, 1998, p. 199). That our experience is so affected is part of the reason so much time and effort is often invested in the design and decoration of home, work, and public spaces. Often such affective manifestations of bare aesthetic perception will lead to our attending to their origins and this will result in a shift toward rich aesthetic perception and characteristically appreciative practices; but the suggestion here is that the affective element of bare aesthetic perception is pervasive in much of our experience of spaces and, indeed, goes beyond that to unattended aesthetic perception of objects and their features even as we go about other tasks in our everyday lives.



### 3.5.1.3 Limits on bare aesthetic perception

It should be stressed that bare aesthetic perception is limited in terms of the *complexity* and *determinacy* of the qualities and relations it may involve; or, to put it in our terms, bare aesthetic perception is limited in the complexity and determinacy of the qualities it can attribute to individual objects. Why this is so will become more apparent when we look in detail at the kind of phenomenal consciousness and cognitive accessibility possible in the absence of attention. Certain qualities, I will suggest, are more “attentionally demanding” than others by virtue of both the complexity of their underlying aesthetic and nonaesthetic bases and the kinds of understanding that they demand as objects.

This can be understood in both the broad and narrow sense of perception: that is, in terms of the complexity and determinacy of representation of which we are capable in bare aesthetic perception, and in terms of the complexity of understanding and knowledge we can bring to bear on such representations. The absence of attention limits the determinacy of the qualities we can perceptually attribute to objects, but this need not threaten the possession of some less determinately represented quality—“light coloured” or “reddish” say—by an individual object represented.

In order to understand attentional complexity consider the manner in which our attribution of aesthetic qualities to a painting might be modified by our knowledge of the prevailing methods of composition and iconography at the time of its execution. What strikes us as an unremarkable dynamism in a minor Futurist work would have quite a different effect in a David tableau (Walton, 1970). Furthermore, as we shall see, some qualities—especially compositional ones—require sustained attention to discrete elements of a work, environment, or object in order that we might relate them to one another and begin to perceive their coherence, unity, or grace of execution (or lack thereof) in a way

that fleeting or inattentive perception could not. A similar point is made by Zuckert about the imaginative activity involved in Kant's account of the representation of an object as beautiful:

“[The] cognitive activity representing an object as beautiful comprises an activity of imagination, which is, more specifically,...*an alternation of attention among heterogeneous (particular, empirical) properties of the object, or “play”*” (Zuckert, 2007, pp. 292, my emphasis).

That is, our attention needs to move amongst discrete elements of a work in order to build up a temporally extended and determinate representation of its character. This kind of activity is unavailable to bare aesthetic perception, except insofar as it may involve fairly indeterminate qualities perceivable in the absence of attention and such qualities are not dependent on our bringing a sophisticated understanding to bear on our representation of them. Such activity is reserved for rich aesthetic perception.

### **3.5.2 Rich aesthetic perception**

For those unnerved by bare aesthetic perception, rich aesthetic perception should provide something of a relief. Rich aesthetic perception, as the term implies, involves a richer and more complex form of aesthetic perception: one which demands the kinds of phenomenological and cognitive processes which only attention supports. On our terms, rich aesthetic perception involves a more complex and determinate representation of the individual and the sensible qualities it possesses: which means that it is capable of supporting more attentionally demanding qualities, some of which require an evaluative and analytical response on our part. For example, the expressive qualities which emerge from temporally extended scrutiny of music or complex formal qualities of painted canvases.

Taking on Guyer's account of the two forms of reflective judgment involved in the judgment of taste, then, rich aesthetic perception is doubly different from bare aesthetic perception, even as it depends on it for the representation of bound perceptual experience. Firstly, rich aesthetic perception is "intentional" in the sense that is necessarily conscious and directed (if not consciously directed) toward objects and their properties. When I attend to a mug on my desk that might not be a voluntary act, it might have shifted as I knock a table leg, or the light might have glinted in the corner of my eye: stimuli can catch our attention, leading to a focusing on their point of origin. Whether or not I was phenomenally conscious of the mug in all its richness and detail before I attended to it—and there are many differences of opinion on this question which we will have to address—I am aware of the mug in a more straightforward sense once I attend to it.

Secondly, then, this more determinate perceptual representation brings with it a different relationship with the reasons for judgement which such a representation might provide. We will go into this further below and in the next chapter, but it is one of my central contentions that only rich aesthetic perception, on the basis of more determinate perceptual representation and the cognitive and rational accessibility attention brings, can furnish us with reasons for aesthetic judgments and verdicts.

Rich aesthetic perception thus involves an attention condition on the mental states it involves and shares this characteristic with narrow forms of aesthetic psychology. By virtue of its more determinate perceptual representation and cognitive and rational access to such representations and our response to them rich aesthetic perception should be understood to support and be involved in *aesthetic appreciation* and the activities and practices which emerge from and depend on such appreciation, such as criticism, aesthetic communication and argument, artistic practice and design. Rich aesthetic perception grounds

appreciation by providing the perceptual and cognitive resources on which appreciation depends.

### 3.5.2.1 Three senses of appreciation

If we recall the narrow accounts discussed in the previous chapters it becomes apparent that there are three interrelating senses of appreciation at play: analytical, evaluative, and affective.

#### *i. Analytical appreciation*

The analytical sense of appreciation involves scrutiny and discrimination and is thus the most closely connected to my specification of the core of aesthetic perception. Beyond this, the analytical sense of appreciation also seems to suggest attentiveness and the cognitive goals of understanding and knowledge. Paul Ziff described this sense of appreciation as “sizing up”, separating it from the evaluative sense of appreciation we will discuss below (Ziff, 1960, pp. 242-243). Seeking to understand the relations between elements of an artwork, the webs of interrelating aesthetic and nonaesthetic qualities, the manner in which they appear in experience, and so on are examples of this analytical sense. Recall Levinson’s suggestion that “to appreciate something aesthetically is to attend to its forms, qualities, and meanings for their own sakes, and to their interrelations, but also to attend to the way in which all such things emerge from the particular set of low-level perceptual features that define the object on a nonaesthetic plane” (Levinson, 1996b, p. 6). Consider the following catalogue entry on Umberto Boccioni’s 1910-1911 *La città che sale* (*The City Rises*):

The picture rejects the age-old laws of harmony, it is aimed at dissonance and expresses the simultaneity, fragmentation and contradictory character which characterises modern sensibility. A vibrant, edgy and flickering brushstroke, at times broad and dense, at others unravelled and diaphanous, becomes the vehicle of forces, the agent of the shift of

energies from one body to another, from one form to another and from one colour to its complementary. (Zippilli, 2009, p. 132)

This formal analysis is a characteristic product of the analytical aspect of rich aesthetic perception: an evocative description of the formal relationships that arc across Boccioni's vibrant canvas, finding social and artistic meaning in that energy and its painterly representation. This is also an example of the attentionally demanding nature of such activity: these qualities and meanings are what we might call "attentionally complex" and thus require a certain level of sustained and shifting attention to them and their constituents in order for us to be able to perceive and interpret them. This is a key feature of a view like Levinson's and is arguably the central aspect of Carroll's content-orientated view wherein "experience is an aesthetic experience in virtue of the objects upon which our attention is focused" (Carroll, 2012).<sup>67</sup> It was also evident in both Sibley and Davies understanding of the cognitive conditions on aesthetic interest.

As with most issues bound up with perception, the transition from bare to rich aesthetic perception has both phenomenological and epistemological aspects. Not only does such scrutiny and attention alter our phenomenology, causing certain relations or qualities to come to the fore of our consciousness, to appear more striking, but such a phenomenological alteration brings with it a sense in which we are placed in a stronger epistemic position in relation to the object of our attention and the grounds of aesthetic judgement. This accords with the common sense concept of attention and the manner in which the items on which we focus are available for scrutiny and report. The analytical sense of appreciation requires attention both in the perceptual sense of our orientating

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<sup>67</sup> The analytical sense accommodates both Carroll's direct and indirect or apperceptive forms of attention whereby one scrutinises an object either in terms of the qualities it strikes one as containing or in virtue of the experience it elicits in us.

sense organs appropriately and thus making the objects and properties of one's attention more determinate, but also in the mental or intellectual sense of our focusing on particular concerns or aspects of the object in question.<sup>68</sup> The analytical sense of appreciation is one way of guaranteeing perceptual acquaintance with the object of appreciation such that we have an appropriate awareness of the objects and features in question.

However, on my account it is not the epistemic or cognitive aspect which renders an episode of perception aesthetic: that is, it is not our access to or even the availability of, the objects and qualities represented in aesthetic perception for reasoning which makes them aesthetic. My specification of the aesthetic character of perception precedes the cognitive and rational accessibility of the representations delivered by such perception, and thus makes it improper to speak of "appropriate" appreciation at the level of bare aesthetic perception. We will have far more to say about this in the next chapter when we will consider the forms of access, awareness, and reference that the presence and absence of attention may involve. For now I will simply state that, although rich aesthetic perception, on my view, does require attention and thus will ensure that objects and qualities represented are accessible to and apt for use in aesthetic judgements and descriptions, this is not the case in bare aesthetic perception, which is characterised by inattention or divided attention. This inaccessibility does not threaten aesthetic character it only constrains its development.

#### *ii. Evaluative appreciation*

The evaluative sense of appreciation is usually coupled with the analytical in

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<sup>68</sup> It is, I suggest, the analytical sense of aesthetic appreciation, coupled with the belief that the "lower senses" are incapable of the requisite cognitive engagement that leads many to suggest senses or sensory experiences of taste, touch, and smell are incapable of supporting appreciative activity. See (Korsmeyer, 1999) for an acceptance of the centrality of the cognitive in aesthetics, but a rejection of taste's incapacity for such engagement.

that it is either the discriminating activity itself which is valued or valuable, or, as is more common, some complex of the (usually) positive evaluation of the discriminating activity and its objects. We see this in Levinson, Walton, Stecker, and Iseminger for each of whom an evaluative response and orientation is built into their understanding of the aesthetic in general and aesthetic appreciation in particular. This reflexivity was characteristic of the various narrow accounts. Recall Iseminger's suggestion that "Someone is *appreciating* a state of affairs just in case she or he is *valuing for its own sake the experiencing of that state of affairs*" (Iseminger, 2006, pp. 99, emphasis in original) and Walton's argument that "'aesthetic" pleasures include the pleasure of finding something valuable, of admiring it. One *appreciates* the work. One does not merely enjoy it; one takes pleasure or delight in judging it to be good" (Walton, 1993, p. 504). Such reflexivity need not necessarily involve a thought or statement to the effect that one is appreciating, but—and especially when coupled with the analytical sense—this evaluative relationship to the objects and character of experience does seem to suggest a suppression of other concerns and ends, a narrowing of one's field of thought and action: a focusing of attention.

Another form of evaluative appreciation might issue in or be thought to be constituted by judgements of aesthetic *merit*: what Sibley calls "purely evaluative judgements", which comprise *verdicts* on the aesthetic quality or value of the object in question (Sibley, 2001a). Nick Zangwill makes a similar distinction between *verdictive* aesthetic judgements: judgements that things have or lack aesthetic value or merit; and *substantive* aesthetic judgements: judgements that things are dainty, dumpy, graceful, garish, delicate, balanced, warm, passionate, brooding, awkward, and sad (Zangwill, 2001a, p. 9). In simple terms, verdictive aesthetic judgements tell us *that* something is valuable, substantive aesthetic judgements tell us *why*.

Now, on my account we need to make a further distinction because the kinds of substantive aesthetic judgement Zangwill mentions are not supported by bare aesthetic perception. Both substantive and verdictive aesthetic judgements in this guise are supported by rich aesthetic perception because only this form will allow of the determinate and temporally extended representation that supports a complex judgement to the effect that a dancer is graceful: a judgement that will be supported by myriad discrete properties of the dancer's body, movement, and relation to any musical accompaniment, a scrutiny symptomatic of the analytical aspect of appreciation.

Bare aesthetic perception, in contrast, cannot support this kind of scrutiny nor can it support conscious access to such judgements as *reasons* in support of verdictive judgements. Bare aesthetic perception precedes and supports substantive aesthetic judgement in providing bound representations of individuals in possession of sensible qualities located in time and space. Judging or perceiving a dancer to be graceful, a painting passionate, a sculpture awkward, requires a response beyond the assembling of experience. These are characteristically aesthetic judgements involving characteristically aesthetic terms, but it is important to see that they are constituted or supported by myriad discrete unifying or binding representations which give structure to experience and constitute the minimal aesthetic response that I have called bare aesthetic perception.

Nonetheless, if these "minimal" aesthetic judgements (with judgement in this instance meaning representation) support substantive aesthetic and verdictive aesthetic judgements, they do not constitute an engagement with aesthetic value or form of aesthetic valuing. It makes little sense to speak of judgements of aesthetic merit or value such as "beauty" or "ugliness" in relation to bare aesthetic perception. Such judgements demand a greater and more complex



response to the qualities of an object than unattended aesthetic perception can supply.

However, as Jerrold Levinson highlights, many aesthetic terms and attributions include a substantial *descriptive* element understood as “a perceptually manifest effect one can register independently of any evaluative assessment of or attitudinal reaction to that effect” (Levinson, 2006a, p. 317). Levinson would not recognise bare aesthetic perception as an instance of this, because—as we have seen—he demands a level of awareness beyond bare aesthetic perception.

Yet, if we understand “descriptive” not as a term relating to an activity but as a substantive contrast to “evaluative” (this is necessary because I argue that bare aesthetic perception does not allow of the kinds of description involved in aesthetic judgement and its justification: that is, the *activity* of description); and if we restrict ourselves to discussing the formal estimation of the object and its properties involved in bare aesthetic perception (the possession of colour, shape, size, texture, outline and silhouette, by an object and our perspective on it); then we can speak in terms of the perceptually manifest effect of our binding of the features of an object into an individual in a minimal aesthetic judgement which provides the foundation for more developed analytical, evaluative, and affective evaluation.<sup>69</sup>

### *iii. Affective appreciation*

The affective or emotional sense of appreciation requires that one take pleasure in or be affected by the objects of experience or the experience itself.

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<sup>69</sup> This doesn't quite match Levinson's specification of higher-order perceptual ways of appearing as the way to understand aesthetic properties and their effects, so we should, perhaps, speak of more modest perceptual ways of appearing in bare aesthetic perception, reserving higher-order ways of appearing and evaluative terms for the products of rich aesthetic perception. See (Levinson, 2006c).

This might involve a feeling of sadness or despair when viewing a Greek tragedy; elation or joy in the beauties of nature; or a simple pleasure in the delicate treatment of a still life. We will focus on pleasure for the moment.

The affective sense stands in a complex relationship with the analytical and evaluative senses of appreciation. On the one hand, it seems, in order for our pleasure in an object to be epistemically appropriate and thus an appropriate ground for aesthetic judgement, that pleasure must be grounded in the analytical or discriminating aspect of appreciation; yet, on the other, for many this relationship also means that our pleasure—in order to be *aesthetic* pleasure—must arise from the right evaluative stance, be that some form of disinterest or “for its own sake”-type condition.

This is further complicated by the manner in which, for some, aesthetic value is indicated by appropriately grounded pleasure. Thus, we can ask if an experience is pleasing because it is valuable or valuable because it is pleasing. Can affectively neutral experiences be aesthetically valuable? What of unpleasant or negative responses to works or features which nonetheless strike us as valuable?<sup>70</sup> We need not worry about such questions here. It is hopefully clear by now that my account of aesthetic character does not hinge on the positive or negative valence of perceived qualities or evaluative responses to experiences on the part of the subject, but on the nature of the perceptual representation of an object and its qualities.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The relationship between aesthetic value, *artistic* value, pleasure and aesthetic experience more broadly is, unsurprisingly, disputed. See, for example, (Graham, 2006), (D. Davies, 2006), (Goldman, 1995, 2006). (Shelley, 2010b) has a good overview.

<sup>71</sup> We mentioned above that one of the significant manifestations of bare aesthetic perception is affective. The form of continuous perceptual discrimination characteristic of bare aesthetic perception manifests, I argue, as much in bodily feeling and mood as it does in more traditional visual and auditory perceptual experiences. It seems plausible that one way in which the shift from bare aesthetic perception to rich aesthetic perception may be characterised is as the voluntary or involuntary shifting of attention to that affective experience as well as the

It is important, however, to distinguish the affective manifestation of bare aesthetic perception, which might also be understood as a form of more or less sophisticated mood, from the affect and emotion involved in rich aesthetic perception. For this purpose I follow Peter Goldie in distinguishing emotions and moods with reference to the degree of specificity of their objects (Goldie, 2000). Such a distinction is necessarily not clear-cut in actual experience, but the contrast between the emotion of anger and the mood of irritability, or that of fear and of anxiety, serves to illustrate the broad difference between emotion and mood. In the case of the emotion, we might be able to specify a particular person as the object of our anger or fear, whereas irritability or anxiety might lack any clear object beyond “everything” or “nothing in particular” (Goldie, 2000, p. 143).

In the clearest case, emotional appreciation has as its object an artwork (and its parts) and, perhaps, our response to it: thus we stand before El Greco’s *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, struck by the transition between interment and apotheosis: a luminous but grief-stricken realism of ashen flesh transforms into the pliant radiance of the divine as the picture stretches upward. That tension between flesh and heaven, tinged with something like the sublime in the face of so large a canvas, elicits a response of awe, a near sensual luxuriance in the rich vestments of St Stephen and St Augustine lowering the Count’s armoured body into his grave, which frisson is heightened by the unity of the composition as it ascends, both as the figures form a triangle and as the colour of their clothing—red, gold, white—holds the height of the work together. Alternatively, of

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beginnings of an analytical and evaluative engagement with their causes and character. If we recall our experience of spaces, we can shift from our daily occupation of such a space and its attendant affective characteristics toward a more focused, discriminating attention to its architecture, decoration, and the origins our responses. This kind of activity is characteristic of house-hunting or the sudden shift of perspective that arranging a room for visitors can elicit. We are able, in such situations, to perceive, appreciate, and discuss more attentively demanding qualities such as balance or disorder as a result.

course, we might feel perplexed, frustrated even, and made irritable by an artwork we neither understand nor value.

That is, the expressive qualities of the work and our affective response to them might form the basis of the emotional response and constitute its object even though the ultimate object of the emotion is the artwork. (This is similar to Carroll's apperceptive form of attention whereby we are struck by the qualities of an artwork in virtue of the experience it elicits in us.) Goldie writes of "feeling towards an object" which "is a feeling towards that thing as being a particular way or as having certain properties or features" (Goldie, 2000, p. 58). This seems to describe the affective or emotional mode of appreciation very well: "Feeling towards is thinking of with feeling" (Goldie, 2000, p. 58), Goldie writes, and the way in which we are guided toward particular qualities of a work, a room, a natural scene—qualities which can support more complex compositional or expressive features—seems often to be a movement *from* feeling associated with appearances *toward* an understanding of the origin of that feeling in our perception of a feature or set of features.

In the case of bare aesthetic perception, however, our access to the source of our mood is restricted by our inattention. Moods affected or induced by bare aesthetic perception—discomfort and anxiety in small, overcrowded spaces, for example—have as their objects the individuals we have bound and placed in assembled representations, but we have neither cognitive nor rational access to them.

Yet this does not mean that such a mood may not affect reasoning and action. As Goldie points out, moods and our less intentional emotions express themselves in and shape action and in this way tend toward specificity, by virtue of, amongst other things, disposing us toward or away from certain courses of action (Goldie, 2000 *passim*). If we understand bare aesthetic

perception as the unattended organisational activity of the perceiving subject, and the upshot of such representation is an effect on experience and thought in the shape of mood and feeling, then it becomes easier to see—at least schematically—how the continuous activity of aesthetic perception must impact on everyday decisions and actions, even if they are not a determining factor. This is one way of interpreting Yuriko Saito’s incorporation of the aesthetic into everyday life and allows us to begin to understand the manner in which bare aesthetic perception might “propel us toward everyday decisions and actions” in the absence of attention and contemplation.

The three senses of aesthetic appreciation are supported by rich aesthetic perception. This discussion should highlight the complex ways in which they might interact phenomenologically, epistemologically, and in relation to attention. They also capture the central elements of most narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology. This is a richer form of aesthetic perception than bare aesthetic perception because it admits of a more complex discriminating engagement with the objects of our response, a greater absorption in both their character and our experience of it, as well as facilitating a wealth of critical, social, and institutional practices. It is attention which supports this richness and is thus necessary for it; and it is the analytical sense of appreciation which is the most fundamental. Our next task is to see precisely how this is the case, for our broad account of aesthetic perception will be incomplete unless we can explain in greater detail how the presence and absence of attention interacts with our key concepts of bare and rich aesthetic perception. To that end, in the next chapter we will engage with contemporary work in empirical psychology and the philosophy of mind on the relationship between attention and consciousness.

### 3.6 Conclusion

A brief word now on aesthetic experience, the concept of which seems to find no place in the scheme of aesthetic perception outlined above. As we have seen, the scope of the term “aesthetic experience” is very broad when used—as it often is—as a marker of any and all commerce with the aesthetic. This “somewhat nebulous idea of aesthetic experience,” as Malcom Budd calls it (Budd, 2008, p. 31), can seem too cumbersome a tool, ambiguous as it so often is between perceptual engagement with aesthetic qualities and objects, on one hand, and constraints on the specific phenomenological characteristics of such engagement, on the other. It is my contention that we are unlikely to make much headway in understanding aesthetic psychology if we seek to do so whilst speaking of “aesthetic experience”. This is partly because the experiential element of the concept is often presumed to qualify the aesthetic aspect, whereas we have seen that this relationship is far from clear. The extent to which there is *an* experience which we can qualify as aesthetic in virtue of some prevailing phenomenological quality or structural characteristic of that experience is questionable and has been attacked in both its Deweyan and Beardsleyan manifestations.<sup>72</sup>

We were on more promising ground with Carroll’s suggestion that aesthetic experience should be characterised disjunctively in terms of its content, because that allowed us to focus, not on the possible affective and evaluative forms of engagement with such content, but on the process of aesthetic perception. However, once again we found fault with Carroll’s view because it presumed attention necessary for aesthetic perception. It also struck us as at the very least questionable whether Carroll’s account justified us speaking in terms of an aesthetic *experience* rather than an experience involving aesthetic content: to this

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<sup>72</sup> For the long-running debate between Monroe Beardsley and George Dickie see, for example, (Beardsley, 1981, 1982b) and (Dickie, 1964) (Dickie, 1965).

extent Levinson's criticism of what he called a "minimal account of aesthetic experience" was justified.

This all reflects the fact that we are not entirely sure what we mean by "experience" in this context: is an experience characterised by its content, by its attendant phenomenology, by our attention, by some complex of these and any stance we have adopted? Does qualifying an experience as aesthetic exclude other potential qualifiers? For some it does, for others it does not. What this ambiguity indicates, I suggest, is that we should avoid using the term and concept of "aesthetic experience"—or, at the very least, avoid relying on it—except to indicate that we are dealing with some conscious, attended form of experience in which the aesthetic is involved in some as yet unspecified but likely significant manner. This is vague but not necessarily the worse for that. It covers anything from Irvin's and Saito's examples to those of Levinson, Carroll, and Iseminger. It says nothing about what *qualifies* those experiences as aesthetic and nor need it. The term is, to that extent, a quantifier rather than a qualifier. We need some other justification of the aesthetic aspect of the experience, at which point we will be more specific about the particular elements of our aesthetic psychology which are in play and why: if we care to be. It's likely that we won't need to be in day-to-day-life.

In this thesis we have increasingly come to associate the aesthetic, and aesthetic perception in particular, with discrimination: with the relating, ordering, and organisational capacity of the mind as it is brought to bear on sensory perception and its products and relatives. This became more concrete in this chapter as I presented an account which identifies the aesthetic character of perception with the purposive perceptual representation of individual objects possessing particular sensible properties.

We have also seen that attention plays an important role in the scope and manner of this aesthetic activity, especially when coupled with particular accounts of the kind of perceptual discrimination and response which is distinctive or characteristic of aesthetic engagement. This led to the formulation of various construals of an attention condition on both aesthetic character and particular forms of aesthetic engagement, many of which were marked by demands for reflexivity, awareness of relations between properties, a certain form or forms of content, particular evaluative stances, or some complex of all of these. These demands underlined particular and interwoven phenomenological, epistemological, and evaluative demands on aesthetic experience, aesthetic perception, aesthetic attention, and aesthetic appreciation.

Yet we found that the clash between broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology turned on divergent intuitions and accounts about what such demands are thought to secure. It also turned out that many of the phenomenological, epistemological, and evaluative demands made by narrower approaches to aesthetic psychology have a very strong relation to the absence or presence of attention. In seeking to accommodate the plausible elements of both approaches I have outlined a broad account of aesthetic perception, comprising bare aesthetic perception and rich aesthetic perception, which operates in both the presence and the absence of attention, and which places no *general* attention condition of aesthetic perception.

However, we have reached a point where our “common sense” concept of attention must give way to a more sophisticated contemporary understanding of the complex and resistant field of attention research. Now that we have understood the divisions between the broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology and the implicit and explicit roles of attention in examples of each approach; and now that we have the outline of a broad account of aesthetic perception, we are in a position to assess the role of attention in such a



model. We need an understanding of attention which matches the progress we have made in grasping the complexity and pervasiveness of aesthetic perception.

In the next chapter, therefore, we will get to grips with contemporary work on attention as it bears on bare and rich aesthetic perception and the behaviour and practices they support. By the end of that chapter we should have refined our understanding of both aesthetic perception and attention. Indeed, I will argue that it is the interaction of this broad concept of aesthetic perception with attention—in concert with other values, goals, and cognitive influences—which serves to individuate our aesthetic psychology.

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## Chapter Four

### Attention and Aesthetic Perception

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Such are the noons here. In the morning this light breasts your windowpane and, having pried your eye open like a shell, runs ahead of you, strumming its lengthy rays—like a hot-footed schoolboy running his stick along the iron grate of a park or garden—along arcades, colonnades, red-brick chimneys, saints, and lions. “Depict! Depict” it cries to you, either mistaking you for some Canaletto or Carpaccio or Guardi, or because it doesn’t trust your retina’s ability to retain what it makes available, not to mention your brain’s capacity to absorb it. Perhaps the latter explains the former. Perhaps they are synonymous. Perhaps art is simply an organism’s reaction against its retentive limitations.

*Watermark: An Essay on Venice*

Joseph Brodsky<sup>73</sup>

#### 4.1. Introduction

What is the relationship between attention and aesthetic perception? In order to answer this question we need to address contemporary empirical and philosophical work on attention and its complex relationship to perceptual organisation, phenomenal consciousness, and cognitive and rational accessibility. Each of these is a crowded and contested field of research whose aims and preoccupations differ from the aesthetician’s except insofar as all seek to understand the processes and mental states involved in perception, attention, and consciousness. The sheer complexity of contemporary work on attention is daunting, but careful engagement with its material offers us the chance to be

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<sup>73</sup> (Brodsky, 1992, p. 79).

much more precise about the nature of bare and rich aesthetic perception and the relationship between them.<sup>74</sup>

## **4.2 Beyond common sense**

Thus far we have tended to discuss attention as if it were a unified or coherent concept amenable to concomitantly unified explanation. We pointed toward perceptual and cognitive selectivity (and their reciprocal relationship) as the heart of a common-sense concept of attention which shaped our aesthetic phenomenology, epistemology, and evaluation and, consequently, our picture of aesthetic psychology. The common-sense concept of attention was useful because it allowed us to analyse the role of attention in broad and narrow accounts of aesthetic experience and appreciation. However, there are drawbacks to the common-sense concept when it comes to thinking about the specific processes and mental states involved in aesthetic perception.

### **4.2.1 A common-sense concept of attention?**

The extent to which there is a consistent common-sense or folk concept of attention is debated; as is the extent to which such a common sense concept could or should guide research on attention. William James remarks that “Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible trains of thought”. This is arguably an appeal to such common-sense

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<sup>74</sup> In this chapter we will focus on vision, not because vision should be privileged in aesthetic psychology (although it has been), but because the vast majority of research on attention has been on visual sensory and perceptual experience.

We will draw on attention research in empirical psychology, cognitive science, and the philosophy of mind. For overviews of the psychological and philosophical issues in such research see (Mole, 2009) or (Watzl, 2011b, 2011c). (Wu, 2014) is an excellent introduction to many of the issues we will touch on in this chapter. (Mole et al., 2011a) is a collection of essays spanning neuroscientific, psychological, and philosophical approaches to attention.

For a more technical introduction to attention see (Palmer, 1999) particularly chapter 11, section 2.

See (Carrasco, 2011) and (Driver, 2001) for reviews of empirical work on visual and selective attention.

understandings of attention. Whether researchers should try to accommodate common, pretheoretical patterns of usage or forge ahead and attempt to shape or critique such patterns is a live question; one which finds a focus in debates surrounding the relationship between attention and consciousness. For example, Christopher Mole argues that we can empirically determine common-sense usages of the concepts of attention and consciousness and arrive at the view that “one is conscious of everything that one pays attention to, but one does not pay attention to all the things that one is conscious of” (Mole, 2008, p. 86). Others, such as Felipe De Brigard, reject the claim that there is a consistent common-sense view of attention, consciousness, or their relationship; arguing instead that common usage is varied and context-dependent (De Brigard, 2010).<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, one of the undoubted drawbacks of making use of the resources of attention research is the extensive and seemingly intractable disagreement about the nature and role of attention in consciousness and vice versa. As we will see, definitions of and approaches to consciousness diverge significantly, leading many to talk past one another and adopt very different criteria for the various forms of consciousness proposed. Likewise, what attention is, what it does, why and how it does it, and whether it makes sense to speak of a unified phenomenon of attention at all, are questions that admit of a great many answers and methodological approaches across a range of disciplines. We will have to acknowledge such disagreement if we are not to give a simplistic impression of the ways in which such research is of use to the aesthetician.

Yet, despite the remarkable complexity and diversity of opinion in contemporary attention research, if we can navigate our way through the disagreements we will benefit from a greater grasp of issues such as attended

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<sup>75</sup> See also (De Brigard & Prinz, 2010) and (Watzl, 2011b).

and unattended perceptual experience, the phenomenal and cognitive accessibility of perceptual representations, and the attentional demands of rational and demonstrative thought. With such an understanding we will be in a position to grasp the continuum of aesthetic perception as it runs from bare aesthetic perception to rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. This will help us make sense of the relationship between the broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology and begin to reconcile the two approaches through a deeper understanding of the role of attention in aesthetic perception.

#### **4.2.2 Definitions and explanatory strategies**

The rejection of a unified or consistent common-sense concept of attention need not lead to a rejection of the possibility of a unifying philosophical or psychological account. On the contrary, researchers may reject folk usage whilst presenting an account of attention as, for example, “a natural-kind term, with an empirically discovered essence” (De Brigard & Prinz, 2010, p. 52). Call accounts which look to specify some unified phenomenon of attention “essentialist” (Taylor, forthcoming). Essentialist accounts identify particular conditions or properties which serve to identify the entities which satisfy or possess them as instances of attention.<sup>76</sup>

For example, Jesse Prinz identifies a particular brain process, Christopher Mole a particular way of unifying cognitive processes, and Sebastian Watzl an organisational feature of experience as constituting attention.<sup>77</sup> These “process”, “adverbial”, and “phenomenological” approaches differ in many ways, but what they have in common is their argument that a certain set of properties or conditions are necessary and sufficient for an instance of attention. Each of

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<sup>76</sup> It is not the rejection of folk usage which makes a definition of attention essentialist, but the attempt to specify some unified concept of attention.

<sup>77</sup> For Prinz’s account see, for example, (De Brigard & Prinz, 2010), (Prinz, 2010, 2011b). For Mole, see (Mole, 2011a, 2011b). For Watzl, see (Watzl, 2011a).

these essentialist accounts includes and excludes different examples of apparent attention and inattention, and involve different approaches to the role of attention in perception and cognition. In particular, they can lead to different views of the relationship of necessity and/or sufficiency between attention and consciousness: a debate which is as hostage to definitions of (the varieties of) consciousness as it is to those of attention. These relationships include the following:

- Attention is necessary and sufficient for consciousness.
- Attention is necessary but not sufficient for consciousness.
- Attention is sufficient but not necessary for consciousness.
- Attention is not sufficient for consciousness.
- Attention is neither necessary nor sufficient for consciousness.

List adapted from (Taylor, 2013).

For example, Felipe De Brigard and Prinz write “We claim that attention is necessary and sufficient for perceptual representations to become conscious” (De Brigard & Prinz, 2010, p. 51). For them, the function of attention is to bring a perceptual representation to consciousness, by which they mean that, in order “for there to be something that it is like to experience a representational perceptual state”, it must be attended (De Brigard & Prinz, 2010, p. 51).

In contrast, Robert Kentridge argues on the basis of experimental work on a subject suffering from “blindsight” that (spatial) attention is possible in the *absence* of consciousness, which would mean that attention is not sufficient for consciousness, although it might still be necessary (Kentridge, 2011). In blindsight subjects are “capable of accurately detecting visual stimuli and of making simple discriminations about their properties, despite reporting that [they] are *subjectively blind* to these stimuli” (Kentridge, 2011, pp. 239, my

emphasis). Such a position dissociates attention and the “what-it-is-likeness” of experience: attention occurs in the absence of phenomenal consciousness, something which makes no sense on De Brigard and Prinz’s view. This should give us some inkling of the various functions and forms of attention to which different accounts appeal.

Indeed, Kentridge’s is an example of an alternative to the essentialist approach. Some, most notably those in empirical and cognitive psychology, adopt a plural approach because they are interested in the diverse functions of attention and the myriad processes which instantiate these selective functions. Experimental paradigms can be developed to focus on these processes and their perceptual effects, and in this way various models are produced to deal with particular forms of attentional phenomena. These approaches tend to construe attentional processes as the subject’s response to its limited capacity to deal with the overwhelming amount of information available to us. (E.g. (Carrasco, 2011).) On this approach the route from initial stimulation of the cones and rods of the retina to subjective experience of the view from our window is a story of selective or competitive processing, prioritisation, and interpretation. Discrete yet reciprocal processes are implicated at each stage and in different contexts, leading many to resist a unified or essentialist account of attention, preferring to use “attention” as an umbrella or family-resemblance term. As Ronald Rensink writes, “attention is more of an adjective than a noun” (Rensink, 2013, p. 98). That is, various processes operate selectively and are thus attentional, rather than falling under a particular natural kind term, metaphysical explanation, or connection to consciousness which captures the essence of attention.

Another of the key distinctions between approaches to attention is that between sub-personal and personal accounts. Prinz’s view is an example of an essentialist, reductionist view which identifies attention with a particular sub-personal computational process: “attention is a process by which information

becomes available to working memory” (Prinz, 2011b, p. 199). In contrast, personal approaches, whilst valuing the empirical study of such processes and mechanisms, consider the best account of attention to be located at a personal level. Personal approaches resist reduction to subpersonal processes and the loss of the role of the subject. Declan Smithies, for example, argues that “attention is essentially a phenomenon of consciousness” which performs a particular functional role (Smithies, 2011a, p. 247). We will look more closely at Prinz’s, Smithies’s, and other accounts below.

We must tread carefully in the light of such ongoing disagreement about the terms and concepts we deploy, and about the level at which explanations of attention should be targeted. I will avoid general definitions, preferring to engage in a plural manner with the functional role attention plausibly plays in many mental states and cognitive processes. To the extent that the conclusions I draw depend on the outcome of these wider debates they will be hostage to developments in the field, but not, I hope, vulnerable in the broad direction of my argument as much as in its particular technical expression.

#### **4.2.3 Varieties of attention**

One of the reasons to be open to a plural account is the sheer variety of forms of attention and attentional process with which we are faced. A far from exhaustive list might include the following: firstly, the distinction between *overt* attention in which (in vision) we move our eyes towards a location, and *covert* attention in which we attend to an area *without* shifting our gaze. That is, in covert attention we mentally focus on an area or feature without fixating on it. Secondly, the distinction between *voluntary* (or *endogenous*) attention in which shifts in attention are directed by the will of the subject; and *involuntary* (or *exogenous*) attention in which our attention is captured or automatically orientated to the location of a sudden stimulus like a flashing light or moving



object (Carrasco, 2010, p. 75). Thirdly, we can think about visual attention as *focused* on a single object or feature; spread over several objects; or as *distributed* over an entire scene (sometimes called *global* attention) (Treisman, 2006, p. 411). These differences reflect the fact that we sometimes attend to a whole scene, sometimes to a single object or set of objects, and sometimes we attend locally to a particular feature or property (Palmer, 1999, pp. 351-352). Fourthly, we can distinguish between three main types of visual attention: spatial, feature-based, and object-based.

Spatial visual attention—the variety discussed by Kentridge above—involves attention to a particular *location* or region of space, either via an overt movement of the eyes or a covert shift without accompanying eye movement (Carrasco, 2011, p. 1486; Shomstein, 2010). Feature-based attention “can be deployed covertly to specific aspects (e.g. color, orientation or motion direction) of objects in the environment, regardless of their location” (Carrasco, 2011, p. 1486). Object-based attention involves the guiding of attention by object structure: “The primary signature associated with object-based attention is the enhanced processing of information belonging to or appearing within the confines of one object that is selectively attended” (Behrmann & Shomstein, 2010, p. 94).

Each of these forms of attention captures a way in which we aesthetically engage with artworks and environments: sometimes standing back to take in a view, a canvas, or a building; at other times attending to the distribution of a particular colour and its effect on the compositional structure of an artwork; sometimes focusing on a particular patch of canvas, a rose, an architrave, a vase; often choosing where to attend, but at other times having one’s attention caught and held by a dramatic movement, a flash of light.

This variety of forms and mechanisms of attention is a key motivation for the plural approach of the empirical sciences. It seems unlikely, though not impossible, that an essentialist or unified account at a subpersonal level could account for every form of attention. (Of course, it might not aim to.) This diversity of subpersonal processes involved in attention led Alan Allport to argue that,

[Even] a brief survey of the heterogeneity and functional separability of different components of spatial and nonspatial attentional controls prompts the conclusion that, qua causal mechanism, *there can be no such thing as attention*. There is no *one* uniform computational function, or mental operation (in general, no *one* causal mechanism), to which all so-called attentional phenomena can be attributed. On the contrary, there is a rich diversity of neuropsychological control mechanisms of many different kinds (and no doubt many yet to be discovered), from whose cooperative and competitive interactions emerge the behavioral manifestations of attention. (Allport, 1993, p. 203)

Sebastian Watzl (Watzl, 2011b) summarises this challenge for an essentialist subpersonal account of attention in terms of two problems: *the overgeneralisation problem* and *the disunity problem*. Firstly, as Allport points out, mechanisms and processes implicated in attention in some instances seem to operate in other contexts in the absence of attention. Any account which attempted to identify attention with one of these mechanisms would thus seem to predict the presence of attention where it appears absent. This is the overgeneralisation problem.

Secondly, there appears to be very little in common between the diverse mechanisms associated with attention. “While, for example, in some cases attention seems to be the mechanism that binds features together, in other cases it seems to be the mechanism by which information gets broadcast to working memory” (Watzl, 2011b). This is the disunity problem. This resistance to reduction is what leads many empirical psychologists to write, as Rensink does,

of attentional processes—processes which operate selectively—rather than any unified phenomenon of attention.

Yet, just because we cannot identify a unified subpersonal account of attention need not mean that a personal level account could not capture the core of attention, although such accounts face similar problems of overgeneralisation and disunity, which stem from the great variety of contexts in which “attention” is used in daily life.

Hopefully, the sheer heterogeneity of attentional processes, substrates, and perceptual effects has become clear amidst the definitional and methodological disputes described above: this complexity and resistance to reduction should be kept in mind throughout the discussions which follow. Our question—what is possible in the presence and absence of attention—is misguided if we think the issue of the presence or absence of attention is something which admits of a straightforward resolution.

Our answer will depend on the role and nature of attention in three interwoven fields: perceptual organisation, consciousness, and cognition. We have already encountered one of the issues—that of feature binding and the assembling of visual experience—and will address that when we consider whether such binding is possible in the absence of attention; and thus whether bare aesthetic perception is a plausible element of aesthetic perception. First, however, we will have to address the problems we have already hinted at: the relationship between attention, consciousness, and cognition.

### **4.3 Attention and consciousness**

We have already encountered the permeable divide between philosophical and empirical methodologies, between subpersonal and personal explanation, and essentialist and plural accounts of attention. Of course, each approach may

draw on the others. Philosophers with an interest in unifying explanations benefit from an engagement with the diversity of empirical attention research, whilst experimental psychologists and their colleagues may avail themselves of substantial philosophical work on the nature of consciousness in particular: a concept which is used in so many contexts and with so many divergent meanings as to resist any attempt to render them commensurable.

#### **4.3.1 Concepts of consciousness**

The concept of consciousness is a hybrid, or better, a mongrel concept: the word “consciousness” connotes a number of different concepts and denotes a number of different phenomena. We reason about “consciousness” under some premises that apply to one of the phenomena that fall under “consciousness,” other premises that apply to other “consciousnesses,” and we end up with trouble. (N. Block, 1995, p. 227)

Consciousness is a notoriously disputed concept. Indeed, as Ned Block makes clear, there is no single concept of consciousness. There are a great many “problems” of consciousness which range, in David Chalmers’s presentation, from the easy to the hard. Chalmers outlines the following “easy problems”, which are supposedly susceptible to study by cognitive science and explanation in terms of computational or neural mechanisms:

- The ability to discriminate, categorize, and react to environmental stimuli;
- The integration of information by a cognitive system;
- The reportability of mental states;
- The ability of a system to access its own internal states;
- The focus of attention;
- The deliberate control of behaviour;
- The difference between wakefulness and sleep.

(Chalmers, 2004a)

As Chalmers points out, “one sometimes says that a mental state is conscious when it is verbally reportable, or when it is internally accessible. Sometimes a system is said to be conscious of some information when it has the ability to react on the basis of that information, or, more strongly, when it attends to that information, or when it can integrate that information and exploit it in the sophisticated control of behaviour” (Chalmers, 2004a, p. 618). Attention has been studied as somehow supporting or constituting each of these. For example, for some the reportability of a mental state is a criterion of consciousness. On such a view, if attention plays a role in the reportability of mental states, then it plays a crucial role in consciousness.<sup>78</sup>

It is easy to see how one’s concept of consciousness can affect what one takes to be evidence for its presence. What one takes consciousness to be and what one counts as (experimental) evidence *for* consciousness is as disputed as any definition of or methodological approach to attention. This clearly complicates matters for the aesthetician seeking to understand the relationship between attention, aesthetic perception, and consciousness. Recall our question in the previous chapter—introduced via Kant—about the nature of our consciousness of aesthetic perception (or aesthetic response). Unless we know what we mean by “consciousness” when we are asking about its role in aesthetic perception and aesthetic judgement we cannot get a handle on the question. What do we mean, for example, by consciousness of perceptual representations? Do we mean that they are *reportable*, available for use in aesthetic judgements in the way David Davies (via Sibley) requires (D. Davies, forthcoming)? Would that mean that aesthetic perception requires attention, as a consequence of its requiring consciousness understood as availability for report?

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<sup>78</sup> We need not necessarily accept Chalmer’s suggestion that these *are* easy problems of consciousness; or that the distinction between easy problems amenable to empirical investigation and a hard problem that is more resistant is tenable. For a challenge to Chalmer’s approach see (Lowe, 1995). At this point our aim is to emphasise the diversity of concepts of consciousness rather than to assess their merit.

Put simply: does the purposive representational activity of mind which I have called aesthetic perception require consciousness of the representations of bound multifeatured objects which are its product? If so, does such consciousness require attention? Why? These questions are impossible to answer at this stage and will remain so unless we can be clearer about which concept of consciousness and which definition of attention we are using.

We have yet to address the so-called “hard” problem: the problem of experience itself. There is something it is *like*, a subjective character, to experience (Nagel, 1974). This subjective character does not seem to be captured by the list of the easy problems of consciousness. In this sense of consciousness, something “has conscious states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism—something it is like *for* the organism” (Nagel, 1974, p. 436). There is a felt quality to experience that accompanies visual sensation: the quality of redness, depth of field, the sound of a clarinet, the smell of mothballs, and so on (Chalmers, 2004a, p. 619). Call this *phenomenal consciousness*.

This concept of phenomenal consciousness is, I suggest, a key one for aesthetic psychology. In order to perceive, appreciate, scrutinise, and evaluate aesthetically there must be something it is like to be a subject of aesthetic states—to feel pleasure, to *see* colour, shade, and line, to *hear* a note, a voice, harmony, and to reflect upon those feelings and experiences. If there is nothing it is *like* to perceive aesthetically, then we are not discussing aesthetic matters at all. As we have seen, for a narrow account, not only must there be something it like to experience aesthetically—some phenomenology—but we are also required to *value* the experience and its objects, to *scrutinise* the perceptual manifold, to deploy the products of that scrutiny in descriptions which ground aesthetic judgements, and so on.

These aesthetic activities require the supposed targets of the easy problems of consciousness: reportability, discrimination, introspective access, integration by the cognitive system, and so forth; but they also seem to require the experiential, subjective element as well. Narrow accounts, in other words, require phenomenal consciousness and something more: a particular response to or scrutiny of experience. In contrast, some—although not all—broad accounts require something less. Yuriko Saito, we saw, does not emphasise reportability in everyday aesthetic experience. Instead, she discusses the effect on thought and action of aesthetic qualities and experiences in daily life. This is neither attended to, nor, perhaps, even accessible. It is certainly not deliberate. On some criteria of consciousness, then, those are not conscious phenomena, although it might be assumed that they are part of some broader subjective experience. It is an open question whether for Saito and other broad theorists such unattended everyday experiences are unreportable in principle—whilst remaining aesthetic—or whether we merely happen not to report them in day-to-day life.

Our question now has to be that of the relationship between phenomenal consciousness and that “something more” which is so often taken to be some kind of scrutiny of or evaluative stance toward the contents and objects of perceptual experience. Indeed, one of the central elements of this thesis can be understood as a question about the relationship between the “something it is like” of experience and the “something more” of cognitive and rational engagement with that felt quality of experience insofar as it characterises the relationship between aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. On my account this “something more” is a requirement for aesthetic *appreciation*, but it is the “something it is like”—the phenomenal character of perceptual experience—on which the aesthetic character of experience depends.

### 4.3.2 Consciousness and accessibility

What is the relationship between phenomenal consciousness—understood as the subjective felt quality of experience—and the cognitive and rational accessibility of perceptual representations? Might it be possible to have conscious phenomenology which “overflows” cognitive access? That is, might it be possible for there to be something it is like for a subject to have perceptual experience without the perceptual representations involved in this experience being accessed in cognitive processing and thus reportable? In other words, can we dissociate phenomenal consciousness and what Ned Block calls “access-consciousness”?<sup>79</sup>

A state is access-conscious (A-conscious) if, in virtue of one’s having the state, a representation of its content is (1) inferentially promiscuous (Stich 1978), that is, poised for use as a premise in reasoning, (2) poised for rational control of action, and (3) poised for rational control of speech....These three conditions are together sufficient, but not at all necessary...I see A-consciousness as a cluster concept, in which (3) — roughly, reportability — is the element of the cluster with the smallest weight, although (3) is often the best practical guide to A-consciousness. (N. Block, 1995, p. 231)

For Block, access-consciousness is a *functional* concept: “what makes a state A-conscious is what a representation of its content does in a system” (N. Block, 1995, p. 232). Access-conscious content is paradigmatically involved in reasoning, whereas phenomenally conscious content is paradigmatically a matter of experiential properties: “it is in virtue of its phenomenal content...that a state is P-conscious, whereas it is in virtue of its representational content...that a state is A-conscious” (N. Block, 1995, p. 232). As a functional concept what makes a state access-conscious is what (Block calls) the Executive

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<sup>79</sup> (N. Block, 1995). He develops the argument that phenomenal consciousness “overflows” cognitive access in (N. Block, 2007; N. Block, 2008; N. Block, 2011).



System (“the system in charge of rational control of action and speech”) does or is disposed to do with that representation (N. Block, 1995, p. 232).<sup>80</sup>

What this means is that we can conceive, firstly, of access consciousness without phenomenal consciousness, and, secondly, of phenomenal consciousness without access consciousness. (Although Block doubts that any cases of the former actually exist.) Let’s focus on the latter: phenomenal consciousness without access consciousness. Block writes,

Suppose you are engaged in intense conversation when suddenly at noon you realise that right outside your window there is—and has been—a deafening pneumatic drill digging up the street. You were aware of the noise all along, but only at noon are you *consciously* aware of it. That is, you were P-conscious of the noise all along, but at noon you are both P-conscious *and* A-conscious of it. (N. Block, 1995, p. 234)

This is the idea that phenomenal or perceptual consciousness *overflows* access-consciousness. You were always aware of the noise, conscious of its phenomenal content, but the representational content of the state played no role in the Executive System until noon; at which point “the belief that is acquired at noon is that there is and has been a noise” (N. Block, 1995, p. 234).

The initial motivation for the development of the distinction between phenomenal and access consciousness was the phenomenon of blindsight. As we have seen, in blindsight subjects are “capable of accurately detecting visual stimuli and of making simple discriminations about their properties, despite

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<sup>80</sup> Block continues, “The paradigm P-conscious states are sensations, whereas the paradigm A-conscious states are “propositional attitude” states such as thoughts, beliefs, and desires, states with representational content expressed by “that” clauses...[However,] thoughts are often P-conscious and perceptual experiences often have representational content” (N. Block, 1995, p. 232).

That is, although it is in virtue of its phenomenal content that a state is phenomenally conscious it may still have representational content as, for example, a perceptual experience may possess the representational content “that there is a red square in front of me” (N. Block, 1995, p. 232).

reporting that [they] are subjectively blind to these stimuli” (Kentridge, 2011, p. 239). That is, patients with “blind” areas in their visual field will nonetheless be able to guess reliably about certain features of a stimulus flashed in that area. This includes the discrimination of simple forms, shaping their hands in a way appropriate to grasping an object, and, possibly, colour discrimination (N. Block, 1995, p. 227). On Block’s terms blindsight patients claim to have neither phenomenal nor access consciousness. However, it is not straightforwardly *because* phenomenal consciousness is missing that access is missing as well. This is the key issue for Block.

The confusion that Block is keen to avoid is the jump from the premise that “consciousness” is missing to the conclusion that *phenomenal* consciousness has a certain function. That is, he wants to prevent the move from “the fact that consciousness in some sense or other is missing simultaneously with missing creativity or voluntary action to the conclusion that P-consciousness functions to promote the missing qualities in normal people” (N. Block, 1995, p. 245). It may be that phenomenal and access consciousness are intimately linked—indeed, they normally are—but we can still distinguish between them and thus conceptually distinguish two concepts of consciousness.

### **4.3.3 Consciousness and aesthetic psychology**

Let’s take stock for a moment. I have distinguished several concepts of consciousness, many of which interrelate: the deliberate control of behaviour, the ability to access and report one’s inner states, the felt quality of experience, and the functional notion of the role and accessibility of representational content in cognitive processing. The relationship between phenomenal, cognitive, rational, and behavioural concepts of consciousness is complex. The possibility presents itself that a perceptual state might have phenomenal content without straightforwardly playing a role in the cognitive machinery of a

subject. That is, *phenomenal* consciousness might not unproblematically equate to cognitive, rational, and behavioural consciousness. In other words, there might be “something it is like” to experience without that “something it is like” being accessed for cognitive and rational use or the control of behaviour.

Why is this significant for us? One of our central questions in this thesis is the extent of aesthetic states or states with aesthetic content: that is, of the extent of our aesthetic psychology. I have suggested that both broad and narrow accounts involve attention implicitly or explicitly in their explanations of the extent of our aesthetic psychology. This is because of their (often common-sense or folk-psychological) view of what attention does for us such that it either supports and deepens aesthetic perception and appreciation or is unnecessary for recognisably aesthetic states or effects. On several narrow accounts a kind of higher-order awareness of the objects and phenomenal character of perception is required: an awareness cashed out in terms of the discrimination of and consequent availability for reasoning and report of the relations between qualities; and the reflexive valuing of those properties and our experience of them. Positions which demand higher-order forms of thought and the cognitive processes which support them are, it seems, predicated on the thought that attention is what supports them. This may well be true and we will address that in a moment.

However, we have just seen that it is possible to distinguish between phenomenal consciousness and access or cognitive consciousness, at least in theory. My suggestion is that narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology tend to conflate phenomenal and access consciousness such that they assume, firstly, that the latter depends on the former; and, secondly, that phenomenal consciousness is indicated by reportability and rational control of behaviour, which may actually be evidence of access consciousness. I suggest that it is not

*access* or cognitive and rational scrutiny but *phenomenal consciousness* on which the aesthetic character of perception depends.

In combination with my account of aesthetic perception this suggests that we perceive aesthetically—in the sense that we bind features to individual objects such that we have phenomenal consciousness of them—*without* needing to be cognitively conscious of their representational content or able to use this visual information in rational deliberation in the way that narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology require. (We will examine some evidence for this idea that phenomenal consciousness might *overflow* access in a moment.) The next step in developing such an account of aesthetic perception is to understand the role of attention in phenomenal and access consciousness. Roughly, my argument will be that phenomenal consciousness of a rich enough sort for bare aesthetic perception exists in the absence of attention (and thus access), whereas cognitive access and rich aesthetic perception require attention. In order to understand this we will have to consider the kinds of inattentive phenomena adduced in support of the suggestion that we *do not* possess rich phenomenal consciousness in the absence of attention.

#### **4.3.4 Inattentive phenomena and failures of attention**

How much of what we *look at* do we *see* when our attention is engaged elsewhere? Perhaps much less than we might think. For it seems that when occupied with other tasks there is a tendency for people to miss intuitively striking stimuli even when they are presented directly at fixation. Arien Mack and Irvin Rock called this failure to *report* and thus, they assumed, to *see* bright, salient objects with well-defined contours “inattentive blindness” (Mack & Rock, 1998). Indeed, objects and events as intuitively striking as a man in a gorilla suit walking across the screen whilst the subject is asked to count the passes between a group of basketball players go unnoticed by a surprising

number (Simons & Chabris, 1999). (Although not, it must be noted, by the majority of subjects.) This leads to the claim “that, without attention, visual features of our environment are *not perceived at all* (or at least not consciously perceived)—observers may fail not just at change detection, but *at perception as well*” (Simons & Chabris, 1999, pp. 1060, my emphasis). That is, in cases of inattentive blindness one neither accesses nor possesses phenomenal consciousness of such features.

This is a stronger claim than that arising from so-called “change blindness”: “the striking failure to see large [and salient] changes that would normally be noticed easily” (Simons & Rensink, 2005, p. 16) when those changes occur across film cuts, eye movements, and points of view. Change blindness studies are used to motivate and ground the claim that attention is required in order to see change because it is only with attention that “features can be encoded (abstractly or otherwise) and retained in memory. That is, all of the information in the visual environment is potentially available for attentive processing. Yet, without attention, not much of this information is retained across views” (Simons & Chabris, 1999, p. 1060).

In contrast to many attentional and inattentive phenomena, change blindness is not a mere artefact of experimental disruption, but “a general failure to retain and/or compare information from moment to moment” (Simons & Rensink, 2005, p. 17) even in the face of widespread insistence that such changes would be noticed. (Simons and Rensink call this “change blindness blindness”.)<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The magician Derren Brown exploits change blindness when he performs a routine which involves his asking a member of the public for directions and, when a pair of men carrying a large screen pass between Brown and the unsuspecting subject, swapping places with a confederate of a different age, gender, build, and ethnic background with, it seems, no sign that the subject has noticed.

The key question, of course, is what this inattentive “failure” actually amounts to. Jeremy Wolfe asks whether this is a failure of *perception* in the sense that we fail to *see* unattended information, or a failure of memory and thus not inattentive *blindness* but inattentive *amnesia*. On this view, inattentive visual perception *is* conscious but “vision has no memory and...attention is the gateway to other mental representations” and so “unattended visual stimuli may be seen, but will be instantly forgotten” (Wolfe, 1999, p. 75ff).

The question is not whether unattended visual information is processed, for it seems that unconscious or “implicit” perception of events and stimuli may direct behaviour and be, to that extent, causally if not phenomenally efficacious (Mack, 2003). There are significant priming effects in inattentive blindness experiments as well as evidence—mentioned earlier—that “visual information undergoes substantial processing prior to the engagement of attention” (Mack, 2003, p. 181). The pertinent question for us is whether such priming is the result of unconscious or conscious perception.

The question, of course, is not insubstantially linked to what we mean by consciousness and attention in the first place. This has been a problem all along. We have probed the relationship between consciousness and our ability to report stimuli outside of attention: Why should simultaneous or subsequent failure to *report* imply a lack of phenomenal consciousness or a failure of perception? What *counts* as a demonstration of consciousness? For many, as Block points out, “Whatever it is about a state that makes it unreportable, would also preclude its being phenomenally conscious” (N. Block, 2007, p. 483). But the truth of that is far from clear and “whether the machinery of cognitive accessibility is a constitutive part of the nature of phenomenal consciousness” is precisely the point at issue (N. Block, 2007, p. 483).

Yet, reportability is frequently the criterion by which phenomenal consciousness is thought to be indicated and its nature inferred. The question of what inattentive phenomena actually establish about the nature of perception and perceptual consciousness remains. Is a failure to *report* indicative of a failure to *experience* or a failure to *access*? Linked to this is the question of the richness or sparseness of perceptual consciousness.

#### 4.3.5 Is perceptual consciousness rich or sparse?

Eric Schwitzgebel writes that “We might think of consciousness as like a soup. Is it a *rich* soup, full of experience in a wide variety of modalities simultaneously—visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, imagistic, proprioceptive, emotional—or is it a *thin* soup, limited to one or a few things at a time?” (Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 6). If phenomenal consciousness is *rich* then we can begin to wonder about the relationship between this rich, full consciousness and the kinds of cognitive and rational access we might have to it in the presence and absence of attention. When Block asks “whether phenomenal consciousness could be so divorced from cognitive access that a subject can have an experience that he does not and cannot think about” (N. Block, 2008, p. 289) he is wondering whether we have rich phenomenal consciousness in the absence of attention and the cognitive access it supports.

Now, do inattentive blindness and associated phenomena undermine the rich view of visual representation and experience? Is consciousness a rich or thin soup? This matters for us because, as Schwitzgebel emphasises,

The phenomenological difference between the rich and the thin views is vast. On the first view, our stream of conscious experience is aswarm with detail in many modalities at once, both inside and outside the field of attention; on the second, the stream of experience is limited to one or a few attention-occupying activities or perceptions at a time. On the first view, unconscious perception exists only on the margins if it exists at all; on the second, *most* of our perception is unconscious. On the first, we

always have a complex flow of visual experience; on the second we may quite often have not visual experience at all. (Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 31)

On the sparse view, very little of a scene is consciously processed at any given time: the illusion of seeing outside of the focus of attention may arise because viewers know that they can, at will, orient attention to any location and obtain conscious information from it. This is known as the “refrigerator light illusion”, wherein “subjects mistake the easy accessibility of all sorts of detail for actually seeing that detail” (Block 2008: 297). On the rich view quite a lot of a scene in our visual field is consciously experienced and, at least, available for cognitive access even if it is not actually accessed or remembered.

The significance of this question for the dispute between the broad and narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology should be apparent. If our perceptual or phenomenal consciousness is rich then the kinds of everyday experiences described by Saito, Irvin, and others, seem possible, at least in principle. Multimodality aside, the complexity of visual experience on the rich view—attended or otherwise—seems to admit of the kind of perceptual representation of individuals in possession of appearance properties which constitutes bare aesthetic perception. The sparse view, however, effectively limits perceptual experience to a few attended objects and events and thus restricts aesthetic perception as well.<sup>82</sup>

The inattentive phenomena mentioned above are cited as evidence for a sparse perceptual consciousness. We see, it is suggested, much less than we realise or wish to believe. It is the refrigerator light illusion which leads us to think otherwise. Inattentive blindness in the gorilla basketball case suggests we are conscious of little beyond the focus of our attention. The question of

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<sup>82</sup> Of course, a narrow theorist might hold that we have a rich perceptual consciousness whilst still arguing that aesthetic states of mind require more than this.



what counts as consciousness rears its head once again and is made more complex by the question of the richness or sparseness of consciousness in the presence and absence of attention.

Yet, as was suggested by Wolfe's inattentional amnesia, we come up against the issue of reportability and accessibility here as well. As Schwitzgebel points out, "mere behavioural responsiveness...or above-chance responding on forced choice questions about the presence of stimuli" (Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 32) will not convince an advocate of the thin or sparse view that stimuli outside of attention were consciously experienced. Yet, nor will mere failure to report convince an advocate of the rich view that stimuli outside of attention were *not* consciously experienced. This can be seen in Block, who rejects inattentional *blindness* in favour of inattentional *inaccessibility*: "subjects may see the features that change, but fail to notice the difference, because although much of the detail in each picture is phenomenally registered, it is not conceptualised at a level that allows cognitive access to the difference" (N. Block, 2008, p. 296). But what evidence is there for the view that we have a rich phenomenal or perceptual consciousness which *overflows* attention and cognitive access?

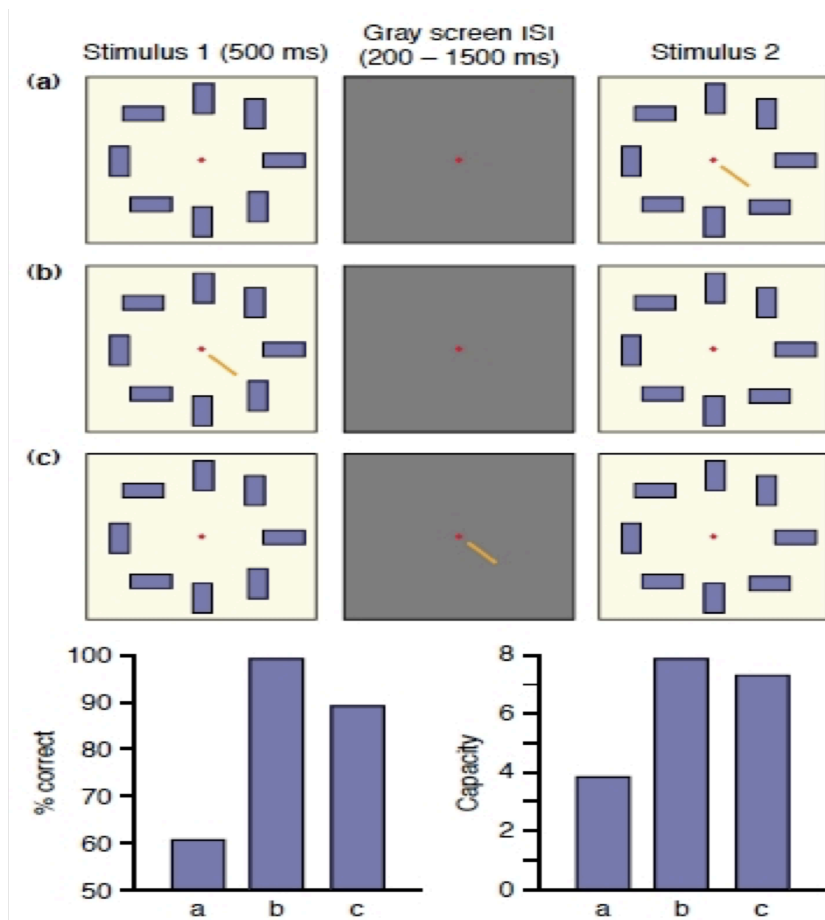
#### **4.3.6 The overflow argument**

The overflow argument turns on a distinction between the conscious perceptual system and the cognitive system which accesses it. This *rich* conscious perceptual system, it is argued, has a greater capacity than the *sparse* system which accesses it (N. Block, 2011, p. 567). Block argues that the working memory system which underlies cognitive access has a smaller capacity than the perceptual consciousness system, which means that necessarily only a portion of the rich perceptual representations possessed by a subject is accessed. (All representations are in principle accessible, but, necessarily, only some are accessed.) For Block, "This difference in capacity shows that consciousness and

cognitive access are to some extent based in different systems with different properties” (N. Block, 2008, p. 297). The evidence for this view is complex and contested. We cannot possibly address every issue. We will focus here on an oft-cited paper by Victor Lamme who, drawing on (Landman, 2003), argues that, “we are ‘conscious’ of many inputs but, without attention, this conscious experience cannot be reported and is quickly erased and forgotten” (Lamme, 2003, p. 13).

The figure below (fig. 1) describes a psychophysical experiment on change blindness which supports this conclusion. In all three cases a stimulus is presented, followed by a grey inter-stimulus interval (ISI), and then a second stimulus in which the orientation of one of the items in the scene has changed. In the first version of the experiment (1a), the altered stimulus is cued *after* the ISI. Subjects asked whether this item has altered orientation perform poorly (60% correct). Unsurprisingly, cueing the item that might change (1b) protects from change blindness, leading to near 100% correct performance in identifying the alteration. The interesting result is the third form of the experiment. In 1c the item which might change is cued *after* the first stimulus has disappeared and before the second appears. This also protects from change blindness. Subject success in detecting change in this case is nearly that of the pre-cued alteration. This suggests that a complete representation of the display, firstly, exists in the absence of attention, and, secondly, endures after the stimulus has disappeared.

Figure 1.



Change blindness in an abstract scene, and the role of attention. In these change blindness trials (a–c), a scene containing multiple items is presented (Stimulus 1), followed by a gray screen inter-stimulus interval (ISI), after which the same scene (Stimulus 2) is shown again. The subject is then asked whether the cued item (indicated by the orange line) has changed or not. In (a) it has changed orientation. Subjects perform poorly at this task, (60% correct, lower left histogram). Performance can be converted into a ‘capacity’ measure (lower right histogram) indicating how many items the subject had available (in working memory) for change detection, in this case, approximately four items. When the to be changed item is cued in advance (b), subjects perform almost 100% correct (resulting in a virtual capacity of all eight objects). However, when subjects are cued after the disappearance of Stimulus 1 but before the onset of Stimulus 2 (c), they perform almost as well and seem to have stored almost all objects.

(Lamme, 2003, p. 13). Reproduced with permission.

Lamme uses this result to argue that attention is responsible, not for bringing stimuli to perceptual consciousness, but for making it possible that stimuli may be consciously reported. Attention is responsible for the storage of items in working memory to allow for subsequent report and comparison. As with Block, on this view change and inattention blindness are construed not as failures of perceptual consciousness but of access. Lamme writes,

Apparently, after the first display has disappeared, a neural representation of almost the whole scene is still present and attention can select from this representation to store the relevant item in working memory. After the onset of stimulus 2, this representation has vanished, as cueing at that time does not help (Fig. 1a).

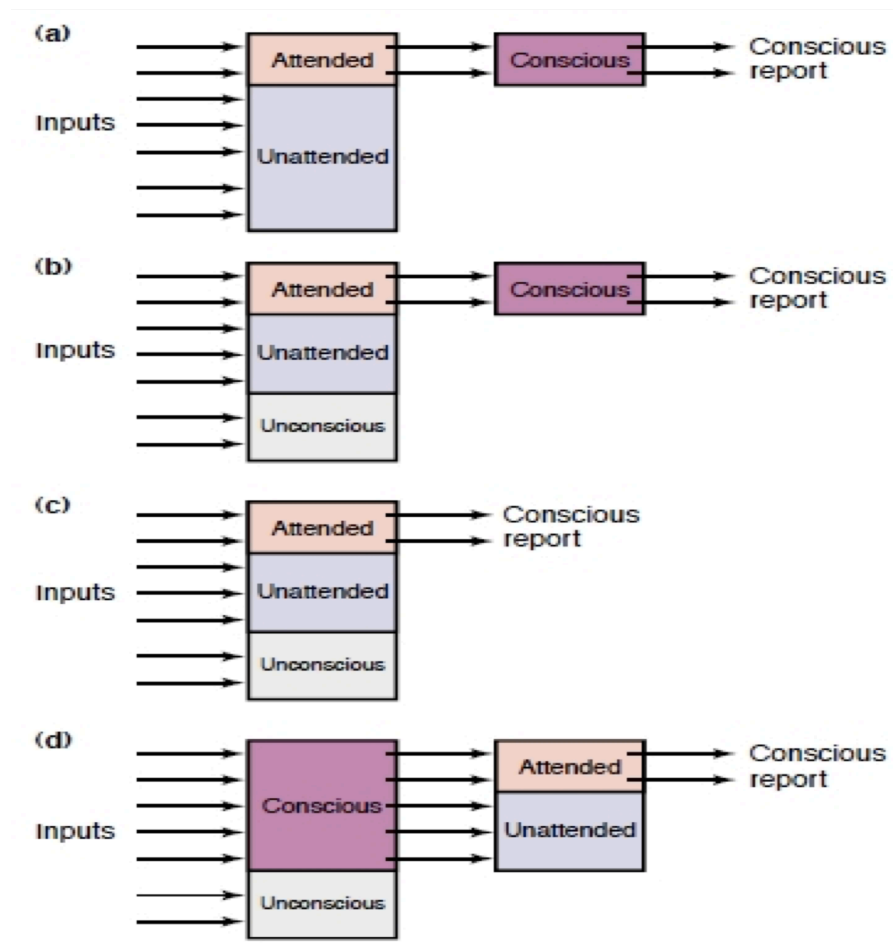
The model thus argues for the existence of a short-lived, vulnerable and not easily reportable form of visual experience, which contrasts with a more stable, reportable form of awareness. (Lamme, 2003, pp. 13-14)

This view is represented in the figure below (fig. 2) in (d): We are conscious of more than we attend, but the capacity to report depends on attention. Prinz's view that attention is responsible for the *availability* of information for encoding in working memory and thus its reaching consciousness equates to (b) because he believes that, despite the necessity and sufficiency of attention for consciousness, our phenomenal consciousness still overflows what we *actually* access. The classic inference from inattention blindness paradigms is represented by (a): only what is attended is conscious and available for report. Recall that for advocates of inattention inaccessibility it is an error to speak of inattention and change *blindness* because, for them, "one normally consciously sees the item that constitutes the difference but fails to categorise or conceptualise it in a way that allows for comparison" (N. Block, 2011, p. 567)<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> In addition to Lamme and Landman, Block cites the experimental paradigm devised by George Sperling in 1960. (Sperling, 1960) In this experiment subjects were shown an array of

Figure 2.



(Lamme, 2003, p. 13). Reproduced with permission.

letters for a brief period. Subjects reported being able to see most or all of an array of twelve letters in three rows of four. However, they could only *report* three to four of the letters from the whole array. Yet, significantly Block argues, subjects could report three to four items from any row cued after stimulus offset. This, Block writes, suggests “that subjects did have a persisting image of almost all the letters” (N. Block, 2011, p. 567).

The overflow argument explains this as the conscious representation of all or almost all twelve letters in sufficient detail to distinguish them from the rest of the alphabet. Yet, “only 3-4 of these items can be cognitively accessed, indicating a larger capacity in conscious phenomenology than in conscious access” (N. Block, 2011, p. 567).

As I suggested above, the possibility that phenomenal consciousness overflows cognitive consciousness, combined with the thought that it is on the former which the aesthetic character of experience depends, leads to the suggestion that what I have called aesthetic perception goes on in the absence of cognitive consciousness and thus that attention may not be required for experiences possessing aesthetic character. However, we are not quite at this stage yet, for we still need to understand the development of aesthetic perception when we do attend and access our broader phenomenal consciousness.

#### **4.3.7 Attention, determinacy, and visual consciousness**

From this point I shall be assuming this model of the relationship between attention, phenomenal consciousness, and cognitive accessibility. That is, the model represented by (d) and Block's overflow argument. This is not uncontroversial and challenges to the overflow argument and the distinction between phenomenal and access consciousness continue. For example, James Stazicker argues that Block underestimates the indeterminacy of visual consciousness and that cueing doesn't prompt access to conscious information, but that "the effect [is] to alter...conscious experience such that some information became more determinate in it" (Stazicker, 2011, p. 169). Thus, for Stazicker, unattended visual consciousness is not rich and "specific" (in the sense that it contains detailed information about size, shape, and so on) when unattended, but rather involves visual consciousness of determinable properties which is made more determinate by attention.<sup>84</sup> As we saw earlier, a similar idea is outlined in (Nanay, 2009) in terms of the perceptual representation of determinate and determinable properties and the role of attention in making an attended property more determinate.

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<sup>84</sup> There is much more to the debate between Block and Stazicker than this, but the above suggests the kinds of disagreement in this area. See also (Tye, 2010).

Now, it is worth conceding that overt perceptual attention—the orientating of one’s visual sense organs—does render visual conscious more determinate. The distinction we must make is between the determinacy of visual consciousness that is causally linked to the physiology of our visual organs and the limitations in determinacy imposed on parafoveal vision, on the one hand, and the determinacy of visual consciousness that arises from restrictions higher in the visual processing system, on the other. A further distinction and dissociation must also be made between those physiological and processing limitations and the cognitive accessibility of perceptual representations.

For it seems plausible that attention and attentional processes are involved in each of these. Overt attention—involving the orientating of one’s gaze (foveal vision)—renders vision more determinate as a consequence of the superior resolution of the fovea. However, overt and covert attention also increase determinacy because particular representations are selected from—or successfully compete with—the mass of potential stimuli with which the visual system is faced.<sup>85</sup> This distinction is illustrated by the difference between focusing one’s gaze on a red mug and thus rendering its previously determinable property “red” determinately “scarlet”, and keeping one’s gaze focused on the computer screen whilst focusing one’s attention covertly on the mug. In the latter case, the colour property is arguably less determinate than the former, whilst being more determinate than it would be when completely unattended. Both cases involve differences in determinacy, with different—although related—causes.

Thus, the determinacy of perceptual experience is not unproblematically related to the *accessibility* of its content, understood in Block’s terms as the functional role its representational content plays in the cognitive system. The

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<sup>85</sup> See (Carrasco, Ling, & Read, 2004) for the effect of covert attention on contrast sensitivity and contrast resolution.

determinacy of our visual consciousness and its accessibility are anything but straightforwardly related and we can sit somewhere between Block's and Stazicker's arguments. This is significant for the question of the nature of perceptual or phenomenal consciousness in bare aesthetic perception. Bare aesthetic perception involves more determinable representations than rich, attended aesthetic perception because it is neither overtly nor covertly attended, and is thus unaccessed and unreported. But, as long as bare aesthetic perception involves bound perceptual representations this does not threaten its *aesthetic* character.

However, this kind of unattended and unaccessed perceptual experience is certainly not what most of us think of as paradigmatically aesthetic experience. Nor does it permit the kinds of complex scrutiny, reflection and communication we tend to associate with such experiences. The overflow of perceptual consciousness might help us to understand the breadth of aesthetic perception, but we need to go further if we are to understand why and how rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation depend on attention for their development. This is crucial for a comprehensive account of our aesthetic psychology: one which doesn't just seek to broaden what counts as aesthetic perception, but which can account for and support the rich forms of perception and appreciation privileged by narrow approaches. This requires understanding the relationship between attention and cognition.

#### **4.4 Attention and cognition**

In chapter two we saw that narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology emphasise what we called epistemic conditions on aesthetic experience. They are concerned with *knowing* the world aesthetically and this is reflected in their accounts of the aesthetic character of experience and judgement. Davies's reading of Sibleyan discrimination was couched explicitly in such terms: a



discriminating approach to the perceptual manifold such that one is furnished with descriptions apt for use in aesthetic judgements. Levinson's demand for an awareness of the interrelations between aesthetic properties and the manner in which they emerge from their nonaesthetic bases seems to require this cognitive capacity; as does the ability to think about and value one's aesthetic experience and its objects in the way Walton and Iseminger describe.

Similarly, rich aesthetic perception—understood, firstly, as involving more determinate and accessible perceptual representations than bare aesthetic perception, and, secondly, as supporting and partially constituted by our response to such representations—involves cognitive access to perceptual experience; and aesthetic appreciation (in its analytical, evaluative, and affective senses) requires both rich aesthetic perception and the capacity to interrogate, respond and refer to the objects and contents of experience. If attention, or one plausible approach to a plural concept of attention, is implicated in our capacity to know the world, to reason about, refer to, or discuss it aesthetically, then we need to understand how and why this might be so.

Accounts of the relationship between attention and cognition are closely linked to those concerned with the relationship of attention and consciousness. For Prinz, for example, attention functions to make information accessible to working memory and thus for use in cognition. For him, attention is what brings information to consciousness (Prinz, 2011b). This clearly makes attention crucial for cognition by way of being crucial for consciousness. However, as Mole, Smithies, and Wu point out, on a different approach “attention does not explain our *conscious experience* of the world but, rather, our conceptual capacity for *thinking* about it or our epistemic capacity for *knowing* it” (Mole, Smithies, & Wu, 2011b, p. xvii). We will focus on the role of attention in rationality and demonstrative thought.

#### 4.4.1 Attention and rationality

Views about the relationship between attention and rationality are characteristically targeted at the personal level perspective rather than, as with Prinz and Block, at the subpersonal level of information processing (Mole et al., 2011b, p. xvii). For example, Declan Smithies writes that,

...attention is essentially a phenomenon of consciousness. If attention is understood in terms of its distinctive phenomenology, then it is built into the concept of attention that there is a phenomenal contrast to be drawn between attentive and inattentive modes of consciousness. On this view, *attention is a distinctive mode of consciousness*, so there is consciousness without attention, but there is not attention without consciousness. (Smithies, 2011a, pp. 247, my emphasis)

Smithies argues that the functional role of attention is to make “information accessible for use in the rational control of thought and action”, and what makes information so accessible is a distinctive mode of consciousness, which means that attention is a distinctive mode of consciousness (Smithies, 2011a, p. 248). Smithies thus links the phenomenology of attention—the distinction for the subject between, on the one hand, perceiving, acting, and thinking attentively, and, on the other hand, doing so inattentively—to its functional role. Attention modifies the stream of consciousness and, in doing so, helps us understand the selectivity of attention: “not every experience within the stream of consciousness can occupy the attended foreground at once, since attention is essentially a contrastive notion: there is always a phenomenal contrast to be drawn between the foreground and the background of consciousness” (Smithies, 2011a, p. 250). Smithies is thus comparable to Block in that consciousness overflows attention, but distinctive in that inattention precludes

rational access at a personal level rather than cognitive accessibility at the subpersonal.<sup>86</sup>

Smithies's response to inattentional blindness illustrates this view. "If attention is necessary for information to be accessible for use in the control of action, reasoning, and verbal report, then this is sufficient to explain why subjects fail to react to unattended objects" (Smithies, 2011a, p. 256). Yet, we saw above that priming effects on performance occur outside of attention. Smithies responds to this unattended effect by making a distinction between *causal* and *rational* notions of accessibility, arguing that attention is only necessary for rational access, leaving the way open for "nonrational forms of causal influence, including priming effects, on action, reasoning, and verbal report" in the absence of attention (Smithies, 2011a, p. 257). He goes on:

The crucial claim is that although unconscious information is sometimes accessible for spontaneous use in the control of action, it is not *rationally* accessible in the sense that it is accessible to the subject as a reason that justifies the subject in forming a belief or performing an action. (Smithies, 2011a, p. 262)<sup>87</sup>

That is, Smithies holds that beliefs and actions cannot be justified or made rational on the basis of information to which one has no access. We require introspective access to information for the purposes of critical reflection about what we believe and do. Unconscious visual information "plays only a nonrational causal role" (Smithies, 2011a, p. 263).

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<sup>86</sup> See (Watzl, 2011a) for another account which construes attention as a structuring of the stream of consciousness.

<sup>87</sup> Thus, for Smithies, in blindsight visual information is causally accessible because it primes performance, but not *rationally* accessible. Hence the appearance of guesswork rather than the formation of beliefs in the experimental responses of blindsighted subjects (Smithies, 2011a, p. 262).

It is his argument that there is a conceptual relationship between consciousness and rational accessibility, and his functional definition of attention in terms of rational accessibility which leads Smithies to conclude that consciousness is necessary but not sufficient for attention.

This account bears comparison to Block's distinction between phenomenal and access-consciousness, but is distinct because Smithies rejects Block's location of the functional role of attention at the subpersonal level of cognitive accessibility whereby attention facilitates the encoding of perceptual representations in working memory, thus allowing them to play a role in the executive system. For Smithies, this "purely causal" notion of accessible information neither constitutes consciousness nor does justice to the connection between the phenomenology of attention and its *epistemic* (rather than causal) role in making information rationally accessible. (Smithies, 2011a, pp. 267-268).

We need not adjudicate this debate. We are interested in both Block's subpersonal access-consciousness and Smithies's personal level rational-access consciousness, because both address the way in which phenomenal consciousness (and thus, on my account, aesthetic perception) may overflow report and access. Both consider phenomenal consciousness to overflow attention, but they diverge in their notions of accessibility: Block's accessibility is causal, whereas Smithies's is normative—it has a role in rational justification.

Crucially, neither rules out the aesthetic character of unattended experience as I have specified it in bare aesthetic perception. What Smithies's approach highlights is the epistemic and rational significance of attention; and this is crucial for rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. If we hold a narrow account of our aesthetic psychology, however, then rational-access consciousness will be required for *any* aesthetic mental state, because the kind of perceptual acquaintance and critical and evaluative reflection involved in such accounts requires such access.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> A similar epistemic account of the role of attention can be found in (Roessler, 2011). Roessler is interested in "perspicuous" perceptual knowledge: we know *how* we know, with immediate understanding. His account differs from Smithies's in that attention, for Roessler,

#### 4.4.2 Aesthetics and demonstrative thought

Closely related to attention's role in rationality is its relationship to demonstrative thought. If I perceive something and my thought can be understood as, for example, "That mug is red" or "That is a square" then I am thinking a demonstrative thought. As Gareth Evan's writes,

[The] general idea is that thinking about an object demonstratively is thinking about an object in a way which crucially depends upon the subject's currently *perceiving* that object. Thus one simply will not have understood a normal use of the sentence 'That cup is *F*', unless (i) one can perceive the cup, and (ii) one thinks, in a way that depends on that perception, 'That cup is *F*, that's what the speaker is saying'... (Evans, 1982, p. 72)

This notion of perceptual demonstrative thought (some demonstrative thought might be based on memory or testimony) requires *current* perceptual contact with objects and their properties. This is not thinking about an object by *description*—even as the object one is currently perceiving—but, as Smithies emphasises, "the crucial difference is...that one cannot think about an object demonstratively unless one currently perceives it" (Smithies, 2011b, p. 8).

I suggest that much aesthetic thought—appreciation, judgement, evaluation, and communication—involves a significant demonstrative component. Recall the different kinds of aesthetic attribution or judgement we can make: substantive judgements are judgements that something is dainty, dumpy, graceful, garish, delicate, and so on. Verdictive judgements are judgements that things have or lack aesthetic value or merit. Now, I don't wish to discuss here whether or not a verdictive judgement of an object one is currently perceiving constitutes demonstrative thought because of the muddy waters swirling

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supports knowledge about objects *because* one knows how one knows: the relationship is a top-down one of perspicuous knowledge providing perceptual justification.

around whether one attributes a *property* to something one calls “beautiful” or some similar evaluative term. One might be thinking demonstratively in this case, but I don’t want to make anything turn on it.

However, we are certainly thinking demonstratively when we make substantive judgements on the basis of our perception of an object. “That dancer is graceful,” “This vase is garish,” “This brushwork is delicate,” and so on are, if based on current perception, demonstrative thoughts. As well as being sentences which express thoughts, these examples also capture a (simplified) form of critical communication. If, standing before a canvas, we are urged by our companion to note the violence of Boccioni’s brushwork, perhaps with reference to its texture, orientation, and visibility, then we are engaged in seeking to understand the reference of their demonstrative utterance.

This pointing toward objects and features is at the heart of aesthetic communication. As Sibley points out “Prominent...among [the activities of the critic] is drawing attention to the features that are notably responsible for the effect the critic wants his audience to see” (Sibley, 2001a, p. 38).<sup>89</sup> Isolating and pointing out both aesthetic effects and the properties or qualities which support them is plausibly an example of demonstrative thought and reference. It is an interesting and open question whether a thought expressible in the sentence “That painting is the cause of my (aesthetic) response” is also demonstrative; or whether one can demonstratively refer to one’s *own* thoughts in a form such as “That aesthetic response is pleasurable” or “That pleasure is valuable”. (That is, whether one’s taking as the content of one’s mental states *other* mental states can constitute demonstrative thought.) If this is the case, then the evaluative and emotional senses of appreciation might be even more closely tied to

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<sup>89</sup> There is, as Sibley points out in the rest of the passage, rather more to the critic’s activity than this isolation of features; but demonstrative thought lies at the heart of the project.

demonstrative thought and the role of attention and consciousness in supporting such thought than I argue here.

There is thus an interesting parallel between the enduring view that aesthetic perception, experience, or judgment requires *direct*, noninferential perception of objects and phenomena, and the role of demonstrative thought in aesthetics.<sup>90</sup> For example, although Kant held that the judgement of taste possesses universal validity, he nonetheless also believed it to be *singular* (§33 5: 285). That is, aesthetic judgement “asserts of a given object, and that object only, that it may be expected to occasion pleasure in every subject responding to it” (Guyer, 1997, p. 133). Thus Kant writes:

If someone does not find a building, a view, or a poem beautiful, then first, he does not allow approval to be internally imposed upon him by a hundred voices who all praise it highly. He may of course behave as if it pleased him as well...But what he does see clearly is this: that the approval of others provides no valid proof for the judging of beauty, that others may perhaps see and observe for him, and that what many have seen in one way he believes himself to have seen otherwise, may serve him as a sufficient ground of proof for a theoretical, hence a logical judgment, but that what has pleased others can never serve as a ground of an aesthetic judgment. (§33, 5: 284)

Singular judgements of the form “This *F* is *G*” are not a form of demonstrative thought, but Kant’s insistence that aesthetic testimony may not ground aesthetic judgement—because aesthetic judgement is grounded in a subjective feeling arising from our representation of the object—suggests that underlying the demand for perceptual acquaintance in aesthetic judgement is a requirement for a perceptual demonstrative thought the subject of which is the object to which beauty is imputed. This means that rich aesthetic perception

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<sup>90</sup> The scepticism of aesthetic testimony can be seen in Sibley’s insistence that aesthetic judgement requires direct perception in (Sibley, 2001a, 2001b) as well as the narrow accounts we have discussed throughout. For a positive discussion of aesthetic testimony see (Meskin, 2004).

and aesthetic appreciation require the capacity to frame and understand the reference of demonstrative thoughts. It is to the relationship between attention and demonstrative thought —and thus the relationship between attention, rich aesthetic perception, and aesthetic appreciation—that we now turn.

#### **4.4.3 Attention and demonstrative thought**

I don't intend to go very far into the analysis of demonstrative thought—that would divert us significantly from the aims of this thesis—but it is significant for us that attention is thought by many to be crucial to such thought.<sup>91</sup> The question is generally framed as one of whether perception must be phenomenally conscious and attentive in order to support demonstrative thought (Smithies, 2011b, p. 7). This question can be focused by considering whether a blindsight patient is capable of using the visual information in the blind half of his visual field in order to understand a visual demonstrative. Recall that such a patient can reliably guess about the orientation and direction of an object in this blind field. There is, apparently, nothing it is like for such a patient to perceive the object and only the forced-choice conditions of the experiment cause this information to manifest itself. That is, the visual information is not spontaneously accessible by the subject, but requires, for example, the questioning of an experimenter in order for the subject to infer the existence of some object in his blind field. As Smithies points out, the subject would therefore be thinking about such stimuli by description rather than demonstratively (Smithies, 2011b, p. 6).

##### **4.4.3.1 Experiential highlighting**

For John Campbell, knowledge of the reference of a demonstrative concept is provided by conscious perceptual attention to its object. “It is attention as a

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<sup>91</sup> See (Evans, 1982) chapter six for his account of demonstrative thought. An overview of Evans's account framed in terms of our concerns with consciousness and attention can be found in (Smithies, 2011b).



phenomenon of consciousness that matters for knowledge of reference. If I am to understand a demonstrative referring to an object, it is not enough merely that the object be there somewhere in my visual field; I have to attend to it" (Campbell, 2002, p. 2). That, for Campbell, one can only have knowledge of the reference of a demonstrative in the case of conscious perceptual attention to its object is made clearer by imagining a blindsight subject who can reliably guess the properties of the object in his blind field, can act appropriately towards it, and construct descriptions which interpret a demonstrative referring to the object. Yet this "blindseer" cannot understand the reference of a demonstrative because, despite appropriate and reliable report and action, the subject doesn't *know* what is being referred to. Consider Campbell's "sea of faces" case:

[You] and I are sitting at a dinner table with a large number of people around and you make a remark to me about 'that woman'. There are a lot of people around; I can't yet visually single out which one you mean. So on anyone's account, I do not yet know which woman you are talking about. Suppose now that we add to the example. My visual experience remains as before: a sea of faces. I cannot consciously single out the person you mean. All I get consciously is a sea of faces. But now we add some of what the blindseer has. You refuse to give me any further clues as to which person you mean, but you say, 'Try to point to the woman I mean.' At first I protest that I can't do that, since I don't know who you're talking about, but I do try to point, and to my surprise you say I'm pointing right at the person you mean. Suppose now that my conscious experience remains a sea of faces, but we extend the reach of my reliable guessing so that it encompasses everything the blind seer can do. So I can make reliable guesses about what the person is eating, wearing, and so on, as well as reaching and pointing appropriately. But so long as my conscious experience remains a sea of faces there is an ordinary sense in which I do not know who you mean. (Campbell, 2002, pp. 8-9)

Campbell's aim in having us consider the sea of faces case is that we should find it compelling that the blindseer does not, despite having a reliable mechanism for detecting and responding to his environment, actually *know* which objects are being indicated. The blindseer lacks conscious awareness of

the object in question and thus, Campbell's case is meant to suggest, he has no knowledge of the reference of a demonstrative of which those objects are the subject.

So what is it about conscious perceptual attention that means we know the reference of a demonstrative? As Campbell points out, it is not simply that foveating the object provides greater information about the object in question—although that is an upshot of overt attention—because covert attention likewise singles out an object or person such that one can know the object to which another is referring; and anyway, the issue is not simply one of information but *experience* (Campbell, 2002, p. 9ff).

Campbell's argument is complex. He construes conscious attention as the *highlighting* of an object in experience, which highlighting affects the functional role of experience and serves to place us in a position to deliberately track, answer questions about, and to act on the object. “[It] is because of your experience of the object that you are able to verify propositions about the object” (Campbell, 2004, pp. 267-268). Conscious attention plays a target-setting or selectional role at a *computational level*, even though “the targets of the information-processing selected are set at the level of *conscious attention*” (Campbell, 2004, pp. 270, my emphasis). It is conscious attention to the *location* of the object in question which serves to facilitate information processing of the features and object at that location.

Thus, although Campbell's concept of attention as “experiential highlighting” is a phenomenal one, it serves a functional role via the functional role of conscious experience by identifying the location of the target object of the information processing which underlies our use of demonstrative concepts. Attention aids in the selection and processing of information and it is only thus that we can *know* which object is being pointed out using a demonstrative and

so understand the reference of the demonstrative in question. On Campbell's view, then, a blindsight subject cannot understand the reference of a demonstrative because he cannot *know* the object in question by virtue of a highlighted experience of that object: and it is conscious, attentive experience that provides the requisite knowledge of that object such that it can serve as the reference of a demonstrative term. The blindsight subject does not understand his success in guessing the characteristics of an object in their blind field, he only knows that he is successful.<sup>92</sup>

So, if rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation involve a significant demonstrative component, and if conscious visual attention is required in order that we understand the reference of a visual demonstrative, then there is a strong suggestion of a conscious visual attention condition on rich aesthetic perception and the appreciative aesthetic experiences characteristic of art-centred aesthetics.

#### **4.4.3.2 Forming immediately justified beliefs**

We can contrast Campbell's experiential highlighting account with Smithies view. Smithies rejects Campbell's target-setting account of attention in favour of an account which locates the significance of consciousness at an epistemic level. For Smithies, consciousness plays an epistemic role because "it enables subjects to use demonstrative concepts in forming immediately justified beliefs about objects in the world around them" (Smithies, 2011b, p. 19). On this account, blindsight subjects cannot think demonstrative thoughts because they fail to satisfy certain *epistemic* constraints on their possession.

For Smithies, we only possess a demonstrative concept of a particular object *o* if we have "information about *o* which provides immediate, defeasible

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<sup>92</sup> I am not concerned to critique Campbell's view here. See (Kelly, 2004), (Matthen, 2006), and references to Smithies above for some concerns about Campbell's account.

justification to form beliefs about *o*" (Smithies, 2011b, p. 21). This justification, he argues, requires conscious perceptual experience of *o*.

So, on this view, it is our conscious perceptual experience of an object which causes and provides the justification for forming beliefs about it. That is, the phenomenology of conscious experience plays an epistemic role. This role is missing in the blindsight case because, as we saw earlier, it makes little sense, for Smithies, to speak of beliefs as rationally justified if we have no access to their grounds. On the rational-access model of attention, our beliefs about an object are only immediately justified if we have access to that object and its properties, and it is attention which makes information fully accessible in the rational control of thought and action. This precludes the possession of a demonstrative concept of an object in blindsight cases.

Again, without adjudicating between Campbell's and Smithies's accounts, we can see that conscious attention is plausibly crucial for rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. (As well as for the experiences targeted by narrow aesthetic psychology.) Although it is not the capacity for demonstrative thought which renders perception aesthetic, rich aesthetic perception nonetheless requires that we possess demonstrative concepts. That is, in rich aesthetic perception we need to be able to sustain perceptual and rational engagement with the objects of experience, and this requires demonstrative thoughts about those objects. This perceptual and cognitive capacity supports the kinds of thought and communication involved in aesthetic appreciation.

It is thus only at this level that discussion of the *appropriateness* of aesthetic perception becomes apt, because it is only once attended that information about an object can be used to form immediately justified beliefs about that object. This is not only because differences in attention lead to differences in

represented detail—and one might think a certain level of detailed perceptual scrutiny required before we are warranted in making an aesthetic judgement—but also because conscious attention is required in order that we may *use* the justification derived from our experience to form beliefs about an object.

Consider an account of appreciation like Iseminger's: "Someone is *appreciating* a state of affairs just in case she or he is *valuing for its own sake the experiencing of that state of affairs*" (Iseminger, 2006, pp. 99, emphasis in original). It is very difficult to imagine valuing a state of affairs and one's experience of it without consciously attending to it. Iseminger's terms invite framing such appreciation in terms of a focusing of attention on both one's experience and its objects; and it is difficult to understand the experience of that object without using demonstrative terms. Certainly if we were to ask what it is about an object which invites appreciation of it we would expect, if we were to share that appreciation and understand its grounds, to be provided with a demonstrative characterisation like "that painting is harmonious", which characterisation might itself be unpacked in demonstrative terms such as "the composition is symmetrical," "that line is unbroken," "those colours complement one another" and so on.

Furthermore, if we are to use such aesthetic descriptions to aid our appreciation, then the commonly held view of the need for direct experience of aesthetic objects in order for us to have warranted aesthetic judgements of them seems to require that we stand in direct perceptual contact with the artwork (or any other object of aesthetic appreciation) such that our judgement can be of the singular form "*that* painting is harmonious". Following Smithies, without

conscious attention to the painting we cannot use our immediate perceptual justification to form beliefs about the object which are immediately justified.<sup>93</sup>

#### 4.4.4 Taking stock

Let's take stock once again. We have covered a lot of philosophical and psychological ground, considering attention, consciousness, cognition, rationality, and demonstrative thought. I have tried to show that these discussions contain the resources the aesthician needs to understand and ground broad aesthetic psychology. These debates are far from resolved and look set to run and run. The aim here was to outline some of the material that provides fodder for debates about the relationship between attention and cognition and to understand how and why it is that views on that relationship can differ so sharply. Our broader aim is to use this to understand the forms of consciousness (phenomenal, cognitive, rational-access, and so on) involved in our perceptual representation of the world around us and, in particular, the different ways in which we are aware of that part of our perceptual activity which is aesthetic.

Now, one of the key differences in these debates concerns the use and extension of the term "attention" itself. We have encountered talk of subpersonal attentional processes and personal, conscious attention. Both strategies are useful for us as long as we proceed with their differing aims and frameworks in mind. What a cognitive scientist working with a subpersonal, plural understanding of attention as various selective and competitive computational processes construes as pre- and post-attentional differs from a philosopher with an understanding of attention as a personal, unified, and

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<sup>93</sup> Even if we are unhappy with the thought of "that painting is harmonious" as demonstrative, we can nonetheless still argue that the more descriptive statements which underpin that thought are demonstrative, as we saw above. So we need not pin too much on more evaluatively weighted substantive statements being demonstrative ones. It is enough that the more descriptive substantive statements are demonstrative ones.

phenomenally or rationally distinguished phenomenon. In short, asking whether aesthetic perception occurs pre- or inattentionally is to invite questions about the definition of attention we adopt; as well as questions about our understanding of the relationship between attention, consciousness, and cognition.

This brings us to a question we have yet to answer: whether feature binding—and thus bare aesthetic perception—goes on in the absence of attention. I have resisted presenting the evidence for this position until now because, whilst it is a question which arises prior to those surrounding attention and cognition, some of the key distinctions we will draw between attended and unattended feature binding make use of the discussions of consciousness and rational thought above. Briefly, the argument will be that the problem of feature binding can be solved at several levels—those of computational information processing, perceptual experience, and conceptual thought—and that attention is involved in each of these in different ways. The problem of feature binding with which we are concerned in bare aesthetic perception is that at the level of perceptual experience or consciousness rather than conceptual thought. However, before we can reach this conclusion we need to understand why it might be thought that attention *is* required for bound perceptual experience and thus for bare aesthetic perception.

#### **4.5 Bare aesthetic perception and binding**

Let's remind ourselves of the account of bare aesthetic perception I presented in the last chapter. I argued that the core of aesthetic perception is the perceptual representation of an individual object or phenomenon in possession of particular qualities of appearance. This reflects the distinctively aesthetic concern with our discrimination of and engagement with *appearances*. I suggested that this understanding of the aesthetic as bound up with the

organisation and production of appearances, of objects and events in a spatio-temporal framework, is productively understood in terms of what Anne Treisman calls “the binding problem”: the problem of how we assemble or “bind” discrete features or properties into coherent and enduring visual representations of multifeatured objects with locations. Once we solve the binding problem we perceive aesthetically. Once the coffee mug before us is bound temporally and spatially, possessing colour, shape, size, and other sensible qualities—once its features are integrated—we have perceptually represented it as an individual in possession of particular sensible qualities of appearance. (Although we need not have represented it *as* a coffee mug.) We are perceiving aesthetically.

The representation of bound objects I called bare aesthetic perception, distinguishing it from the attended and potentially far more complex rich aesthetic perception. I suggested that bare aesthetic perception is pervasive and operates in the absence of attention whilst also providing the foundation for rich aesthetic perception which requires overt or covert attention for cognitive and rational access to the products of feature binding (that is, bare aesthetic perception). We should now understand why such cognitive and rational access might be limited to the necessarily attended rich aesthetic perception, as well as why inattention need not mean a lack of phenomenal or perceptual consciousness.

However, we still need to establish whether feature binding can go on in the absence of attention; something which might initially seem problematic because the central account of feature binding, Treisman’s Feature Integration Theory, can be interpreted as ruling out unattended binding. Indeed, the initial statement of the theory seems to do precisely this. “[Focal] attention provides the “glue” which integrates the initially separable features into unitary objects....We claim that, without focused attention, features cannot be related to



each other” (Treisman & Gelade, 1980, p. 98). This appears quite devastating. Fortunately, however, Treisman’s account doesn’t have the consequence these apparently problematic statements might be thought to suggest.

#### 4.5.1 Feature Integration Theory

As we saw, binding is “the process of conjoining different properties into visual objects” (Palmer, 1999, p. 557) and Feature Integration Theory is an account of how this binding comes about which gives attention a key role. As it was initially developed in (Treisman & Gelade, 1980) FIT suggested that features such as colour, curvature, and orientation are detected early and automatically in the visual system, but that they are registered *separately* and “in parallel” across the visual field. Objects are only identified as a result of focused attention.

[The] visual scene is initially coded along a number of separable dimensions, such as color, orientation, spatial frequency, brightness, direction of movement. In order to recombine these separate representations and to ensure the correct synthesis of features for each object in a complex display, stimulus features are processed serially with focal attention. Any features which are present in the same central “fixation” of attention are combined to form a single object. Thus focal attention provides the “glue” which integrates the initially separable features into unitary objects. Once they have been correctly registered, the compound objects continue to be perceived and stored as such. (Treisman & Gelade, 1980, p. 98)

Each feature is independently registered on a “feature map”. Thus, red horizontal lines in the visual field cause activity in the “red” and “horizontal” feature maps (Palmer, 1999, p. 557). Yet, in order for the subject to perceive these stimuli as red horizontal lines, more is required than simultaneous registration in discrete feature maps. Treisman argued that focused attention to specific locations is required in order to *correctly* bind features together. This “correctly” is important. For it is not the case that an absence of focused

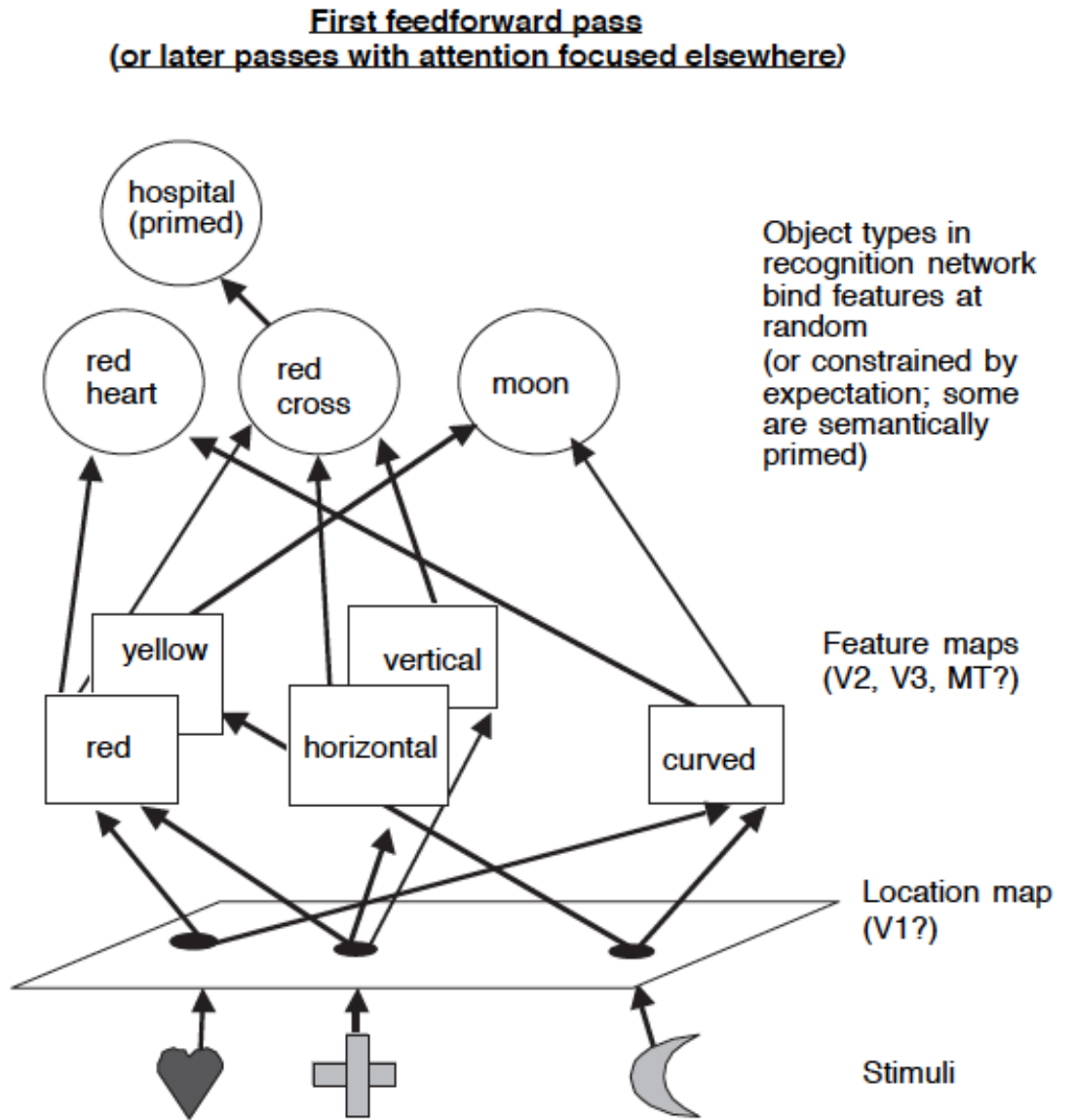
attention equates to an absence of visual experience or an experience of empty space. Rather, features *can* be conjoined prior to conscious perception, but they are likely to be formed randomly. “These unattended couplings will give rise to “illusory conjunctions”” (Treisman & Gelade, 1980, p. 98).<sup>94</sup> That is, visual experience may be of a blue cross when blue, red, horizontal, vertical, and curved features are detected, whereas the stimuli in question are a blue circle and a red cross.

The figure below (fig. 3) indicates the route from the detection of stimuli to bound features and object recognition in preattentive perception. Stimuli are detected as implicit conjunctions of features and individual feature maps are formed. “In this preattentive or inattentive phase, features activate any object types with which they are individually consistent, and may inhibit those with which they conflict, activating particular recognition nodes to differing degrees depending on the level of feature support” (Treisman, 2006, p. 413). The non-selectivity of feature access means illusory conjunctions as well as correct conjunctions will be activated, and thus the figure below shows “the nodes for a red cross, and, through associative priming, for hospital, being activated by what is actually a yellow cross and a red heart” (Treisman, 2006, p. 413).

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<sup>94</sup> Top-down processing also has a significant influence on feature binding. Unattended features can be combined correctly as a result of past experience and context. As Treisman writes, “Even when attention is directed elsewhere, we are unlikely to see a blue sun in a yellow sky” (Treisman & Gelade, 1980, p. 98). A great deal of our day to day life is likely to benefit from such top-down influence.

Figure 3.



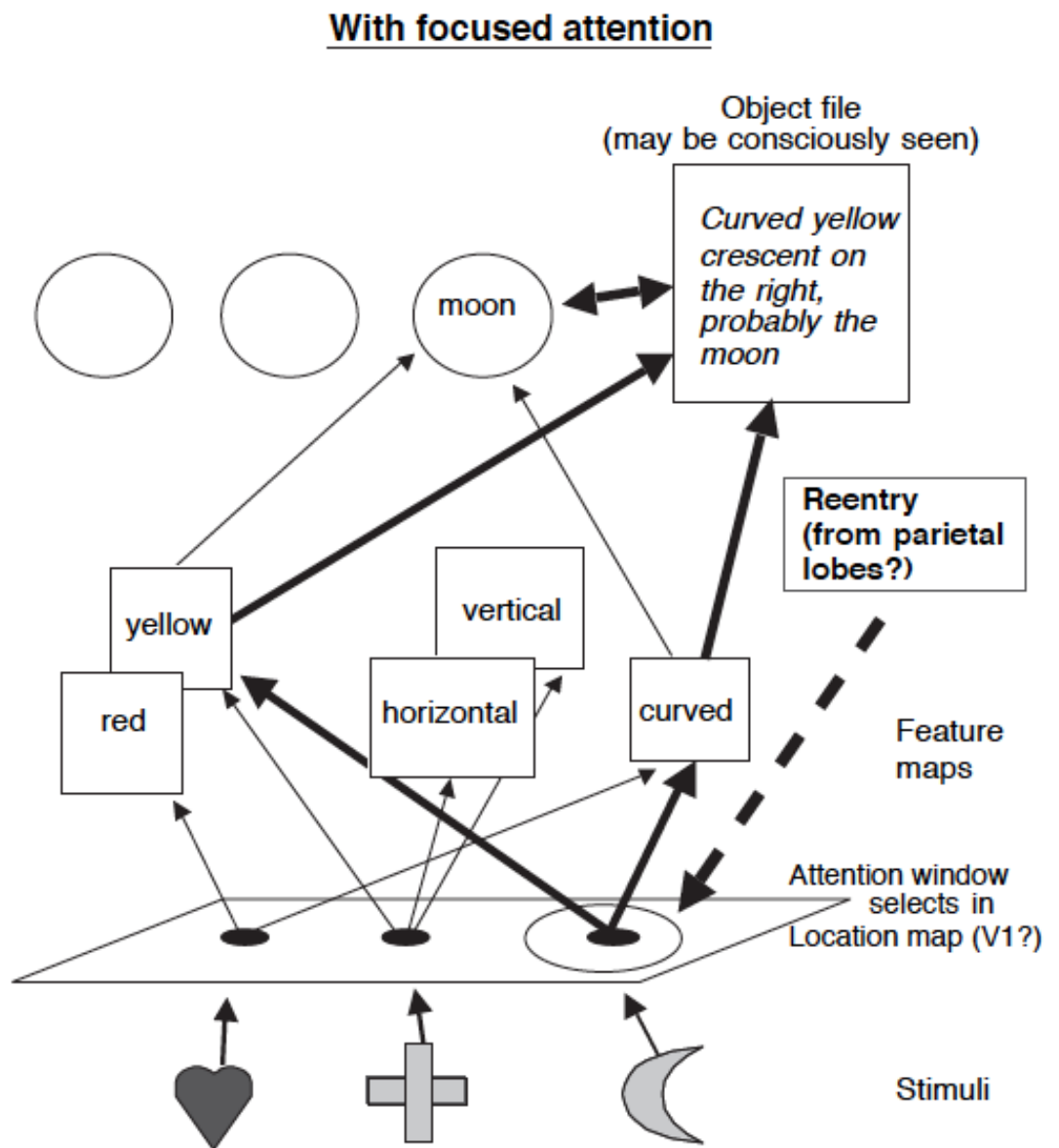
(Treisman, 2006, p. 412). Reproduced with permission.

This form of binding is rudimentary, unreliable and subject to correction by focused “serial” attention: that is, focused attention to each location in turn serves to “weed out” illusory conjunctions of features as well as facilitating discrimination. In order to perceive multiple objects in the visual field the subject must move a variable “window” of focused attention sequentially between locations and thus build up the complex and multifeatured objects we experience. (“Variable” because we can vary the focus of attention from a single feature, to an object, to an entire scene.) Thus, serial focused spatial attention solves the binding problem by eliminating illusory conjunctions and binding features into a representation of unitary multifeatured objects.

As we have seen, Treisman’s view is that we solve the binding problem—that is, achieve correctly bound representations—by moving a variable “window of attention” between locations in the scene before us. The figure below (fig. 4) shows the attention window focused on a particular object location which serves to suppress features outside of that location. Thus, on the principle that only one visible object can occupy a space at any one time, and combined with serial attention to the contents of different locations, the binding problem is solved by binding all the features at one location as one object. An “object file” is formed to represent this bound object. “These “object files” “encode information from particular objects in their particular current instantiation, specifying the spatial relations and conjunctions of features” (Treisman, 2006, p. 415). Because the window of attention is variable, it can “encompass anything from a finely localized object to a global view of the surrounding scene” (Treisman, 2006, p. 414). An object file may thus represent “the scene as a whole (e.g., an ocean beach), a pair of objects within the scene (e.g., a woman walking her dog), or even a single part of one object (e.g., the handle of a cup). In combination, these samples at differing scales build up a

representation both of a background setting and some objects within it” (Treisman, 2006, p. 414). Object files are required for conscious perception.

Figure 4.



(Treisman, 2006, p. 414). Reproduced with permission.

Is this sufficient for bare aesthetic perception? Perhaps. Whilst individual feature detection, does not qualify as bare aesthetic perception, Treisman allows that conjunctions—albeit often illusory ones—may occur preattentively. The main problem here is one of *location*. Objects are not integrated and bound until conjunctions are spatially localised. And, for Treisman, this localisation requires focused attention. This could be a problem for bare aesthetic perception, because, as I have presented it, aesthetic perception requires the representation of bound objects *in particular locations*. Aesthetic perception is perception of objects in space and time, and without attention it seems we cannot bind features in the same location into a single object in that location. That *does* seem to preclude aesthetic perception.<sup>95</sup>

#### 4.5.2 FIT, attention, and consciousness

We have said all along that it is vitally important to be clear about what we mean by “attention”. Feature Integration Theory seems to suggest that attention is required for binding features into objects with locations. However, it is vital to understand that, in FIT, “attention” is *not* visual attention of the sort we discussed in relation to either the overflow argument or Smithies’s and Campbell’s conscious visual attention. Indeed, Treisman points out that “spatial selection and serial scanning...can and often do occur *without awareness*” (Treisman, 2003, pp. 109, my emphasis). That should give us our first indication that Treisman might not be ruling out what we had feared. Treisman’s attentional processes are subpersonal and unconscious, even though such processes can certainly be consciously directed. *Thus, she is not suggesting that conscious visual attention is required for feature binding*. Indeed, Treisman has

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<sup>95</sup> It also seems to preclude demonstrative thought which is vital for aesthetic appreciation and judgement. This is because, as Smithies highlights, in addition to requiring attention for the formation of “beliefs about the identity of a particular object unless one attends to the object in question...” (Smithies, 2011b, p. 30), we also need to be able to perceive and “believe that properties are bound to a single object and to make inferences that trade on the identity of the object” (Smithies, 2011b, pp. 32-33).

written of the necessity of binding *for* consciousness, by which she means something like cognitive accessibility: “Conscious access in perception is always to bound objects and events. Experienced objects have colors, locations, orientations” (Treisman, 2003, p. 97). It would thus make little sense to suggest that conscious attention was required *for* binding. She goes on:

Why should binding be necessary for conscious experience? Perhaps because the properties by which we characterize an object do share their source in the physical world. This makes it useful to represent the bindings and the structural relations for quick and explicit access in conscious awareness. Binding is also a way of compacting the sensory information to fit into the single representation to which consciousness seems to be restricted. (Treisman, 2003, p. 109)

We noted at the beginning of this chapter that we might find it a challenge to account for the different concepts of attention and consciousness at play in empirical and philosophical discussions of each phenomenon. The apparent necessity of attention for perceptual consciousness, access, or rational thought on one account might not straightforwardly conflict with another account’s suggestion that one or all of these might not require attention. The difference between Treisman’s subpersonal and unconscious construal of one kind of visual attention as spatial selection and serial scanning which supports binding and access and Smithies’s account of conscious visual attention and rational access consciousness is one example of this.

The solution to this problem of the proliferation of attentions lies in two linked approaches. Firstly, we should commit to a plural construal of attention which includes the subpersonal processes psychologists investigate and the kinds of personal level explanation of attention which focus on cognition and reason. It is important to note, as writers like Smithies, Campbell, and Sebastian Watzl do, that attention plays an important role at a personal level and may be apt for partial explanation at such a level. Conscious visual attention, for

example, highlights and structures phenomenal experience whilst playing an important role in cognition. We can hold on to that function and approach to attention (whilst acknowledging that each account differs) whilst also taking approaches like Block's and Treisman's (and many others) seriously.

This plural approach involves the rejection of an essentialist or natural kind account of attention whilst acknowledging that such accounts might still capture one aspect of the wide array of attentional phenomena we have discussed. Thus the attentional processes involved in Feature Integration Theory capture an important aspect of the assembling of bound, integrated, multifeatured objects, but certainly do not exhaust what we mean by attention and should not be confused with other concepts of attention which perform different functions.

When it comes to the relationship between attention and aesthetic perception the benefits of this plural form of thinking are substantial. It is, I think, most likely that the concept of attention with which most aestheticians are working is akin to conscious visual attention of the variety discussed by Campbell and Smithies. That is, narrow theorists are unlikely to hold that attention is required for perceptual or phenomenal consciousness *per se*, but they do seem to believe that the kind of visual consciousness involved in aesthetic perception requires attention because they are demanding about the kinds of discrimination and reflection required for aesthetic states of mind. Hence the implicit attention condition on any form of aesthetic engagement in narrow accounts.

#### **4.5.3 Aesthetic perception and two kinds of binding**

The second, and related, approach to adopt is to distinguish between different forms of the binding problem with different relationships to attention (and to different *construals* of attention). Smithies points out that talking of *the* binding problem can be misleading, "since there are multiple binding problems



which arise at multiple levels of psychological reality” (Smithies, 2011b, p. 31). He highlights three levels: computational information processing, perceptual experience, and conceptual thought. Let’s focus on the second and third. The question is whether attention is required for binding at the level of perceptual experience or conceptual thought.

This does not admit of a reliable answer if we fail to be clear about what we mean by attention. Treisman’s binding problem is posed at the level of the prerequisites for coherent, integrated perceptual experience. Smithies’s binding problem is a question of the prerequisites for conceptual thought: specifically, whether or not attention is necessary “for using one’s justification to believe that properties are bound to a single object and to make inferences that trade on the identity of the object” (Smithies, 2011b, pp. 31-32). Each operates with a different, though not mutually exclusive concept of attention.

As we have seen, Treisman’s attention involves spatial selection and serial scanning in the form of a “window” of attention moving between locations. This can and does occur unconsciously. It is the product of such activity which comes to consciousness. The concept of attention as a form or mode of phenomenal consciousness, however, clearly means something quite different. The functional role of conscious attention is, on this view, an upshot of the phenomenal contrast between attention and inattention (which also means that consciousness exists in the absence of such attention). For both Smithies and Campbell it is conscious attention as a modification of experience which makes conceptual thought possible.

Putting the perceptual and conceptual forms of the binding problem together with the differing construals of attention (and its relation to consciousness) we arrive at the following suggestion. The binding problem at the level of *perceptual experience* requires attention in Treisman’s sense, but does not require attention

understood as a form of phenomenal modification of the stream of consciousness which makes information rationally accessible. The binding problem at the level of *conceptual thought* likewise requires Treisman's sense of attention because bound perceptual experience is a prerequisite for consciousness; however, it is at this level of psychological explanation that conscious visual attention is required, because one of the roles of attention is to place us in a position to answer questions about and be rationally justified in using our bound perceptual experience.

What does this mean for bare aesthetic perception? Well, we can understand the different ways of thinking about the binding problem as analogous to the distinction between bare and rich aesthetic perception. I have identified bare aesthetic perception as bound perceptual experience, which locates the question of the aesthetic character of perception at the level of Treisman's form of the binding problem. This, we have seen, requires certain attentional processes, but not, I suggest, either the kind of attention narrow theorists of aesthetic psychology have in mind, or, we can be fairly sure, the conscious visual attention those interested in conceptual thought seek to deploy. Put simply, bare aesthetic perception requires perceptual binding for phenomenal consciousness, but does not require conceptual binding and thus does not require conscious visual attention.

In contrast, the criteria for aesthetic perception and appreciation on which narrow theorists insist are plausibly located at the level of conceptual thought. For example, David Davies's insistence on discriminating attention to the perceptual manifold such that we have *available* rich descriptions involved in aesthetic judgements seems to be precisely a demand for conscious visual attention to the objects of perceptual experience in order that we are able to access this experience and possess demonstrative thoughts, understand demonstrative reference, and be justified in using our experiences in rational

thought. Much the same can be said for narrow accounts demanding awareness of the relations between properties as well as our awareness of them; or for those accounts which require scrutiny and *appropriate* evaluation both of the objects of scrutiny and our response to them. In other words, rich aesthetic perception requires perceptual *and* conceptual binding and thus requires conscious visual attention.<sup>96</sup>

#### 4.6 The structure of aesthetic perception revisited

We are now in a position to return to our model of aesthetic perception in light of the conclusions of this chapter. The aim of this thesis is to use a sophisticated understanding of attention to develop an account of our aesthetic psychology and reconcile the motivations behind the broad and narrow approaches. I suggested in the previous chapter that we can usefully understand the senses of perception in which we are interested in terms of discrimination: firstly, as the detection and organisation of features into perceptual representations of an ordered world; and, secondly, as the interrogation of and reflection on those representations. These reciprocal senses of discrimination become clearer when we consider the way in which perceptual and conceptual binding underpin our representation of and capacity to think about the world. Likewise, the way in which attention (and its diverse

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<sup>96</sup> Whilst I have appealed to a distinction between perceptual and conceptual binding, we need not and should hold this distinction between perceptual experience and conceptual thought to be a rigid or exclusive one: how could we, given our ability to think about our experience, to take perceptual states as objects of belief and desire, and to use them as reasons? We can hold, with E.J. Lowe (and Kant), that “our capacity for conceptual thought is...inextricably bound up with our capacity for phenomenal consciousness” (Lowe, 1995, p. 73) and consider the relationship between perception and demonstrative thought to be one example of this. Locating the root of aesthetic perception in the assembling of experience—the foundation of perceptual consciousness—is not to exclude it from a significant role in conceptual thought. That would be to radically impoverish our aesthetic psychology and, indeed, our lives. That we can enrich perceptual experience through our aesthetic understanding should convince us of this. Artworks and spaces and phenomena whose qualities and values we once failed to grasp can be made accessible through shifts in understanding, in perception in its widest sense. This is what, if anything, “an aesthetic education” amounts to.

denotations) mediates and constrains discrimination and binding leads to a continuum of aesthetic perception running from the perceptual representation of bound objects to complex reflective engagement with such representations. On this account, despite its characteristic development at the level of conceptual thought, practice, and communication, the core of the aesthetic is to be found at the perceptual level.

#### **4.6.1 Bare aesthetic perception**

We can now say that bare aesthetic perception is, in many respects, the product of the solving of the binding problem at the level of perceptual experience. The perceptual representation of individual bound and integrated multifeatured objects with locations is a necessary condition of our experience of an assembled world of appearances: particular appearances possessed by particular objects. This perceptual representation forms a part of (or constitutes) our perceptual or phenomenal consciousness whether or not we attend to and cognitively or rationally access it. Bare aesthetic perception is thus pervasive in perceptual experience and forms a foundation for richer, more determinate and accessed perception. Recall that in chapter two we discussed the forms an attention condition on aesthetic perception might take.

The attention condition for aesthetic perception:

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for an episode of perception to be distinctively or characteristically *aesthetic*, that we attend to the object(s), properties, qualities, or features perceived.

## The attention condition for aesthetic perception<sup>2</sup>

It is necessary, although not sufficient, for a form of aesthetic engagement to be an episode of aesthetic *perception*, that we attend to the object(s), properties, qualities, or features perceived.

The first form of the attention condition for aesthetic perception makes attention necessary for perception to be aesthetic. The second form makes attention necessary for the perceptual element of aesthetic perception. We can rule out both of these conditions. I have argued that attention in the sense of conscious visual attention—the sense most akin to the common sense concept utilised in theories of aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience—is unnecessary for the aesthetic character of perception. This is the result of two linked arguments: that the key criterion for aesthetic character is the perceptual representation of individual bound and integrated multifeatured objects; and that feature binding occurs in the absence of conscious visual attention. There is thus no *conscious visual attention condition* on either the aesthetic or the perceptual elements of aesthetic perception.

However, we need to be clear about the different senses of attention. We endorsed a plural concept of attention which encompasses the kinds of processes of selection and competition resolution involved in perceptual organisation and feature binding as well as the kinds of phenomena involved in modifying and structuring phenomenal consciousness. If we consider the spatial selection and serial scanning involved in feature integration to be attentional processes, then there *is* an attention condition on bare aesthetic perception. Yet, these processes are conditions of perceptual consciousness itself; and I have never suggested that aesthetic perception goes on in the absence of perceptual consciousness.

Moreover, it is not the necessity of spatial selection and serial scanning for aesthetic perception which distinguishes narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology. They are understandably silent on such processes given the level of explanation at which they seek to operate. Perceptual experience is taken for granted in such accounts even as they discuss discriminating attention to and evaluation of the contents of such experience. My argument is not that a great many forms of aesthetic engagement with our environment and its contents do not require attention, but that we must not presume that all forms do.

Nor was my argument about the ontology of aesthetic qualities. Were it simply that we should admit the discrimination of a range of so-called “everyday aesthetic qualities” (Leddy, 1995) into the aesthetic club we would not have sought to understand the nature and limits of that discrimination. It may well be that we should admit such qualities into the discourse of aesthetic appreciation, but the aim here is to ask a question prior to this: where does aesthetic perception begin? My answer is that it begins with the products of feature binding at the level of perceptual experience—which I call bare aesthetic perception—and does not require conscious visual attention.

In answering this question of the reach of aesthetic perception I have provided the psychological framework missing from accounts of everyday aesthetic experience and the broad aesthetic psychology they often presume. Moreover, by developing an empirically grounded account of the continuum of bare and rich aesthetic perception through a discussion of perceptual organisation, consciousness, and cognition I have placed the experiences of both broad and narrow aesthetic psychology within a naturalistic aesthetic framework. This approach allows us to understand both the penetration of the aesthetic into everyday life and the significance and psychological prerequisites of rich, contemplative aesthetic experiences characteristic of mainstream aesthetics.

#### **4.6.1.2 Limits on bare aesthetic perception**

For all that aesthetic perception occurs in conditions of inattention there are limits on the complexity, determinacy, and access involved. As we saw above, our perceptual consciousness plausibly lacks the capacity to represent properties determinately in the absence of conscious visual attention. Covert attention facilitates the processing of stimuli and affects the appearance and accessibility of its objects, but it is overt attention which provides the highest resolution. As a result, the perceptual representations of bare aesthetic perception remain determinable rather than determinate.

This is complicated slightly by the capacity for prior knowledge, expectation, and contextual information to affect preattentive feature binding. If we know that there is a mug, a sculpture, a cat on the table then we are likely to bind their features in a way which reflects this. Such top-down influences on perceptual organisation make it likely that a great deal of bare aesthetic perception involves perceptual representations of objects and phenomena with which we are already acquainted. We will briefly discuss the effect of familiarity and unfamiliarity further in chapter five.

We have also seen that unattended perceptual representations are fleeting. They persist for only slightly longer than the stimuli which prompted them. As a result there will be limits on the perception of phenomena involving succession or contrast over longer periods of time. I argued in the last chapter that attention is needed to build up a temporally extended and determinate representation of the character of objects. Thus, it is unlikely that the complex temporal structures involved in music, dance, or, perhaps, architecture could be perceived or appreciated in bare aesthetic perception beyond a kind of window in which they are perceived but unaccessed. This limit on the complexity of bare aesthetic perception is a central feature of our aesthetic psychology.

#### 4.6.2 Rich aesthetic perception

On the foundation of bare aesthetic perception is laid the structure of rich aesthetic perception. Rich aesthetic perception is characterised by the capacity for complex and determinate perceptual representations of objects and phenomena. This capacity is provided by conscious visual attention to its objects. As we have seen, we can attend to particular features, objects, or entire scenes. Indeed, our attention is likely to flit amongst these different “modes” fairly frequently. We step back to view a whole room, its layout, colour scheme, dimensions, lighting; we then focus on the sofa and its qualities; perhaps we focus on the prominence of red in the room. The same can be said for the scrutiny of an artwork, a building, a garden. Our attention moves around and builds up a picture of its objects. This representation is more determinate because it involves the higher resolution foveal vision secures, as well as the greater determinacy selection and preferential processing of stimuli brings. Without attention the texture of a cushion might not be perceived, but when we take a closer look we see its cross-hatched pattern.

Because rich aesthetic perception is constituted by the determinate perceptual representation provided by conscious visual attention, such attention is a necessary and sufficient condition for it.

The conscious attention condition for rich aesthetic perception

It is necessary and sufficient for rich aesthetic perception, that we consciously attend to the object(s) perceived.

It is important to appreciate that the distinction between bare and rich aesthetic perception is primarily a perceptual one despite its cognitive and rational consequences. The distinction is between the determinacy and complexity of perceptual representations of bound and integrated



multifeatured objects. That binding occurs in the absence of conscious visual attention, but is developed only in the presence of such attention. This is why rich aesthetic perception is a ground for, rather than identical with aesthetic appreciation.

#### **4.6.3 Rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation**

It is at the level of rich aesthetic perception that the fuller sense of perception comes to the fore. As we have seen, the other upshot of conscious visual attention is the capacity to demonstratively perceive objects and their properties and to use this identification and the visual information represented in critical reflection. Rich aesthetic perception grounds appreciation by providing the perceptual and cognitive resources on which appreciation depends. Rich aesthetic perception is thus in a reciprocal relationship with aesthetic appreciation. It makes appreciation possible yet it can also be enriched and guided by appreciation. There is thus also a conscious attention condition on aesthetic appreciation because of its dependence on rich aesthetic perception.

The three senses of appreciation—analytical, evaluative, and emotional—depend on rich aesthetic perception in slightly different ways. We might analyse, value, or have emotional responses toward objects without visually attending to them. It is not that these practices or states depend on visual attention that makes them dependent on rich aesthetic perception. (It seems that some kind of attention is required for each, but such attention might be purely to one's own inner states or memories.) In the case of visual artworks, objects, and phenomena, however, conscious visual attention is necessary in order, firstly, that we richly aesthetically perceive them and, secondly, that we are able to access this information such that it can form the object of a more complex thought or belief in aesthetic appreciation

The analytical sense of appreciation is the most closely connected to the determinate perceptual representation that conscious visual attention provides. Such attention can range over an object, building up a picture of its qualities, relating them to one another. Complex qualities of composition such as harmony, balance, and dissonance likely require this determinate representation in order to be perceived because they often require that our attention moves amongst discrete elements in order to construct a picture of the whole. It is also attention which enables us to reflect on such representations; which reflection can feed back into our perception of the object. That is, aesthetic appreciation feeds back into rich aesthetic perception because it has a role in setting the targets for attention as well as involving the kind of historical, artistic, and social understanding which can lead us to see features which we might otherwise miss.

The analytical sense of appreciation also provides grounds for evaluative appreciation. Evaluative appreciation might be understood as the valuing of an object, experience, or as some complex of the evaluation of the activity and its objects. This complex activity requires the determinate representation of rich aesthetic perception as well as the accessibility of and capacity to reflect on its products and the activity itself. This requires conscious visual attention. As do judgements of aesthetic merit. We have seen that attention supports demonstrative thought, which I argued was plausibly necessary for aesthetic judgement, because we require a direct perceptual experience of an object in order to judge its appearance.

The affective or emotional sense of appreciation depends on the analytical, because analytical appreciation provides the ground which makes our emotional response appropriate to its object(s). However, it might well be the case that an affective response to an object is what leads us to focus our attention on it with an aesthetic motive. That is, although I have argued that it is

not anything about our intentions or evaluative stance which constitutes aesthetic character, we might still approach an object with the intention of scrutinising its appearance in order to understand why its qualities might cause us to emotionally respond to it in a certain way. That kind of experience seems common and we should not rule it out. It remains the case, however, that any judgement of the object would rely on some specification of its qualities which requires conscious visual attention as the provider of both determinate representations of the object and the capacity to access and reflect upon it.

In any given case it is likely that these three senses of appreciation will be related in quite complex and shifting ways. Each sense of appreciation might guide our attention and lead to our scrutinising particular features, collections of objects, or the entire scene; which might lead to an alteration in our evaluation of the objects; which might affect or be constituted by our emotional response. At some point we might wish to discuss or be guided by another, which requires that we frame and share demonstrative thoughts, produce reasons for our judgements, or act towards the object of the discussion in certain ways: waving our hands, standing back, changing our viewing angle, walking around it, and so on. All of this depends on rich aesthetic perception and conscious visual attention.

For all that I have sought to distinguish bare and rich aesthetic perception, they are intimately related and occur simultaneously. We might richly aesthetically perceive one object by attending to it, but that doesn't mean the rest of our consciousness is not involved in bare aesthetic perception. We shift our attention between objects constantly. Simply navigating a room is likely to involve numerous shifts of attention between furniture, ornaments, pets, windows, and doors. Likewise, a task like preparing food involves constantly shifting our attention between knives (and fingers!), chopping boards, individual vegetables, collections of ingredients, a recipe book, a glass of wine,

another person, and so on. Each of these involves a different sized window of attention, focused on different features, and none of which need require that we stand back and seek to judge aesthetically. We might well so judge if we are choosing different colours of raw ingredient or seeking to present uniformly sized cuts of meat, say. Again, it is likely that plating a meal might involve more attention to composition; but we need not aesthetically appreciate a meal in order for it to involve rich aesthetic perception and nor need we attend to it in order for it to involve bare aesthetic perception.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to provide the complex understanding of attention, consciousness, and cognition required in order to develop the model of aesthetic perception I outlined in chapter three. We distinguished the different approaches we might take to attention, choosing to tread a plural path between different approaches to its definition and function. We also distinguished between different concepts of consciousness, focusing on phenomenological, cognitive, and rational concepts and the different way in which each is related to attention. We took care to keep in mind the concepts of attention and consciousness that different accounts deploy. This allowed us to reach a point where we could argue that the kind of perception which constitutes a minimal or bare kind of aesthetic perception goes on in the absence of conscious visual attention; although the absence of conscious visual attention precludes rich aesthetic perception and thus aesthetic appreciation, because only such attention enables cognitive, demonstrative, and rational access to perceptual representation. There is thus a conscious visual attention condition on rich aesthetic perception (and aesthetic appreciation), but not on bare aesthetic perception. Each form of aesthetic perception interacts with the other in a complex and endless fashion in everyday life and in the art gallery.

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## Chapter Five

### Outstanding Issues

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I shrugged “I know it’s untidy...”

“It is not just the room,” Oscar said. “A room is not just a room. A room is a manifestation of a state of mind, the product of an intelligence. Either conscious” —and he dropped dramatically back into his armchair, sending up a plume of dust and cigarette ash—“or unconscious. We make our rooms, and then our rooms make us.”

*Care of Wooden Floors*

Will Wiles

#### 5.1 Introduction

The central motivation for this thesis was the thought that both broad and narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology capture important aspects of the mind’s aesthetic engagement with the world; and that the impasse that arises from the opposition of each might be resolved through an analysis of the role of attention and its relation to awareness and discrimination in accounts of aesthetic experience, aesthetic appreciation, and aesthetic judgement. I have endeavoured to undertake this analysis as well as to begin the work of developing an account of aesthetic perception which reconciles the broad and narrow approaches through a greater understanding of attention and the forms of perceptual representation and appreciation of which we are capable in different contexts.

In this chapter we will consider some of the most significant challenges my account faces as well as the advantages and wider implications of thinking about attention and aesthetic perception in the ways I have presented. In responding to these challenges we will consider the advantages which come with separating certain questions about aesthetic perception from questions about aesthetic value, as well as the benefits of my account for the

understanding of the role and significance of the aesthetic in art and everyday life. In several cases I will suggest that the apparent challenge or objection in question should be thought of as an opportunity for a realignment or reconstrual of the concerns underlying the discussion. This will be the case with objections focusing on the aestheticisation of perception and the apparent demotion of aesthetic value, both of which are considerations we might adduce against a broad account of aesthetic psychology and in favour of a narrow one.

## **5.2 The aesthetic activity of mind**

I turn first to the pinpointing of the aesthetic character of perception and the distinction between bare and rich aesthetic perception. Here, the main challenge will be to emphasise that my proposal captures the philosophical core of the aesthetic whilst neither rendering the aesthetic too inclusive, nor setting up distinctions where none are needed. After that I will consider some potentially problematic implications of my account of aesthetic perception which arise from the aestheticisation of perception and the perceived demotion of aesthetic value. Here I will focus on the supposed loss of the normative core of the aesthetic in my account, and the worry that interest in aesthetic value becomes epiphenomenal.

### **5.2.1 From nonaesthetic to bare aesthetic perception**

One of the key tasks in the attempt to map the limits of our aesthetic psychology is to locate that moment, so to speak, when the aesthetic enters into or begins to play a role in experience. We may then develop a framework in which differing forms of engagement with the aesthetic are explored— aesthetic perception, aesthetic judgement, aesthetic appreciation, and so on—but without a clear central concept of the aesthetic this framework will remain fuzzy and the grounds of our aesthetic psychology unclear. On my account this central concept is a perceptual activity which purposively orders the material of sense

into bound representations. Other strategies for locating this “aesthetic moment” include the scrutiny of some characteristic of the objects of perception, perhaps its possession of aesthetic and expressive properties. This scrutiny might itself possess some appropriate and aesthetic-making characteristic of the kind we have examined: appropriate attention, disinterested contemplation, or the viewing and valuing of the object and its properties for its own sake. One of the central arguments of this thesis is that these strategies come with oft-unacknowledged commitments or conceptual lacunae in relation to attention and awareness: which lacunae are partly responsible for the narrowing of aesthetic psychology and the ease with which evaluative and appreciative concepts of the aesthetic take centre stage in aesthetic frameworks.

Still, it is worth returning to this question of the aesthetic moment. Throughout I have focused on the representational activity of the perceiving mind as being the foundational concept of a broad aesthetic psychology, rather than, say, some aesthetic property of the *object* of perception which forms the aesthetic content of (appropriately specified) mental states. As we have seen, the appropriate scrutiny or valuing of aesthetic properties (however one considers such properties to be realised) forces on us a post-attentional model of aesthetic psychology if it is considered the mark of the aesthetic. By moving the aesthetic moment into a more fundamental activity of mind I have shifted this attention condition into a position whereby it applies to only rich aesthetic perception and the mental states and practices of aesthetic appreciation.

That aesthetic perception is a pervasive activity of mind makes it difficult to locate its tipping point: that moment when we move from nonaesthetic to bare aesthetic perception. There is no “clean break” in experience, no Deweyan “pervasive quality” to our phenomenology which marks the move from nonaesthetic to aesthetic perception. Rather, and as we saw in our discussion of

Kant and purposiveness, the aesthetic character of perception is constituted by the representation of the heterogeneous qualities of objects in the external world: hence our focus on feature *integration* and the binding problem. It is this stage where discrete features are *related to one another* that the aesthetic character of perception lies.<sup>97</sup>

Of course, a great deal of perceptual organisation and processing goes on prior to binding. We discussed some of these processes in chapter three. They included *grouping and part-whole relationships* (determining which regions of an image go with others to form unitary objects) and *perceptual coupling* (determining the appropriate relationship between two linked dimensions in an image). These are the nonaesthetic organisational relationships which are bound together to form representations of multifeatured objects with locations. Prior to binding, perception is nonaesthetic because it still involves, as it were, unassigned features rather than qualities of particular, individual objects in an ordered world. It is in the *assembly* and the *assembling* that the aesthetic character of perception lies. Thus, in Anthony Savile's characterisation of Kant's "aesthetic" in the first *Critique*, the heart of aesthetic perception lies in "what the mind makes of its manifold of sensation" (Savile, 2005, p. 67). To this extent, aesthetic perception is one way of understanding our perceptual approach and orientation to the world and its contents: as an ongoing mental activity whose minimal aesthetic activity is the assembling of a representation of our environment and its qualities, rather than a discrete episode of contemplation or appreciation.

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<sup>97</sup> Binding need not have some single mechanism or locus whereby the "aesthetic" somehow pops into existence. Would that things were so simple. However, if we step back for a moment and consider that what we are looking for in our consideration of aesthetic psychology is some understanding of the capacities of the mind—which capacities are bound up with their empirical study much more closely than many have wished to acknowledge—then the diverse processes involved in feature binding should not trouble the aesthician unduly.



Understood in this way, it makes sense that aesthetic perception might run from the fundamental form of perceptual discrimination I've called bare aesthetic perception to the attended and concomitantly more complex rich aesthetic perception. Our purposive and discriminating perceptual approach to the world is fundamental, but it varies in its focus and development. Sometimes we choose to attend to appearances, to deploy the full range of our appreciative capacities on the objects of perception and our responses to them: this is a form of discrimination potentially Levinsonian in its interest in the relationships between qualities and their perceptual effects, Carroll-like in its attention to apperceptive experience, Waltonian in its attention to our taking pleasure in positive evaluation of appearances. These are the fullest, richest senses of aesthetic perception and appreciation, subject to questions about their appropriateness, and deserve their place at one end of a continuum of aesthetic engagement. They are built, however, on the foundation of our perceptually discriminating, aesthetic approach to the ordering of the world: an aesthetic approach which, because it is pervasive and fundamental, is affected in its development by so significant a mental (and bodily) phenomenon as attention.

### **5.2.2 Is bound perceptual experience really aesthetic?**

The heart of my account is that bound perceptual experience of multifeatured objects with locations is the minimal concept of aesthetic perception. However, it might be argued that bound perceptual experience is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of aesthetic perception. A narrow theorist will argue that it is not sufficient for aesthetic perception that we perceptually represent objects as appearing in a certain way. What is required is a form of scrutiny or the adoption of a certain attitude toward the objects and qualities represented. Distinctively aesthetic perception takes perceptual experience and subjects it to something *more*. In other words, on this view, what I have called rich aesthetic perception is just aesthetic perception and bare

aesthetic perception is a nonaesthetic foundation. (Alternatively, rich aesthetic perception is still only a necessary condition for aesthetic appreciation or aesthetic experience.)

In this case it would be open to a critic to accept my analysis of the role of attention, but to nonetheless maintain that this demonstrates precisely what I have denied: that aesthetic perception or experience require attention because the right kind of perceptual scrutiny and valuing for its own sake are impossible in its absence. In other words, attention is required for appropriate scrutiny of and reflection on the perceptual manifold, and this is why bare aesthetic perception cannot be aesthetic. In that case, I should hope to have at the very least performed a service in the analysis of the role of attention in contemporary theories of aesthetic experience and appreciation, as well as demonstrating the importance of engagement with philosophical and empirical work on attention and consciousness. Aestheticians need to be much clearer about what they mean when they invoke or allude to either concept. Moreover, I challenged the narrowness of many theories of aesthetic experience: in particular, I have highlighted the problems with limiting aesthetic experience to cognitively and evaluatively complex responses. It is not clear why the aesthetic *tout court* rather than particular forms of aesthetic engagement should be limited to such responses.

In my view, a key way of rendering the aesthetic coherent is to resist the trend towards the identification of aesthetic experience with some form of higher-order engagement with or intensification of perceptual experience. This trend targets particular forms of engagement characteristic of experiences of art and nature, as well as seeking to understand the value of such experience. Yet, as I argued in chapter one, such extra-psychological desiderata are not sufficient to force on us an otherwise unconvincing account of the concept of the aesthetic or aesthetic perception.

In locating the heart of the aesthetic at the level of bound perceptual experience rather than in some scrutiny, higher-order thought, or evaluation, I have sought to establish a unified, evaluatively neutral concept of aesthetic perception which does justice to the perennial aesthetic concern with ways of appearing, whilst not becoming *too* inclusive or watering down the concept of appreciation. In doing so, I have tried to accommodate both the idea that the aesthetic is bound up with ways of appearing and the everyday aesthetics-inspired thought that it is not in the *appreciation* of ways of appearing that aesthetic status lies.

Indeed, it is a commitment to this kind of narrowing and exclusive distinction which renders aesthetic experience and the accounts which attempt to analyse it, open to charges of irrelevance, impracticality, and elitism. As Saito (Saito, 2007) and Irvin (Irvin, 2008a) point out, accounts which treat aesthetic experience as detached, isolated from everyday life, and occupying Olympian heights, might well capture one kind of experience; but it is a relatively rare and exclusive form, treating aesthetic experience as a success term, rather than something more dynamic and pervasive in the way Dewey gestured towards (Dewey, 2005).

Saito is pessimistic about placing such detached experience on a spectrum with unattended, everyday experience. She thinks we need separate accounts for art-centred aesthetics, special experience-based aesthetics, and everyday aesthetics (Saito, 2007). I resist this splitting up of aesthetic engagement. In specifying a minimal concept of aesthetic perception which nonetheless satisfies the core aesthetic interest in the way in which things appear I have sought to provide a foundation for all forms of aesthetic engagement. This creates the possibility of a continuum of aesthetic perception which runs from bare aesthetic perception to rich and which is capable of accommodating the

unattended everyday as well as the paradigmatic and detached experience of art.

My account of aesthetic perception is not intended to replace accounts which discuss scrutiny and awareness of the relations between aesthetic qualities, their evaluation and the critical activities which depend on them. Where I argue for the priority of my account is in the initial specification of the aesthetic character of perception and its relation to attention. I endorse a plural account of aesthetic thought in the sense that, once we perceive aesthetically, and once we do so richly, there are a great many ways in which our engagement with aesthetic perception and its objects might proceed.

### **5.2.3 Is there a significant difference between bare and rich aesthetic perception?**

With that said, once we have specified the aesthetic character of perception, it is a further step to make the kind of distinction between forms of aesthetic perception—bare and rich—in the way that I have. The former does not entail the latter. Nonetheless, my account depends on there being a significant difference between bare and rich aesthetic perception. I have argued that they are on a continuum with one another and that conscious (visual) attention mediates the move from one to the other. Yet, if conscious visual attention (or its absence) is what determines whether we perceive barely or richly, does it make sense to distinguish two forms of aesthetic perception as I have done? Why not simply speak of aesthetic perception in the presence or absence of conscious visual attention? Distinguishing bare and rich aesthetic perception as I have, it might be argued, is unparsimonious when we can use our understanding of the role of attention to understand aesthetic perception.

It is true that I consider bare and rich aesthetic perception less as distinct species of aesthetic perception and more as aspects of the same phenomenon.

However, the value in distinguishing them as I have lies in in the different forms of thought and activity which they are capable of supporting, which is a result of their differing relationship to phenomenal attention, consciousness, and our access to visual representation.

We can think about it this way: If one way of individuating useful concepts is with reference to their differing conditions, then bare and rich aesthetic perception are distinct. Both are *aesthetic* in virtue of satisfying the same criterion: that of the perceptual representation of bound multifeatured objects with locations. That is, they share necessary conditions insofar as they are aesthetic. It is at this point, someone might suggest, that we should stop making distinctions, because we have our necessary and sufficient condition for aesthetic perception.

However, as we have seen, each form of aesthetic perception stands in a different relationship to conscious visual attention and cognitive consciousness, with all the consequences for aesthetic appreciation which this brings. We can distinguish between bound perceptual experience which is and is not accessed, and we can do so partly in virtue of whether or not we are consciously attending.

Indeed, consciously attended perceptual experience is not only accessed, but also more determinate, capable of supporting more enduring and complex representations. There is thus a conscious visual attention condition on accessible, enduring, and determinate bound perceptual representation while there is no such condition on fleeting and determinable bound perceptual representation. In other words, there is a conscious visual attention condition on rich aesthetic perception and no such condition on bare aesthetic perception.

Furthermore, rich aesthetic perception is a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for aesthetic appreciation which further distinguishes it from unattended, bare aesthetic perception. This difference in necessary conditions for each form of aesthetic perception and in the mental states and activities for which they are necessary conditions allows us to individuate two forms of aesthetic perception.

Yet, for all that we can individuate bare and rich aesthetic perception in this way, we must acknowledge that the transition between them is more fluid than a list of necessary and sufficient conditions might suggest. This is because attention is not a straightforward binary phenomenon. Attention can be divided amongst tasks, objects, and internal states. (See (Mole, 2011a, p. 74ff.)) We can find ourselves distracted whilst desperately trying to focus on a piece of work or a play. (Or, of course, we can allow ourselves to attend to anything but our task.) Attention can misbehave despite our best efforts.<sup>98</sup> To the extent that it is not always clear what we attend to, nor to what extent we are attending to it, the line between bare and rich aesthetic perception becomes blurred. This is likely to be especially true in everyday life as we move between different tasks, environments, preoccupations, and distractions. Some intermediate point between each form of aesthetic perception may be typical of our engagement with the environment, having characteristics of both bare and rich aesthetic perception, shifting the balance between them constantly.

### **5.3 The aestheticisation of perception**

One of the central implications of my account is that aesthetic perception is pervasive in perceptual experience. Bare aesthetic perception, understood as the perceptual representation of bound multifeatured objects with locations, goes

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<sup>98</sup> Indeed, as William James pointed out, for some the inability to attend consistently is never overcome: people “whose work, to the end of life, gets done in the interstices of mind-wandering” (James, 1980, p. 417).

on all the time. This “aestheticisation” of perception, it might be argued, renders the aesthetic trivial and threatens its value.

“Aestheticisation” is a term used in a number of different ways. Ossi Naukkarinen defines it as “the notion that more and more things get absorbed into the aesthetic sphere, and that aesthetic matters are becoming increasingly important in our daily [lives]” (Quoted in Leddy, 2012a). In this sense, and in the sense implicit in Saito’s and Sherri Irvin’s work on everyday aesthetics, aestheticisation is either the recognition of things as aesthetic and aesthetically valuable which have always been so, or the process of their somehow becoming aesthetically significant: of the aesthetic sphere expanding, perhaps as attitudes towards everyday life change. These are positive or neutral understandings of aestheticisation.

However, there are more negative uses of the term. As Thomas Leddy points out, one strand of criticism of aestheticisation focuses on the aesthetically pleasing representation in advertisements of potentially harmful products (Leddy, 2012a). In this sense, “aestheticisation” is the process and result of making something visually *pleasing*, possibly so as to mislead or distract the viewer from its other qualities. This is not the negative sense of aestheticisation I will be considering as a challenge to my account.

I will focus on an understanding of aestheticisation which considers the pervasiveness of the aesthetic in perception to lead to its trivialisation. Implicit in this understanding of aestheticisation is the charge that we are viewing as aesthetic things which are not (or viewing them in a nonaesthetic manner); and that doing so is damaging both to our understanding of the aesthetic and its value. This trivialisation can be understood in a number of linked ways. Firstly, it might be held that the pervasiveness of aesthetic perception threatens the coherence and the significance of the category or concept of the aesthetic by

including such diverse experiences and phenomena that no common thread can be found. I have attempted to answer this aspect of the challenge of aestheticisation throughout this thesis, by presenting a minimal concept of aesthetic perception which forms the foundation for richer and potentially highly diverse forms of aesthetic engagement.

Secondly, pervasiveness might be thought to threaten the value or significance of the aesthetic. Put simply, if we want to find in the aesthetic a marker or a core of value—something special—then its pervasiveness in ordinary life renders aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience just that: *ordinary*. I take it that this concern is what underlies Christopher Dowling’s worry “that in attempting to extend the concept of the aesthetic used in philosophical discussion of the experience of art, we do not lose sight of the core concept of the aesthetic...[There] is a serious danger of motivating such an intuition at the cost of trivializing what counts as aesthetic” (Dowling, 2010, p. 226). The objection here is not to extending the aesthetic sphere to cover at least some aspects of daily life, but to the admission of forms of *response* beyond those characteristic of the aesthetic experience of art.<sup>99</sup>

Thirdly, and relatedly, aestheticisation threatens the normativity of aesthetic perception. This is the Kantian worry which underlies Dowling’s criticism: The *normative* or *critical* core of the aesthetic is lost when one extends aesthetic perception or aesthetic experience beyond the reach of aesthetic judgements which “demand agreement from apparent dissenters” (Dowling, 2010, p. 228). For Dowling, the critical core of the aesthetic—the focus on aesthetic

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<sup>99</sup> Dowling’s primary targets are accounts of everyday aesthetic experience like Irvin’s which recognise a wider array of felt experience as aesthetic. My account is not vulnerable to his criticism of such accounts on the basis that the extension of the aesthetic to the everyday trivialises the aesthetic by confusing the agreeable with the beautiful. This is because I have not outlined a criterion of aesthetic perception which identifies some sensuous or “private feeling” which gratifies the subject. The distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful does not map on to my account because I do not give pleasure an “aesthetic making” role in perception.



judgements which make normative claims on others, and which are characteristic of the aesthetic experience of art—must be retained in order for the coherence and value of the concept to remain. It is only “those responses that legitimately engage critical attention and interest” (Dowling, 2010, p. 229), in part because they are common and communicable, that should be admitted as aesthetic: the *a-critical*, the response which admits of no sense in which it is correct or appropriate, should not be allowed through the “aesthetics door”, because that way lie the idiosyncratic and merely agreeable responses that threaten the coherence and significance of the concept. We saw in chapter one that this Kantian strategy leads to the narrowing of aesthetic psychology.

At the heart of my response to these challenges will be the separation of questions about aesthetic perception from questions about aesthetic value, along with the insistence that separating these questions need not threaten the value of the aesthetic. We’ll begin by discussing the challenge from normativity.

### **5.3.1 Aestheticisation and normativity**

Let’s spell out the challenge of aestheticisation and normativity for my account in more detail. If aesthetic perception is pervasive in perceptual experience in the way that I have argued, then it goes on pre-attentively. In that case, firstly, our perceptual experience is aestheticised because bare aesthetic perception is involved in the assembling of such experience prior to conscious visual attention; and, secondly, aesthetic perception goes on before talk of appropriateness or normativity becomes applicable. This is because the epistemic and rational inaccessibility of bare aesthetic perception mean that aesthetic judgements in the sense of critical and communicable attributions of aesthetic qualities or aesthetic value have no place at this level. Despite involving the perceptual representation of bound multifeatured objects with locations—which I argued should be the core of the concept of the aesthetic—

this pervasive aesthetic perception does not admit of anything like the normative aesthetic experience Dowling outlines or the critical scrutiny David Davies insists upon (D. Davies, forthcoming). I have argued that it is this minimal conception of aesthetic perception which underpins all other forms of aesthetic engagement. It is only once attended and richly aesthetically perceived that talk of appropriateness, aesthetic appreciation, and critical communication becomes apt.

Dowling's worry can be understood as an appeal to place aesthetic judgement at the heart of our aesthetic framework, and to understand aesthetic experience and aesthetic value with reference to that normative concern. Hence his resistance to responses which don't admit of an assessment of appropriateness, and which make no critical claims on others. This normative concern, despite variations, is characteristic of many narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology. Throughout this thesis we have seen that, for many, aesthetic experience must somehow admit of appropriate judgements: of value, of particular qualities, of our pleasure in them, and so on. In many cases the content of such judgements, as well as their appropriateness are provided and partly guaranteed by conscious attention to their objects and our responses to them. On some views it is appropriately grounded pleasure which constitutes or informs judgement, on others it is attention to certain forms and qualities of objects "for their own sakes", and, on still others, it is attention to our own experience of a state of affairs. The normative concern has certain benefits as well as attendant problems. One benefit lies in doing justice to our sense, identified by Hume, Kant, and many others, that our aesthetic judgements possess something more than merely personal significance.<sup>100</sup> We feel that a

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<sup>100</sup> The normative concern runs through most of modern aesthetics, from Hume's *Of the Standard of Taste* (Hume, 2008) and Kant's third *Critique* (Kant, 1998) to more modern manifestations in (Scruton, 1979), (Levinson, 1996b), and (Zangwill, 2001a).

judgement of beauty, grace, ugliness, has a claim on others. Without this normative core, we risk triviality.<sup>101</sup>

If one of the key implications of my account is that aesthetic perception extends beyond this normative core, becoming supposedly “a-critical”, then that might be thought to provide *prima facie* grounds for rejecting it. The aesthetic framework has become warped, tending towards an a-critical aesthetic perception and too far from aesthetic judgement. (Moreover, it might be argued, this aestheticising extension results in the triviality of the concept of the aesthetic. If all perception is somehow aesthetic, then the concept doesn’t really demarcate anything useful over and above perceptual experience, and certainly can’t be used to discuss or identify a kind of *value*.) This is a challenge which must be taken seriously. One concern of this thesis is the relationship between several key concepts in aesthetics. How aesthetic value, aesthetic perception, aesthetic experience, aesthetic pleasure, aesthetic judgement, and aesthetic appreciation are interrelated and interdefined is what tends to make any given account distinctive. Shift one concept or define it in terms of another and you alter the framework.

### 5.3.2 Aesthetic response and aesthetic judgement

It must be conceded that a commitment to this normative core as a *sine qua non* of aesthetics will result in the rejection of my account. It is not a *critical*

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<sup>101</sup> However, such a project comes with its own problems. One is how to cash out the idea that subjective responses can be assessed for appropriateness when it is often the case that the qualities to which we are responding are thought to be partially constituted by that response. One attempted solution to this has been the suggestion that we attend to or value the objects of our response “for their own sake”, so as to protect against instrumental or merely personal evaluation. Another, has been to argue that in experiencing or perceiving aesthetically we apprehend real features of objects, thus seeking to secure the appropriateness of our responses and judgements with reference to the world rather than ourselves. This form of realism about aesthetic properties is accompanied by familiar metaphysical concerns about response-dependence and the status of secondary qualities, which I don’t intend to discuss here.

On this perennial debate, a representative sample might include (Bender, 1996, 2001, 2003; Goldman, 1993, 1995; Levinson, 2006a, 2006c).

approach to appearances which demarcates the aesthetic on my account of aesthetic perception. Nor, however, is the identification of a form of pleasure or evaluation the criterion by which the aesthetic is identified. This should help us begin to see why the normative critique might not be fatal for my approach. If part of the reason for the emphasis on appropriateness and critical interest in aesthetics is the frequent understanding of aesthetic judgement, aesthetic perception, and aesthetic experience as grounded in the felt response of the subject to features of the external world, then the worry that such responses may be inappropriate or a-critical can be understood as the upshot of a particular approach to the nature of aesthetic response and its relation to aesthetic judgement, rather than characteristic of the aesthetic in general.

In other words, if one's account of aesthetic response involves, on the one hand, a subjective response such as pleasure, and, on the other hand, a condition that attempts to secure intersubjective legitimacy for judgements grounded in that pleasure, then that demonstrates why one would need to be committed to a normative core. As Dowling highlights, such accounts don't want to arrive at a point where "merely" pleasurable or agreeable experiences qualify as aesthetic. So they need a way to isolate distinctively aesthetic pleasures which are then used to ground judgements with a claim on others: that is, with a claim to describe something about the world as well as an individual's response to it.

But that, I suggest, is the result of an account (or family of accounts) of aesthetic response we need not accept, and a view of the relationship between aesthetic response and aesthetic judgement which should not be taken to characterise the aesthetic *tout court*. Because I haven't identified aesthetic response with a form of pleasure my account of aesthetic perception need not be concerned with the demarcation of distinctively *aesthetic* pleasure from pleasure in general. (At least, not urgently.) As a result, the normative demand

on aesthetic response drops away, because my characterisation of aesthetic perception as the perceptual representation of bound multifeatured objects with locations is not vulnerable to the kind of *epistemic* or *causal* worry that underlies attempts to ensure that aesthetic judgements grounded on pleasure are appropriate and have some claim on others.

Another form of this worry is that bare aesthetic perception does not admit of the comparative judgement and relevance of expertise involved in judging artworks and aesthetic merit. This is another manifestation of the objection that bare aesthetic perception does not admit of the right kind of discrimination. The idea is that certain reasons cannot play a justificatory role in aesthetic judgement, because justification doesn't enter into my framework of aesthetic perception until attention is involved: *then* the relationship between reasons and aesthetic judgement becomes similar to mainstream accounts. Yet the aesthetic ends up sitting uncomfortably, it might be suggested, between the rational and the a-rational; and thus the concept of the aesthetic and its role in our lives becomes fractured.

The response to this challenge focuses on the difference we discussed in the previous chapter between perceptual justification and the *use* of perceptual justification. Now, it is true that attended and unattended perceptual experiences differ in terms of the complexity and determinacy of representation of which they are capable, but that doesn't affect this issue, because it's not the case that in bare aesthetic perception we make aesthetic judgements which cannot be justified until we attend. Rather, by virtue of our representation of bound multifeatured objects with locations we already possess perceptual justification. We certainly require more than the possession of perceptual justification for aesthetic appreciation: we require the capacity to *use* that justification in statements and inferences about the objects of our experience. It is conscious visual attention which enables us to use the justification that

perceptual experience provides. In this sense, bare aesthetic perception is pre-critical rather than a-critical. My account retains the critical thought and practise involved in aesthetic *appreciation*, supported by rich aesthetic perception. However, I argue that aesthetic perception is the core concept of our aesthetic psychology.

### 5.3.3 A challenge from appearance

Now, it is open to someone to say of the above, “Look, that’s a response to one kind of account of aesthetic response and aesthetic judgement, but my concern is not with those accounts but with the aesthetic interest in appearances *for themselves*. By aestheticising perception, you prevent this interest in appearances for their own sake being paradigmatic of the aesthetic approach to the world.” The challenges are related in that they share the concern to isolate an interest in appearances, either as grounds for appropriate judgements of aesthetic qualities and aesthetic merit, or as straightforwardly characteristic of aesthetic matters. Both challenge the sense in which I aestheticise perception by making bare aesthetic perception pervasive in (although not exhaustive of) perception.

The emphasis of this second objection is slightly different from the normative challenge. The normative challenge is motivated by a concern to preserve the critical core of aesthetic judgement, whereas this new challenge, despite having a normative concern as a potential consequence, is focused on the isolation of appearances from, say, function, idiosyncratic preference, or sensory gratification. What matters is how a mug appears, not how well it performs its function of containing hot liquids in an easily handled form. Of course, elements of the mug’s appearance will be determined by the choices made in fulfilling functional goals; but, goes a characteristic argument, the aesthetic interest—whilst operating alongside function in the design process—is

something over and above mere function, something experienced for its own sake.

It would be a mistake to think that my account necessarily threatens such a view. We are constitutionally involved with appearances in the broadest sense for as long as we perceive. We can respond to the challenge from appearance by arguing that bare aesthetic perception does not threaten this interest in appearances for their own sake.

I suggest that the pre-attentional nature of bare aesthetic perception might actually *foster* the perception of appearances for their own sake. This might seem counter-intuitive to the challenger who holds that perceiving appearances for their own sake require certain forms of attitude or epistemic self-checking such that the individual can guarantee they are not allowing considerations of function or personal interest to impinge. Yet the key point here is that, once attended such an attitude or form of epistemic self-checking might well be required to ensure appearances are perceived or scrutinised for their own sake, *precisely because it is attention which enables considerations of function, interest, and value to affect judgement and appreciation*. In other words, if the concern of the “for its own sake” challenge is to safeguard the isolation of aesthetic perception from supposedly extra-aesthetic concerns, then bare aesthetic perception satisfies this demand by taking place before the deployment of conscious visual attention and the accessibility of such visual information to nonaesthetic influences. Of course, this is not *attention* for its own sake; and we must concede that an insistence of an attention condition for aesthetic perception remains incompatible with my account. Nor, I think, is this a very happy characterisation of aesthetic perception: my account is committed to the aesthetic character of experience prior to interest in appearance for its own sake.

#### **5.4 A broad foundation for plural aesthetic psychology**

Let's take a step back for a moment. Despite my response to the normative challenge, it remains the case that we want aesthetic perception to accommodate the communication of something like verdictive and substantive aesthetic judgements. The sense that we appreciate features of the external world—even if partially constituted by our response to them—and that our attribution of qualities and aesthetic merit to those features has some kind of claim on the assent of others should not be brushed aside. My claim is that aptness for critical communication in aesthetic judgement does not exhaust the aesthetic or aesthetic perception. It is not the concept or practice in terms of which all other elements of our aesthetic framework should be defined and understood. On my account, that central position is occupied by the minimal concept of aesthetic perception.

Part of my aim in developing this account has been to create space for a variety of approaches to the nature of aesthetic appreciation and judgement to be built on this broad foundation of aesthetic perception. There is no guarantee that the objects, individuals, and systems we might appreciate aesthetically have anything in common besides their appearing to us; and there is no reason why anything beyond our representation of their appearances need be held in common in order for our perception and subsequent appreciation of them to be aesthetic. The sheer variety of potential objects of aesthetic appreciation means that a number of accounts of such appreciation might plausibly be developed and coexist happily. Taking up something like an aesthetic attitude toward an artwork is not, on my account, illegitimate as a form of aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic perception is pervasive and it thus pervades each form of appreciation that might occur.



What the distinction between bare and rich aesthetic perception allows is for the aesthetic to be given a crucial role in our perception of and orientation to the world, whilst not detracting from the critical and appreciative practices considered paradigmatic of aesthetic engagement by narrow accounts. Far from trivialising aesthetic judgement, this account preserves the critical intuition that motivates normative approaches to aesthetic experience, whilst making aesthetic perception pervasive and significant in everyday life.

Indeed, one of the interesting results of placing aesthetic perception at the heart of our engagement with the world is the way in which it makes our aesthetic choices significant. Williams James wrote that “each of us literally *chooses*, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit” (James, 1980, p. 424). From the great range of possible objects and contexts of appreciation, what we *actually* aesthetically appreciate is limited: by time, inclination, and day to day concerns. If the aesthetic pervades experience, then what we *choose* to view with a specifically aesthetic interest speaks volumes about our stylistic, artistic, and more broadly cultural concerns. Our choices of aesthetic object and aesthetic experience become one way in which we assert both our individuality and our membership of groups with similar aesthetic interests.

For example, the Japanese aesthetic tradition focuses on and appreciates particular qualities, objects, and practices: most distinctively, what Saito calls “the Japanese aesthetics of imperfection and insufficiency” celebrates “the aged, the obscured, the impoverished and defective” (Saito, 1997, p. 377). In this tradition, Saito argues, the role of time, environment and human agency in the ageing and wearing process are part of a narrative that underlies appreciation of the sensory qualities of a chipped vase, the fallen cherry blossom, the cracked tea cup. (See also (Tanizaki, 2001).)

Indeed, the tea ceremony is one of the clearest examples of aesthetic choices as a manifestation and shaper of Japanese culture. As Kakuzo Okakura writes in *The Book of Tea*:

The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism in the ordinary acceptance of the term, for it expresses conjointly with ethics and religion our whole point of view about man and nature...Our home and habits, costume and cuisine, porcelain, lacquer, painting,—our very literature,—all have been subject to its influence...It has permeated the elegance of noble boudoirs, and entered the abode of the humble. Our peasants have learned to arrange flowers, our meanest labourer to offer his salutation to the rocks and waters. (Okakura, 1964, pp. 1-2)

Of course, neither Japanese nor any other culture is monolithic, and this gives an impression of only a small part of the atmosphere of design and appreciation. Indeed, one of the challenges in any given period is frequently the dispute over which aesthetic choices are the most valuable or representative of a set of values.<sup>102</sup> We will discuss this more below, but before that I want to turn to the relationship between aesthetic perception and aesthetic value.

### **5.5 The demotion of aesthetic value?**

It is common to find discussions of aesthetic experience or aesthetic appreciation motivated with reference to our interest in and pursuit of aesthetic value. Thus Robert Stecker writes that “The reason we are interested in the aesthetic is that we believe there is a distinctive kind of value: aesthetic value. Of all the aesthetic concepts, this is the one we ultimately need to make sense of. Those who care about such things as aesthetic experience or aesthetic properties do so because of the belief that they are providers of something of great value to human beings” (Stecker, 2006a, pp. 1-2). On one influential view, “aesthetic empiricism”, we are to understand aesthetic value as a form of

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<sup>102</sup> See (Saito, 2007) for more on this. One example might be the Nineteenth Century dispute between Neo-Classical and Gothic Revivalist architecture.

instrumental value, such that the aesthetic value of an object is a question of the value of the experience the object is disposed to bring about in an appropriate audience. Thus the concepts of aesthetic experience and aesthetic properties are marshalled in service of the explanation of aesthetic value and why it is we might pursue such an experience and the objects which elicit it.<sup>103</sup>

All this is by way of emphasising the centrality of aesthetic value in explanations of aesthetic concepts and aesthetic practice. In contrast, I have outlined a framework in which an evaluatively neutral concept of aesthetic perception takes centre stage. Concepts such as aesthetic experience and aesthetic appreciation are understood with reference to aesthetic perception, rather than aesthetic value, which is thus demoted from its position at the head of our aesthetic framework. Or so it might be argued.

This kind of objection is related to the problem of pervasiveness and triviality. It can be understood in several ways. Firstly, as the familiar problem that the pervasiveness of the aesthetic leaves us struggling to understand its distinctiveness or value: if aesthetic perception goes on all the time, how could aesthetic experience be in any way more valuable than ordinary experience? This is another form of Dowling's concern. Secondly, and relatedly, the objection from aesthetic value can be understood as the worry that aesthetic value simply drops out of the picture on my account, or becomes explanatorily inconsequential or epiphenomenal. This supposed inconsequentiality of

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<sup>103</sup> Aesthetic empiricism is far more complex an issue than this, involving significant disputes over the nature and relationship between artistic and aesthetic properties, and our experience of them. Matters are further complicated by frequent discussions of *artistic* value rather than aesthetic value, the waters becoming increasingly muddied by disputes about whether artistic value should be separated from aesthetic value. The question of whether *artistic* merits can be judged in the absence of facts external to the experience of a work is plausibly—but not decisively—a separate question from the judgement of its aesthetic merits. My discussion is simply aimed at highlighting the centrality of aesthetic value to discussions of aesthetic experience, aesthetic appreciation, and the concept of the aesthetic itself.

For overviews of such debates see (D. Davies, 2006; Graham, 2006). See (Shelley, 2010a) for a recent argument against value empiricism.

aesthetic value is deeply counterintuitive from such a point of view. For, as John McDowell puts it, “aesthetic experience presents itself as a confrontation with value: an awareness of value as something residing in an object and available to be encountered” (McDowell, 1983, p. 1). It is with reference to such a confrontation with value that we should try and understand the nature of our aesthetic engagement with the world and its features.

Indeed, thirdly, it can be argued that the centrality of aesthetic value is what explains the apparent *normativity* of aesthetic judgement: as James Shelley and Michael Watkins write, “if a painting is beautiful, then you ought to see that it is beautiful if you look at it and *you ought to look at it*....[An] object’s having aesthetic value is a reason to perceive it and to perceive it as having the aesthetic value it has” (Watkins & Shelley, 2012, p. 349). From this point of view, the centrality of aesthetic value provides protection against idiosyncrasy, as well as a framework for understanding the force of judgements of aesthetic merit.

Underlying each of these forms of the challenge from aesthetic value is the thought that aesthetic engagement is *special* and that to widen the reach of the aesthetic is to risk adulterating its value and the loss of the ability to explain why we want to engage in such experience. Moreover, to broaden the reach of the aesthetic by shifting aesthetic value from its central position in our aesthetic framework is to undermine—once again—the normativity of aesthetic judgements and aesthetic merit. From this point of view, if my account were to trivialise aesthetic value or to render it explanatorily insignificant, then that would cast significant doubt on its plausibility.

### **5.5.1 Two separate questions: aesthetic perception and aesthetic value**

It is undoubtedly the case that we are interested in valuable aesthetic experiences and in understanding the value of objects and the kinds of

disagreements we can have with others about this value. It would not do to deny McDowell's emphasis on the confrontation with and awareness of value arising from objects and our experience of them; nor would it seem sensible to disagree that an object's aesthetic value provides *prima facie* reason to experience it—at least if we are interested in valuable aesthetic experience. In the light of such acknowledgements it might seem sensible to agree with Stecker when he claims that we are interested in the aesthetic *because* we are interested in aesthetic value; or, perhaps go further, and suggest that we should understand the aesthetic as essentially evaluative and develop our accounts of aesthetic qualities, aesthetic perception, and aesthetic experience with reference to aesthetic value.

We can acknowledge the significance of aesthetic value in our lives. We can even concede the plausibility of the suggestion that aesthetic value leads us to try to understand other aesthetic issues. However, that the significance of aesthetic value prompts investigation into other aesthetic concepts should not lead us to think that this prompting implies its occupation of the central position in our aesthetic framework. In particular, we should avoid the pitfall of narrowing our concepts of the aesthetic and aesthetic perception in an effort to cash them out in terms of aesthetic value.

On my account the question of the aesthetic character of perception is prior to that of the aesthetic value of the objects of perception and our experience of them. The recognition or appreciation of aesthetic value depends on (rich) aesthetic perception, but the mark of the aesthetic is not evaluative: it is perceptual. Of course, aesthetic perception must be compatible with an account of aesthetic value and our appreciation of it and the objects and experiences which possess it. I have insisted throughout that the kinds of discriminating approach to appearances “for their own sake” outlined by narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology are not illegitimate as analyses of forms of engagement

with aesthetic perception and its objects; nor are their discussions of the relationship between appropriately grounded pleasure and aesthetic judgement ruled out on my account. Rather, I have taken a step back and away from the grounding of aesthetic character in an evaluative orientation toward the character of experience and its objects whilst maintaining a focus on appearances and their constitution.

This certainly means that the unity of the concept of the aesthetic cannot be secured with reference to a kind of evaluative interest in appearances or a concern with a certain kind of value. That much I concede and insist upon. However, this does not necessarily mean—because the account does not pronounce upon it—that we cannot look to secure the normativity of such judgements with reference to an account of aesthetic value and what it means to appropriately experience the bearers of such value. It means that such a project must be understood as subsequent to, though intimately connected with, the wider project of understanding the nature of the aesthetic itself.

So, aesthetic value does not become superfluous on my account of aesthetic perception, but it is shifted to a separate set of questions, one which a complete theory of aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic judgement would have to address. This is not the demotion of aesthetic value or its implied explanatory inconsequence but a clear separation of questions about value from questions about aesthetic perception. This likewise suggests the limitations of my account. I earlier emphasised that I made no attempt to give an account of judgements of beauty or aesthetic merit beyond outlining the perceptual and cognitive conditions for such an account. Nor have I attempted to analyse the connection between pleasure in appearance and aesthetic value in the way that accounts of the response-dependence of aesthetic value do. (E.g. (Goldman, 2006).) To the extent that aesthetic perception is pervasive on my account the attempt to

isolate *aesthetic* pleasure will require some further condition beyond its arising from assembled experience.

### **5.5.2 Connecting aesthetic perception and aesthetic value**

Despite arguing that questions about aesthetic perception and aesthetic value are separate, it would be odd were we to insist that no connections could be made between them. Such a proposal would have the strange consequence of attempting to secure the unity and coherence of the concept of the aesthetic by excluding questions about aesthetic value; which exclusion rather militates against the unifying aim. Aesthetic perception is a valuable mental activity not least because it plays a central role in our orientation to our environment. Such an activity has cognitive, social, therapeutic, and ethical value, some of which we will discuss below. Let's focus first, however, on the connection between one form of aesthetic value—that of aesthetic qualities and the objects which possess them—and the activity of aesthetic perception. I'll do this with the assistance of a passage from Frank Sibley's "Aesthetics and the Looks of Things" (Sibley, 2001c).

### **5.5.3 Sibley and values in human life**

When wondering why we value certain qualities "for themselves" Sibley makes the following suggestion,

Is it perhaps, that the qualities and appearances that can be admired aesthetically for themselves must be ones which somehow, putting aesthetic questions aside, are vitally involved in human experience? Awareness of and concern with warmth, light, brilliance, clarity, purity, regularity, cleanness, richness, softness, smoothness, and simplicity go deep into human life and interests. There is nothing artificial or accidental or superficial about them. They are as basic as the passions. (Sibley, 2001c, p. 31)

He goes on:

we cannot survive without warmth, peace, energy; we cannot avoid danger, violence, fear; and we concern ourselves deeply over purity, clarity, and simplicity. These are qualities we may value for themselves...[Qualities] like serrated, or hygienic, or sanitary are more specialized or peripheral, of interest less for themselves than for their instrumental value (contrast with them 'sharp' and 'biting', 'pure' and 'clean'). When we do praise something for being, e.g., fast-looking, we notice that 'fast' is not confined, like 'hygienic', to its instrumental value; it suggests dash, bravado, a way of life valued for itself. (Sibley, 2001c, p. 31)

Sibley suggests that those qualities in which we can take an aesthetic interest for themselves, without reference to other explanations of suitability to context and so on, are those which reflect fundamental human concerns. In a slight contrast to his phrasing, Sibley's aesthetic "for itself" derives from a broader human instrumentality, linking certain appearances with foundational needs and desires. The implication seems to be that, although these are aesthetic qualities we value for themselves, they are instrumental and anthropocentric in the sense that they signify human value. They *become* "for itself"-type values (or qualities we value "for themselves") for us because we are human and have certain vital interests. Roger Scruton has pointed out that humans seem to have inherent need to interpret: when the object of our attention is an appearance, we will interpret it as something intrinsically meaningful (Scruton, 2007, p. 244). Aspects of our environment's appearance such as light, brilliance, clarity, purity, regularity, cleanness, richness, softness, smoothness are perceived as valuable for their own sake as a consequence of their signifying safety, warmth, peace, energy, and so on.

There is a Deweyan undercurrent to Sibley's suggestion. Dewey thought "the contemplative character of the esthetic" overemphasised "without much regard to capacity for esthetic perception in the concrete". For Dewey, aesthetic



perception “deeply affects the practice of living” and this overemphasis of the contemplation of art results in “drawing away esthetic perceptions that are necessary ingredients of happiness, or reducing them to the level of compensating transient pleasurable excitations” (Dewey, 2005, pp. 8-9). We have seen how this is the case in contemporary narrow accounts and Dowling-like objections to everyday aesthetics. Similarly, Sibley was of the view that we should not neglect those aesthetic aspects of life which don’t result in standout experiences, although each writer differs in many other respects (Sibley, 2001d). For Dewey, as for Sibley, aesthetic value can be connected to fundamental human needs and our ever changing relation to the environment.

The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way...Life consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it...In a world like ours, every living creature that attains sensibility welcomes order with a response of harmonious feeling whenever it finds a congruous order about it. (Dewey, 2005, pp. 12-13)

Our perception of the congruity between appearances and these needs is valuable and experienced as valuable, both aesthetically and as fulfilling these needs. This congruity, as Sibley highlights, allows us to explain why certain qualities might be aesthetically valuable in only some situations. “[To] make a quality like angularity aesthetically acceptable, we link it with some of these deeper concerns, with what touches home; we say it is violent or energetic or menacing” (Sibley, 2001c, pp. 31-32). What I want to suggest, then, in response to the challenge of aesthetic value’s separation from aesthetic perception is that we begin to understand the role of value in the way Sibley hints. Far from banishing aesthetic value to the sidelines, this understanding places it at the very centre of our lives.

How should we understand the connection between my account and the Sibleian approach to (some kinds of) aesthetic value? These qualities, the objects which possess them, and the collections of such objects in the environment are at the heart of aesthetic perception. They inform and inflect perceptual experience at the level of both bare and rich aesthetic perception. Although I have outlined an evaluatively neutral criterion for aesthetic perception, it remains the case that the objects and qualities represented may possess this connection to valuable qualities of the environment, and do so, in part as a consequence of how they appear even when unattended.

The qualities which Sibley identifies are at the heart of this: they are qualities we confront every day even if we do not attend to them. In the absence of attention we are unable to respond appropriately to them in the way many accounts of aesthetic value demand (unless we have done so previously, in which case contextual and memory-based top-down influences on our representation of them *might* amount to something like an appropriate response). However, we nonetheless represent them and they are connected to the deep human interests Sibley discusses. Bare aesthetic perception thus involves a confrontation with aesthetic value, the possessors of which are aesthetic qualities which connect to human interests in such a way as to be valuable for their own sake.

Of course, aesthetic appreciation remains the locus of engagement with aesthetic value and the phenomena which possess it. As we have seen, it is only attentive, appreciative experience which provides the perceptual and cognitive tools to respond appropriately to objects and their qualities. Thus, it is only such experience which can be involved in the kinds of critical practice privileged by Dowling-like challenges to broad aesthetic psychology. As long as we don't make such practice criterial of the aesthetic in general, we can allow that aesthetic appreciation—supported by rich aesthetic perception—is the

origin of aesthetic judgements with a claim on others, which possess (or purport to possess) normative force in their attribution of aesthetic qualities and aesthetic value, whilst arguing that the role of aesthetic perception in representing an integrated external world implicates it in the confrontation with value.

## **5.6 Aesthetic perception, art, and everyday aesthetics: advantages and implications**

Perhaps the greatest advantage of my account is that its outline of aesthetic psychology allows us to begin to reconcile the role of the aesthetic in the experience of art, nature, and the home. To put it another way, the reconciliation of the broad and narrow accounts of aesthetic psychology through a greater understanding of the nature and role of attention and aesthetic perception provides a foundation for everyday and standout forms of aesthetic engagement. It allows us to say *this* is where the aesthetic is in everyday life and show the continuum of that concept with experiences of art (and nature).

### **5.6.1 Aesthetic perception and everyday aesthetics**

One of the motivations for this thesis was the conviction that whilst everyday aesthetics has raised important questions about the nature, extent, and value of aesthetic experience in everyday life, it has not done a good job of addressing the psychological foundations of such experience or the ways in which everyday aesthetic psychology differs from mainstream theories of aesthetic experience and aesthetic value. This made it fairly straightforward for what I called the narrow approach to aesthetic psychology to exclude those everyday aesthetic experiences which do not satisfy their theories of attentive and appreciative experience. Everyday aesthetics has not provided an aesthetic psychology to support the extension of aesthetic experience. I have

endeavoured to remedy that and, in doing so, to provide the kinds of analytical tools which both mainstream and everyday aestheticians can use to understand the nature and variety of aesthetic experience. Thus, if the narrow theorist still wishes to reject everyday aesthetic experience, they now have a concept of aesthetic perception, aesthetic psychology, and attention against which to argue.

One of the key ways in which I have attempted to substantiate the extension of the aesthetic to everyday experience is by providing a concept of aesthetic perception which is neither “merely sensory” nor simply an approach adapted from so-called “art-centred” aesthetics. The former approach will never satisfy those who wish to see a more significant role for the aesthetic than its involving sensory experience; and the latter threatens to retain the focus on the contemplative experiences characteristic of theories of the appropriate experience of art, which, as we have seen, either begs the question against unattended aesthetic experience or includes such experience without saying why it qualifies as aesthetic. The concept of aesthetic perception as the perceptual representation of bound objects with locations avoids the weaknesses of both approaches and can be used to understand the significance of the aesthetic in daily life as well as the attentive experiences philosophers of art describe.

Of course, attention to appearances isn’t restricted to the art gallery. We attend to appearances every day, perhaps never more frequently and with such personal significance as when we are at home. Much of the everyday aesthetics literature is dedicated to an analysis and urging of the aesthetic status of domestic experience, practice, qualities, and values.<sup>104</sup> For example, Thomas Leddy’s “everyday surface aesthetic qualities” are characteristically domestic:

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, (Lee, 2010), (Melchionne, 1998), (Naukkarinen, 2013), (Rautio, 2009), (Saito, 2007).

“Neat,” “clean,” “messy”, “dirty”, “sloppy”, “carelessness”, “shoddy”, “slipshod”, “precise/imprecise”, “meticulous”. He writes,

Rooms become messy, cluttered. They must be cleaned, cleared, set straight, tidied up. Kitchens and bathrooms can be unclean or ‘filthy.’ Floors must be washed when dirty and unattractive. Shelves may be ordered or disordered. Desks can be cluttered. Schedules and organizational plans can be messy. Products can be presented neatly and attractively or not. Clothes run from messy and dirty to neat and clean. People too can be messy or neat, clean or unclean. They are considered messy and unclean if their clothes, grooming, possessions, products, or workstations have these qualities.’ (Leddy, 1995, p. 261)

Leddy argues that such qualities deserve a place in the ontology of aesthetic qualities. It is worth highlighting the way in which we might connect such qualities with Sibley’s suggestion that some qualities represent or touch upon vital human interests. We can and frequently do attend to such qualities, both from the point of view of appearance and function. Ideally, of course, we want a home that both appears and functions in a manner conducive to our living well in it. As Scruton writes, “[The] attempt to match our surroundings to ourselves and ourselves to our surroundings is arguably a human universal” (Scruton, 2009, p. 82). In a similar vein, the critic Rowan Moore describes the building of a home as the attempt “to rearrange the bewildering world, so as to find your place and way in it” (Moore, 2012, p. 55). We can place aesthetic perception at the heart of this project, both in the matching and the living. Our attention to and assembly of our surroundings is informed by the qualities we value and which signify for us both fundamental human concerns and individual preoccupations. Habits of attention and inattention—as James suspected—translate into different experiences, different ways of occupying spaces; and this variety of attention—as we saw in the last chapter—has a major effect on the kinds of aesthetic thought and communication of which we are

capable by virtue of the perceptual representations accessed and available to cognition and discussion.

Moore quotes the architect Lina Bo Bardi speaking of her approach to building her own house: “[the] idea was to have a house that gave physical protection from the wind and rain, but shared this with poetry and ethics, things that can be found even in a storm” (Moore, 2012, p. 32). By poetry, Moore writes, Bo Bardi meant “such things as the ability of the house to seem airborne and grounded at once, or the rapport she created between artefacts and vegetation” (Moore, 2012, p. 32). These are aesthetic effects conducive to a certain way of occupying the home and representative of Sibleian valuable qualities such as light, regularity, simplicity, clarity. As a particular architect and individual Bo Bardi connected to and privileged particular values and their manifestations in the appearance of her home.<sup>105</sup>

Particular habits of linking such qualities to these deeper concerns amount to a style, a particular way of establishing a home and displaying the values we adopt. That these values are multiply realisable is evident from the great variety of ways we go about representing and satisfying them. For example, Junichirō Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows* highlights the distinctively Japanese approach to food, light, shade, and space, as well as the way in which such a distinctive tradition of architecture and dwelling satisfies similar fundamental human needs as Western traditions (Tanizaki, 2001). Thus, to a great degree the creation and ordering of a home is the choosing of our experience and the experience of those who visit. We can do this to differing degrees. Some seem oblivious to the environment in which they live and others exquisitely sensitive, as in Will Wiles’s novel *Care of Wooden Floors* in which an inveterate slob is entrusted with the immaculate apartment of modernist composer Oskar. This is

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<sup>105</sup> See also (Ballantyne, 2011).

a question of character and aesthetic preferences will have a part to play. After all, we might judge an artwork extraordinary yet prefer a serene minor impressionist landscape on the wall of the sitting room to a blood-spurting Caravaggio. (Should any of us be so fortunate.)

Of course, on my account of aesthetic perception—and on several broad accounts of aesthetic psychology—it is not only when attended that everyday life is aesthetic. As Ossi Naukkarinen writes “The everyday attitude is colored with routines, familiarity, continuity, normalcy, habits, the slow process of acclimatization, even superficiality and a sort of half-consciousness and not with creative experiments, exceptions, constant questioning and change, analyses, and deep reflections” (Naukkarinen, 2013). A central project of everyday aesthetics is the recognition and theorisation of the objects and experiences of everyday life as aesthetic and aesthetically valuable. I have contributed to this project by developing a framework in which perception is aestheticised but not trivialised. Bare and rich aesthetic perception operate reciprocally as we live and move and work at home.

Bare aesthetic perception as I have developed it is fleeting, persisting for only slightly longer than the stimuli which prompt it. If this were all there were to unattended experience, daily life would be impoverished. However, bare aesthetic perception is enriched by its interplay with rich aesthetic perception. As we saw in the previous chapter, prior knowledge, evaluation, and experience affect unattended perceptual representation, which means that much of our daily bare aesthetic perception will be informed by prior episodes of rich aesthetic perception. This is especially true in the home, where our intimacy with its spaces and contents will inform and render determinate perceptual representations which would otherwise remain undetermined. Such familiarity makes it likely that deviations from our domestic expectations will

draw attention. We notice when our living room is disarranged: many visitors would not.

This familiarity has a strange consequence, which is that we tend to attend *less* in the home than we do in unfamiliar or strange places. As Naukkarinen pointed out, our everyday operation is often one of “half-consciousness” in the sense that we do not attend to the intimate and familiar: it’s not new, it’s not exciting, it’s background. Part of what art does is force us to attend, both as a result of the cultural context of its production and reception, and by representing the familiar in strange and striking ways. This is part of the impact of the avant-garde in any particular period: new stylistic movements present new ways of assembling experience, urge differing habits of attention on us. In the home, however, we are used to seeing, hearing, and touching the objects and events we encounter. Our attention is not drawn to the familiar in the way that it is to the strange (Haapala, 2005). I walk home distracted, barely noticing the path, the trees, the sky, the road; but when I visit a new country, city, church, or museum, I am unfamiliar and excited. I attend and am open in the way that narrow accounts of aesthetic experience privilege. That shifting relationship between the attended and the unattended, between bare and rich aesthetic perception is testament to the significance and breadth of aesthetic psychology. It is a strength of the account presented in this thesis that it can accommodate the variety of our aesthetic engagement with the world.

### **5.6.2 Everyday and art-centred aesthetics**

As I mentioned above, by resisting the tendency to fix the meaning and value of aesthetic experience with reference to paradigmatic experiences of art I have undercut approaches which seek to understand the role of the aesthetic in daily life by extending art-centred accounts. This kind of art-centred approach is exemplified by Christopher Dowling’s distinction between two different ways



of accommodating the “Aesthetics of Daily Life Intuition”. The intuition that we should extend the aesthetic to aspects of daily life can be understood either as the suggested application of art-centred accounts of aesthetic experience and value to everyday life *or* as the view that experiences of daily life supply paradigmatic instances of aesthetic experience and value without any reference to frameworks derived from the philosophy of art. Dowling opts for the weaker art-centred approach, Yuriko Saito, he suggests, for the stronger (Dowling, 2010).

In choosing the weaker form of the intuition Dowling resists Saito’s division of the aesthetic domain into art-centred and everyday aesthetics. He retains the unity of the concept of the aesthetic by arguing that its critical and evaluative core is exemplified by experiences of art; and he does so by arguing that the stronger form of the intuition (exemplified by Irvin and Saito) has unwelcome consequences for aesthetics: namely the trivialisation of aesthetic value and the fragmentation of the concept of the aesthetic. His tone in endorsing the art-extending intuition is one of rescuing aesthetics from the excesses of those who would accord the everyday equal status with art. He writes that the strong intuition involves experiences “not bound by the limitations and conventions that temper discussions of aesthetic value in the philosophy of art” (Dowling, 2010, p. 241).

My account undercuts this distinction. By framing a minimal account of aesthetic perception as bound perceptual representation we can avoid both Saito’s division of the aesthetic domain and Dowling’s (and others’) attempt to retain its unity by insisting on the priority of art. The aesthetic becomes broader and its value need not be thought diluted by its pervasiveness. We need not seek to understand our concepts of aesthetic experience and aesthetic value with reference to a prioritisation of art *or* everyday life. The interesting question becomes one focused on how aesthetic perception *varies* in everyday and art

contexts. I have reorientated the debate surrounding the relationship between art and the everyday away from questions of priority or accommodation by developing a concept of aesthetic perception and a psychological framework in which both are equal partners on a continuum of aesthetic engagement running from bare aesthetic perception to the rich and appreciative. Moreover, I have done so in such a way that we can understand why unattended everyday experience and attended aesthetic experience should differ in their relationship to aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic judgement, and critical communication. As we have seen, this has been a focus for disagreement between broad and narrow, everyday and art-centred approaches. On my account we need give up neither inattentive and unreported aesthetic perception nor attentive, extended and critical contemplation.

### **5.6.3 Art and aesthetic perception**

What are the implications of my account for art and the experience of art? Much of what I have had to say in this thesis has been about experiences very different from those associated with art. Yet it would be odd if an account of aesthetic perception were inapplicable to the reception and creation of artworks. I'll focus here on some interwoven implications of my account for the experience, creation, and appreciation of art, as well the role of the critic.

I have already pointed out that aesthetic perception overflows the experience of art and I suggested in chapter one that my account of aesthetic perception has consequences for aesthetic theories of art. In thinking about the relationship between my account and aesthetic theories I will focus on Nick Zangwill's Aesthetic Creation Theory (Zangwill, 2007). This is Zangwill's "bare statement" of the theory:

Something is a work of art because and only because someone had an insight that certain aesthetic properties would depend on certain

nonaesthetic properties; and because of this, the thing was intentionally endowed with some of those aesthetic properties in virtue of the nonaesthetic properties, as envisaged in the insight. (Zangwill, 2007, p. 36)

This is an aesthetic theory of art: Zangwill takes the familiar line of identifying an intention to create an artefact with aesthetic character and, by extension, aesthetic value. This aesthetic character is understood in terms of an insight about the dependence of aesthetic properties on nonaesthetic properties: an insight about the aesthetic effect “*realized* by an object or event with certain nonaesthetic properties—for example, marks on a canvas, sounds or words” (Zangwill, 2007, p. 39). Artistic activity, for Zangwill, involves the insight, intention and belief that the creation of an object with particular nonaesthetic properties will produce the aesthetic properties which depend on them. “The existence of such an intention or set of intentions,” he maintains, “is essential for something to be a work of art” (Zangwill, 2007, p. 40). It follows that aesthetic appreciation involves the perception and evaluation of this dependency and the intentions which produced it.<sup>106</sup>

What would a reconstrual of Aesthetic Creation Theory in the light of my account of aesthetic perception look like? It must be noted that I have resisted property talk in this thesis, whereas Aesthetic Creation Theory is couched specifically in terms of the dependence of aesthetic properties on nonaesthetic properties. However, nothing I have argued in this thesis militates against property talk, especially when we come to discuss and attribute properties—or, as I prefer, qualities—to objects, events, and individuals as a result of perceiving them aesthetically. Indeed, I have endeavoured to steer clear of explicit metaphysical commitments beyond those which accompany the naturalism implicit in the use of empirical psychology.

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<sup>106</sup> It is a further, and specifically artistic issue, for Zangwill, whether or not the artist’s insight was original (Zangwill, 2007, p. 44).

A more natural reading of Aesthetic Creation Theory from the point of view of aesthetic perception—and one which avoids property talk where possible—would be in terms of the insight of the artist into the way in which both she and others will assemble the qualities with which they may intentionally endow the object or event. In other words, the artist has an insight about the nature of the potential perceptual experience their work may engender. The aesthetic appreciation of the resulting artwork will consequently focus on the success of the artist's intention and the nature of the experience. So, an aesthetic theory of art may well be compatible with my account, in part due to the emphasis on the intentions of the artist to engender particular perceptual experiences.

It is particularly interesting from the point of view of the relationship of art-centred and everyday aesthetics that Zangwill is keen to include everyday creative activities “such as industrial design, advertising, weaving, whistling, cake-decorating, arranging and decorating rooms, religious rituals and fireworks displays” in his theory of art (Zangwill, 2007, p. 78). In this his view is similar to Melchionne's suggestion that “Everyday domestic practice can be interpreted as a response to the status of ordinary domestic space as a work of art” (Melchionne, 1998, p. 194). Elsewhere Zangwill writes that,

...some grooming activities are aesthetically motivated and their upshot may count as little works of art—or I see no harm in saying so. In cases where we groom ourselves to enhance our beauty, I would shift the onus of proof, and ask, giving the extent of the aesthetics of everyday life, why such activities are not at least on a continuum with artworld art activities? Hairdressing, after all, is an art in a broad sense, and in many countries the art even goes under the name “aesthetic”. (Zangwill, 2009b, p. 25)

We can understand all of these activities as involving the manipulation of the qualities of objects and events to create a perceptual effect: a particular way of assembling perceptual experience. The breadth of Zangwill's concept of

creativity sits happily with the idea that the kinds of thought and attention involved in art and the everyday are deeply connected. As he writes, “Artwork activities fall into a more general class of aesthetic activities” (Zangwill, 2009b, p. 26). Indeed, we might add that artwork activities fall into the class of *attended* aesthetic activities: those which are attended and thus richly aesthetically perceived, which allows for cognitive and rational engagement with perceptual experience and its objects. As I suggested above, in daily life we move between bare and rich aesthetic perception, unattended and attended: when we attend, we can engage and act creatively, if only for a moment.

Of course, I have taken the further step of suggesting that the aesthetic starts earlier in perception than Zangwill would accept—for he insists that many of the features I identify as involved in bare aesthetic perception are nonaesthetic—but the idea that aesthetic insight is based on an understanding of the ways in which we assemble experience is attractive from the point of view of my account of aesthetic perception.

Reading Aesthetic Creation Theory in terms of my account also helps us to think about the nature and role of aesthetic appreciation and criticism. The core of aesthetic appreciation is perceptual: It is about seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, and so on in a certain way. In the case of the aesthetic appreciation of *art*, we are concerned with the perceptual experience(s) offered by the work. I have argued that perception’s being aesthetic need not involve a particular stance, detachment, disinterest toward experience or its objects, or even attention; however, it may still be the case that specifically aesthetic *appreciation* of an object or event requires not only attention but a form of orientation or epistemic self-checking so as to ensure that—insofar as our aim is to understand and, perhaps, evaluate the appearance of the object in question—we are not influenced by colour preferences, mood, commercial value, or the

pleasures of familiarity.<sup>107</sup> But this is an aspect of the special activity of appreciating appearances rather than the aesthetic *per se*.

Now, this does not mean that aesthetic appreciation exhausts the appreciation of art as *art*. Nonetheless, understanding an artist's achievement frequently requires perceiving the work and its qualities and the nature of the aesthetic insight which led to the work engendering the perceptual experience which the artist intended (if they have been successful).

One of the roles of the critic is also, therefore, to bring their audience to a particular way of perceiving the artwork.<sup>108</sup> The critic guides attention to particular marks, relationships, textures, notes, or movements so that we may perceive the artwork as they believe it should be perceived. Indeed, attention is required in order to understand the kinds of statement the critic makes and to bring that understanding to our experience of the work in question. We must also attend so as to connect that experience with the evaluation a critic (or anyone) makes of the work and the *reasons* they may produce in favour of it.

Of course, the critic's overall goal may exceed their aesthetic one, and their evaluation of the work as *art* will overflow their assessment of the perceptual experience offered by the work. The place of the artwork in a tradition, its context of production, and our understanding of the artist's wider intentions are, of course, relevant and attention is required in order to appreciate such artistic concerns. Such knowledge may affect the way we perceive the work and, to the extent that this occurs, such knowledge is relevant to aesthetic perception. Artistic and aesthetic experience are not straightforwardly disentangled: one opportunity for development of the work in this thesis is the question of the relationship between knowledge and understanding of the

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<sup>107</sup> See (Kieran, 2011) for discussion of these kinds of effects on aesthetic judgement.

<sup>108</sup> See (Grant, 2013) for a recent discussion of the aims and nature of criticism.

origins of artworks on the perceptual experience of them. That is, how are we to understand the idea that an artwork's "relational properties"—for example, its relation to other works and the art-historical category in which it belongs—is *aesthetically* relevant rather than simply artistically so?<sup>109</sup> Another is the question of the role of rational argument in criticism as it relates to the perception of the qualities of artworks.<sup>110</sup>

The above is one speculative development of the relationship between aesthetic perception and art. The continuum of aesthetic perception I have presented allows for other accounts of appreciative scrutiny which can make sense of the experience of art. What we must resist is the suggestion that conscious visual attention to appearances is characteristic of the aesthetic in the sense of fixing its extension. It strikes me as being far richer to place such absorbed attention to appearances (and the variety of forms of appreciation it allows) on a continuum with everyday aesthetic perception. In some ways this serves to *heighten* the value and significance of attended aesthetic experience. In a world shot through with aesthetic significance, how valuable that we can step back and *look* at it, and understand that as the intensification of a relationship that shifts and endures throughout our lives. Art is one element of that relationship, but is far from exhausting it.

## 5.7 Conclusion

On my account aesthetic psychology is both broad and deep. Its breadth is in the wide variety of forms our engagement with aesthetic perception and the

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<sup>109</sup> The classic paper is, of course, (Walton, 1970). For discussion of the relationship between the value of artworks, the perceptual experiences they afford, and the relevance of non-perceptual properties see (D. Davies, 2006) and (Graham, 2006).

See also (Hopkins, 2005). See (Zangwill, 2001b, 2001c) for a discussion in relation to formalism.

<sup>110</sup> See (Hopkins, 2006) on the relationship between critical reasoning and critical perception. See (Sibley, 2001a, 2001b) for an example of the argument that critical activity aims at bringing about perceptual experience.

objects and qualities it represents may take. Its depth is in the continuum from unattended bound perceptual experience to attended, complex, reflexive, evaluative and affective responses engaged in and undergone by subjects who have sought to detach themselves from questions of function or personal interest in order to focus purely on appearances. This plurality of legitimate aesthetic responses and forms of aesthetic appreciation and the continuum of aesthetic perception situates us in a richly varied aesthetic domain; a domain which is indivisible from foundational human interests as well as our drive to understand the world as ordered, purposive and conducive to such interests.

I have argued that attention plays a significant role in determining the kinds of aesthetic engagement of which we are capable in any given situation. Conscious visual attention allows us the full use of our cognitive faculties in the scrutiny of its objects. Finding out about the world and our place in it by way of our affective, conative, and evaluative responses to it and relating those responses to aspects of the world's appearance in causal and rational terms is plausibly the central role for aesthetic perception and appreciation. Engaging in description of and debate about these appearances, their interpretation, and the appropriateness of our responses to them likewise depends on the forms of perceptual and cognitive scrutiny that attention makes possible. These aesthetic responses and critical practices may then affect how we represent or respond to appearances in an ongoing reciprocal relationship.

Other challenges remain. I have not discussed the role of aesthetic pleasure (or affect more generally) at any great length in the aesthetic framework presented. Nor have I discussed the related issue of aesthetic preference. How, we might ask, should we understand the role and nature of aesthetic preferences in a framework which is not premised on appropriate pleasure? Likewise, the nature of aesthetic knowledge and rationality is important given the emphasis I have placed on the accessibility of perceptual representations to



cognition and reason in the presence and absence of conscious visual attention. The relationship between aesthetic judgements and the reasons we possess for them and have available for critical debate—including the thorny issue of aesthetic testimony and acquaintance—will affect the precise development of a full theory of the interplay between attention, aesthetic perception, and aesthetic appreciation.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to respond to some central challenges to my account of aesthetic perception and attention. I have focused on what strike me as the most significant challenges from the point of view of a narrow approach to aesthetic psychology. These were focused on aestheticisation, aesthetic value, and normativity. This discussion has neither exhausted the objections which might be raised against my account, nor has every theoretical lacuna been filled. In some cases I have not provided full-blown argument, but rather suggested the kind of approach I should like to take in dealing with each problem. The problems of pervasiveness and triviality are serious challenges for an account like mine, and I don't deceive myself that the responses in this chapter will fully convince an interlocutor who is otherwise unmoved by it. Nonetheless, I have attempted to show that these are not insurmountable challenges. I have also indicated some of the ways in which my account affects wider questions in philosophical aesthetics, specifically the relationship between aesthetic perception and the theory of art, between everyday aesthetics and art-centred aesthetics, and between aesthetic perception and aesthetic value.

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## Conclusion

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So while the examination of tastes and smells may be in itself an insignificant matter, there can hardly be any enterprise in aesthetics more central, or more in need of clarification, than the concept, the boundaries, the criteria of the Aesthetic itself.

*Tastes, Smells, and Aesthetics*

Frank Sibley<sup>111</sup>

This thesis asked a question about aesthetic psychology: How does the relationship between the nature of the aesthetic and the capacities of the mind serve to support or constrain the contexts in which the aesthetic plays a role in experience? I have argued for a broad aesthetic psychology founded in a concept of aesthetic perception as the perceptual representation of bound multifeatured objects, the bare form of which goes on in the absence of conscious visual attention and is thus pervasive in experience. The main strengths of this account are, firstly, that it retains the unity of the aesthetic by creating a continuum of aesthetic engagement which runs from the fleeting and unattended experiences of broad aesthetic psychology to the complex and appreciative experiences of narrow aesthetic psychology without compromising what is distinctive about each approach; and, secondly, that it does so by beginning to remedy the under-theorisation of attention in aesthetic psychology.

I began chapter one by showing how questions about the nature and extent of aesthetic experience in daily life and the relationship of such experiences to mainstream accounts lead us to consider the psychological foundations of aesthetic experience. I suggested that a good way to think about aesthetic psychology and aesthetic experience is in terms of broad and narrow

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<sup>111</sup> (Sibley, 2001d, p. 253).

approaches, each of which can result in or be implied by different accounts of aesthetic experience and assumptions about the psychological capacities required for experiences with aesthetic character. I argued that much of contemporary philosophical aesthetics has inherited the narrowing interest in a particular kind of discrimination, appreciation, or judgement, whilst the broad approach remains interested in everyday and unattended forms of experience. I located the heart of this conflict in a disagreement about the form(s) of awareness required for aesthetic character and the level of attention which supplies it. I argued that neither approach has adequately theorised the kinds of attention and awareness required for the forms of aesthetic engagement they propose.

If our aesthetic psychology has been under-theorised despite its significance for the forms of aesthetic experience of which we are capable, then our next step had to be to excavate the psychological assumptions operative in contemporary aesthetics. To this end, in chapter two I introduced the attention condition in order to analyse the role attention plays in different accounts of aesthetic experience. Alongside a “common-sense” concept of attention, I argued that narrow approaches to aesthetic psychology require attention in order that we are aware of the right kind of content in the right kind of way for characteristically appreciative activities. However, I also argued that there was no reason to think that *aesthetic character* requires attention and the forms of awareness it supports unless we consider aesthetic appreciation (or something similar) exhaustive of aesthetic engagement.

In chapter three I proposed a broad account of aesthetic psychology founded in aesthetic perception. My aim was to develop a model which can accommodate both the unattended and fleeting everyday experiences of broad aesthetic psychology as well as the complex and appreciative experiences of the narrow approach. I argued that the concept of aesthetic perception as the

perceptual representation of individual bound objects possessing sensible qualities lies at the heart of the perennial aesthetic concern with “the ways things present themselves”. I called this “bare aesthetic perception” and suggested that it might go on in the absence of attention. In contrast, and by virtue of its requiring attention, “rich aesthetic perception” involves a more determinate form of perceptual representation and supports the forms of awareness distinctive of aesthetic appreciation and narrow aesthetic psychology: something bare aesthetic perception cannot do.

At this point we needed to understand in greater depth how and why bare aesthetic perception might go on in the absence of attention, whilst rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation require its presence. In chapter four I turned to contemporary philosophical and psychological work on attention, consciousness, and cognition. I argued that attention is required for cognitive access to phenomenal consciousness, but that it might not be necessary for phenomenal consciousness itself. Phenomenal or “perceptual consciousness” may *overflow* cognitive consciousness. Our question then became which kind of consciousness is required for bare aesthetic perception and which for rich aesthetic perception.

Narrow aesthetic psychology, I suggested, requires cognitive consciousness for aesthetic character. In contrast, I argued that it is the activity of perceptually *binding* features into objects rather than our *accessing* these representations on which the aesthetic character of experience depends. Rich aesthetic perception and appreciation require both perceptual consciousness and cognitive and rational access to perceptual representations in order to support and involve characteristically narrow forms of reasoning, judgement, and communication. Bare aesthetic perception, however, requires only that we possess bound perceptual representations of objects with locations: this, I argued, does not require attention. There is thus an attention condition on rich aesthetic

perception, but no such condition on bare aesthetic perception. This established a broad aesthetic psychology running from bare to rich aesthetic perception and the pervasiveness of the aesthetic in everyday experience.

In chapter five I considered opportunities for development as well as some challenges which arise from my argument. The first challenge was to emphasise the *foundational* nature of bare aesthetic perception. I argued that this minimal concept of aesthetic perception as the perceptual representation of bound multifeatured objects with locations renders the aesthetic pervasive in experience, but that this neither trivialises the aesthetic as a concept nor threatens its value. Rather, by locating the foundational concept of the aesthetic at the level of bound perceptual experience instead of some scrutiny, higher-order thought, or evaluation I have retained the unity of the aesthetic and resisted the exclusive conception of the narrow approach as well as the division of the aesthetic domain into everyday and art-centred aesthetics.

In response to the worry that the normative core of the aesthetic is lost on my approach, I argued that this normative concern properly extends only to rich aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation. Bare aesthetic perception is a pre-critical element of our aesthetic psychology: questions of aesthetic value and the appropriateness of aesthetic judgement enter only once we attend and richly aesthetically perceive. This threatens to lead to a worry about the supposed demotion of aesthetic value on my account.

I emphasised that the question of aesthetic character is prior to that of aesthetic value does not mean that aesthetic value is inconsequential, but it does shift it from the central position that many wish it to occupy. Nor does the separation of questions about aesthetic perception from those about aesthetic value mean that the two are unconnected. Aesthetic perception situates us in the world by virtue of its involvement in the purposive assembly of experience,

and in doing so connects us to qualities which are, in Sibley's words, "vitaly involved in human experience" and which suggest "a way of life valued for itself".

The breadth and depth of my account of aesthetic psychology allows us to reconcile the role of the aesthetic in diverse experiences of art and the home, placing them on a continuum which testifies to the richness of aesthetic engagement and the variety of ways in which the aesthetic activity of mind manifests in everyday and traditional, standout experience. With reference to Nick Zangwill's Aesthetic Creation Theory (Zangwill, 2007), I suggested that my account may allow us to understand aesthetic theories of art in terms of the intention to create a work with the capacity to engender a particular perceptual experience. We might thus understand the aesthetic appreciation of art as the grasping of this experience and the qualities of the work which give it this capacity. This, I suggested, means that we can understand of role of the critic to be bringing their audience to the perceptual experience(s) of the work they consider appropriate. We can understand this as a guiding of attention to the qualities of the work and the experiences they support and form a part of; and also in terms of the necessity of attention for our capacity to understand the reference of the critic's statements, the relationship between the reasons they offer in favour of their analysis or evaluation, and the experience offered by the work.

I wrote in the Introduction that this thesis aimed to present both a clarificatory and a revisionary argument. Through an examination of the psychological assumptions involved in contemporary aesthetics and an account of aesthetic perception and its relationship to attention, consciousness, and cognition, I have argued for a revised understanding of the limits of our aesthetic psychology and the capacities required to support aesthetic experience. We might build on this foundation for a broad aesthetic psychology

in a number of ways. I have focused throughout on vision, but always with the proviso that the aesthetic should not be limited to the so-called “higher” senses of vision and hearing. A complete account of aesthetic perception and aesthetic psychology should extend to all of the sensory modalities for which we can develop plausible aesthetic theories.

Such a project involves a number of challenges, not least of which is the fear that the extension of the aesthetic senses to so-called “bodily pleasures” results in a “flight into sensuality”: towards the body and away from the legitimately aesthetic (Parsons & Carlson, 2008). Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson base their argument against the so-called “lower senses” on a discussion of aesthetic and bodily *pleasures*. There are a number of problems with their argument, not least of which is a problematic account of the individuation and phenomenology of the senses and a perennial interest in contemplation, but—as I argued in the last chapter in my discussion of Dowling’s challenge—my account need not concern itself with arguments which distinguish the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic (or agreeable) on the basis of pleasures. This is because my account of aesthetic perception is not grounded in a distinction between pleasures but between bound and unbound perceptual representations of objects (or collections of objects). Instead, the question we need to ask of the non-visual and non-auditory senses is not whether they deliver the “right kind of pleasure” or are apt for contemplative experience, but whether they admit of the activity of binding features to objects with locations.

In the case of taste and smell—the interaction and individuation of which are complex questions<sup>112</sup>—the work of Frank Sibley (Sibley, 2001d), Emily Brady (Brady, 2005), and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Korsmeyer, 1999) suggests that gustatory and olfactory modalities admit of a form of binding and localisation,

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<sup>112</sup> See (Macpherson, 2011).

the representation of which serves to orientate us in and to our environment. Brady writes that “We can identify, individuate, select, and revisit smells and tastes; they can be localized and specified, even if they are not as sustained as other aesthetic objects” (Brady, 2005, p. 184). This seems to satisfy my criteria for bare aesthetic perception as well as suiting the forms of attentive perception and appreciation characteristic of narrow aesthetic psychology.

Touch is also subject to questions about how it should be individuated from other forms of bodily feeling.<sup>113</sup> As Matthew Ratcliffe writes, “one cannot perceive the world tactually without perceiving oneself” (Ratcliffe, 2013, p. 131), and this involvement of the subject’s body has led to the exclusion of tactual or “bodily” experience from aesthetic experience.<sup>114</sup> Yet, if we are serious about the role of the aesthetic and aesthetic perception in orientating us to or situating us in a world of objects and qualities, then we must take touch seriously; for, it has been suggested, touch is vital in what Ratcliffe calls our “sense of reality” (Ratcliffe, 2013).<sup>115</sup> There is much work to be done on the variety of senses and sensory experience in aesthetics. This thesis provides one foundation on which such work can be built.

My account can be understood to retain the subjectivity of the aesthetic, whilst rejecting the necessity for a particular *form* of feeling or representation *via* a feeling for aesthetic experience. Nonetheless, the role of feeling, emotion, or pleasure in aesthetic perception and aesthetic appreciation is significant despite my separation of it from the question of aesthetic character. A pleasurable feeling or some emotional response is often the first indication of the value of objects and experiences: such responses are also frequently the terms in which

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<sup>113</sup> See (Ratcliffe, 2012).

<sup>114</sup> See Parsons and Carlson, and (Scruton, 1979, p. 74).

<sup>115</sup> Korsmeyer has suggested that this aspect of touch helps us to understand the significance of physical contact in our aesthetic experience of the genuine (Korsmeyer, 2012).



we communicate to others the value of artworks, landscapes, architecture, and design.

Whether or not we think that affective or emotional responses are what aesthetic value consists in, they remain central and we ignore them at our peril. Aesthetic life is rarely affectively or emotionally “cold” even if we are often unsure quite how our emotions and feelings relate to the aesthetic character of our experiences or the qualities of their objects. It frequently seems to be the case that a feeling or emotion draws our attention to the qualities of the objects or phenomena which seem to elicit them: be that the supposed sadness of the “*Marcia funebre*” of Beethoven’s third symphony or the calm, cool rationality of Brunelleschi’s Pazzi Chapel. That is, phenomenologically, we seem to feel *first* and then turn our attention to features which might explain that response.

Indeed, the architectural example brings together our sensory and emotional concerns, for the experience of architecture is plausibly multisensory and bound up with bodily feeling. As Jenefer Robinson writes, “good architecture invites or compels multisensory experiences and ways of moving and acting that can be felt in a bodily way by the appreciator” (Robinson, 2012, p. 342). If, as I have argued, aesthetic perception situates us in the world, then our multisensory, attentive and inattentive, affective and emotional responses to the built (and natural) environment lie at the heart of the aesthetic in daily life. The challenge is to connect the perceptual representation of bound objects to such experience.

This thesis asked a question about the nature and extent of the aesthetic activity of mind. In answering this question I have revised the limits of our aesthetic psychology and argued for a pervasive form of aesthetic perception shaped by attention. This broad foundation allows for a plural conception of aesthetic life and the involvement of the aesthetic in a wide range of valuable forms of thought, action, and communication. The breadth and depth of this

account of aesthetic psychology—running as it does from fleeting and unattended everyday experience to full, rich, and contemplative appreciation—reveals the indispensability of aesthetic perception in human life. In the perceptual representation of an ordered, purposive world; and in our occupation and expectation of such a world lies the confluence of perception, appreciation, and value that underpins daily life and its fluid relationship with the production and consumption of art.

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