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**AESTHETIC PERCEPTION, NATURE AND EXPERIENCE**

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PhD in Philosophy  
University of Edinburgh  
2014

I declare that I have composed the thesis as follows, that the work is my own and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

**Wild Geese, by Mary Oliver**

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

To my own beloved family  
Alistair and Maya

To my beloved family, parents and brothers  
June, Harry, Gregory and Daniel

To my teachers  
Peter, Emily, Matt, Dave

To my respected interlocutors  
Michela and Elisabeth

To my mentors  
Emily, Holly, Ellie, Sherri, Carole, Michela, Anne

To my dear friends, mentors and lovers of beauty, art and philosophy  
Ana, Clare, Mirjam

To my dear extended family  
Les Halls français, Andreea and Sandra

To my family of friends  
Marian & David, Jo M., Holly & Stu, Karen & Mark, Jo B., Claire, Ishbel, Roser &  
Lindsay, Catarina & Steve, Evelyn, Morag, Sue

To lovers of books  
Rhona, Karen, Lucy, Catriona, Frances, Clare, Rebecca

To my very own Scottish crooner, Hugh, with great thanks  
for the moral and intellectual support

To Mr. PFX Statham, with deeply felt gratitude

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the perceptual nature of aesthetic experience and the importance of nature as a paradigmatic object of aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience more broadly conceived. For this reason, it merits serious attention by philosophers working in aesthetics, as has been argued since Ronald Hepburn's seminal essay "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty". If aesthetic experience is anything, it is at least perceptual. It is a mode of perceptual experience that is the result of having been attentive to and having discriminated between, the aesthetic and non-aesthetic, and invites room for reflection on, and connections to be made with, cognitive and emotive processes. Rooting the aesthetic in perception allows us to recognize and understand that it has an impact on our daily activities, rather than being restricted either to a particular kind of object, to the knowledge we might have about it, or to intense, rarefied aesthetic experience. If an object is to be an aesthetic object it need not be an artwork, indeed, one might even argue that nature is more interesting an aesthetic object from the perspective that it is indeterminate, not the result of human intentionality, and from an existential point of view, one that acknowledges our dependence on it. In the course of the argument, I thus resist the idea that the aesthetic experience of art is necessarily prior to the aesthetic experience of nature. The perceptual account put forward is based on a realist account of aesthetic properties that considers aesthetic properties to be perceptual properties and that considers aesthetic experience to be perceptually rich. I link it to the idea of 'whole formalism', a perceptual, aesthetic account that is nestled in the wider thought that aesthetic perception relates, although not causally, to other features of experience, such as emotion, and knowledge. Perceptual, aesthetic experience is thus not reduced to an austere account of aesthetic formalism. The thesis begins by analysing historical accounts of aesthetic perception, beginning with Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas. It builds on this analysis by reinterpreting crucial concepts to the discipline of aesthetics, such as disinterest and formalism that originated in the eighteenth century and are relevant to the idea of aesthetic perception. It then brings the idea of aesthetic perception up to date by addressing the current debate about cognitivism and non-cognitivism about aesthetic experience where nature is concerned. By tracing the idea of aesthetic perception historically, I will have also shown the role of nature as a paradigm of aesthetic experience through history and that nature is a repository for rich aesthetic experience and for rich experiential engagement with it.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>General Introduction: What Could it Mean to Perceive Nature Aesthetically?.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter One: The Aesthetic and Mimesis.....</b>	<b>18</b>
§ Introduction.....	18
§ The Aesthetic, Mimesis and Plato.....	21
§ The Aesthetic, Mimesis and Aristotle.....	31
§ The Aesthetic, Mimesis and Aquinas.....	36
§ Conclusion.....	41
<b>Chapter Two: The Aesthetic and the Eighteenth Century.....</b>	<b>43</b>
§ Introduction.....	43
§ The Judgment of Taste and Immediacy.....	45
§ Disinterest.....	56
§ Aesthetic Perception and Hutcheson.....	64
§ Conclusion.....	69
<b>Chapter Three: Nature versus Art.....</b>	<b>70</b>
§ Introduction.....	70
§ The Turn Away from Nature: Ancients to Descartes.....	70
§ The Turn Away from Nature: Hutcheson to Hegel.....	77
§ Beyond Art: the Return of Nature.....	85
§ Conclusion.....	96
<b>Chapter Four: The Aesthetic, Nature and Art.....</b>	<b>98</b>
§ Introduction.....	98
§ Art and the Aesthetic.....	100
§ The Aesthetic and its Objects.....	105
§ The Expressive Properties of Nature.....	119
§ Conclusion.....	128
<b>Chapter Five: Formalism, Cognitivism and Aesthetic Perception.....</b>	<b>130</b>
§ Introduction.....	130
§ Austere Formalism.....	132
§ Scientific Cognitivism and the Rejection of Formalism.....	151
§ Conclusion.....	167
<b>Chapter Six: Perceiving Aesthetically.....</b>	<b>168</b>
§ Introduction.....	168
§ Aesthetic Attention.....	170
§ Privacy, Communicability and Secondary Aesthetic and Colour Qualities.....	174
§ Aesthetic Perception.....	191
§ Whole Formalism.....	198
§ Conclusion.....	208
<b>General Conclusion: Perceiving Nature Aesthetically.....</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>212</b>

## **General Introduction: What Could it Mean to Perceive Nature Aesthetically?**

I may want to find out whether or not *Maman*, 1999, a sculpture by Louise Bourgeois, is a beautiful sculpture. I may want to discover why it is that *Jupiter Artland* in Edinburgh is more or less aesthetically pleasing than *Little Sparta*, a garden designed by Ian Hamilton Finlay. I may want to discover why it is that the Highlands of Scotland are described as majestic or as pristine wilderness. A good friend has given me ample reason for believing that *Maman* is beautiful, and I have reconstructed the description she has given in my own imagination, the image thus constructed is of a beautiful, enormous, steel spider carrying, and caring for, her sack of eggs. Another friend, who is interested in art, and gardens, has offered convincing reasons for thinking that *Little Sparta* is more pleasing than *Jupiter Artland*, and therefore more engaging as a space that is describable in the most poetic of terms. The *Visit Scotland* brochure has given me good reason for believing that the Highlands are majestic and that the landscape in one of pristine wilderness, which it is not.

If I were to visit the Tate Gallery in London to see *Maman*, or visit *Little Sparta* near the Pentland Hills and *Jupiter Artland* in Wilkieston to see which is preferable, or the Highlands themselves to see whether they are majestic, pristine and wild, I would be able to know for myself whether these objects are as they have been described. If, on the other hand, I were to rely on another's testimony, or my own imagination, for confirmation that these objects are as they have been described, I would not be in the position to judge for myself. There is something importantly primary about aesthetic perception. Aesthetic knowledge is foundational and testimony about it is traceable back to aesthetic perception. By seeing or perceptually experiencing the objects concerned, I can assess whether the objects in question have been described matches the direct and immediate experience of them. I see beauty, majesty and the wild character for myself. The starting point for experiencing something aesthetically is experiencing it personally, using the appropriate senses.



My main aim in the dissertation will be to unpack the idea of aesthetic perception, that aesthetic properties are appearance properties, and precede what we might know about the object in important ways in a more loaded cognitive sense. That is, following Pettit, I support the view that a cognitive approach to aesthetic objects is not possible without perceptual access to it.<sup>1</sup> In order for the experience of a non-abstract object to be thought of as distinctly aesthetic, it is first and foremost a perceptual experience on which complex cognitive processes depend. I defend an understanding of aesthetic experience, therefore, that is based on a continuum, that brings together an account of ‘whole formalism’, based on that presented by Zuckert, that can integrate perceptual, aesthetic, phenomena with diverse, non-specifiable, intellectual approaches. The whole-formalist approach differs from other formalist approaches, such as those put forward by Bell and Zangwill, for example, whose formalism might be described as austere and rule-governed in the sense that they require certain properties deemed to be formal properties rather than being attentive to the object for the features that are present to the subject in the subject’s experience of it.

The change in emphasis from the formalist point of view to the whole-formalist is, therefore, subtle but nevertheless important. Whole formalism, unlike what formalism is ordinarily taken to be, takes it that the object as a whole, as it is present to the subject’s experience is important, including its formal properties and non-formal perceptual properties are one fold of the “three-fold disjunction”, as Zuckert characterizes the Kantian view, which we sensually experience (the second fold of the three-fold disjunction) interact with our concepts through the “free-play of the imagination and understanding” (this interaction being the third fold).

The idea is that whole formalism, and this threefold disjunctive explanation of aesthetic experience, can help dissolve the dichotomy presented by advocates of formalist, non-cognitive, or perceptualist approaches to aesthetic experience and non-formalist, cognitive, or intellectualist, approaches. This issue has become important in the aesthetics of nature because formalists take an overly-reductive approach to aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism," in *Pleasure, Preference and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1983).

experience while cognitivists, or intellectualists, try to seek objectivity about aesthetic judgments of nature through what we might know about nature, how we categorise it scientifically, in order to ensure environmental justice. Whole formalism provides the resources both to scrutinise how aesthetic objects are present in perceptual experience and how these relate to imaginative, cognitive and emotive aspects of experience. That is to say, it is just as important to be clear about and scrutinise what we perceive aesthetically as it is about what we might know and feel about the object being perceived and scrutinised. Given that the knowledge we might have of an aesthetic object, or previous experiences of objects similar to it, might influence our *in situ* experience as well as our evaluative judgment of it, we can acknowledge that the contents of different peoples' experiences might differ. What becomes important then is how we link cognitive and emotive elements to perceivable, aesthetic ones. This is where interesting work can be done to at least attempt to be clear on what we individually experience through perception and how these relate to those other features of experience, through aesthetic discourse as Sibley argued.

There is a related debate about testimony, aesthetic experience, second hand aesthetic experience and disagreement about aesthetic judgments and aesthetic value.<sup>2</sup> I will not fully address the issue of aesthetic testimony here, as I wish to focus on *in situ*, first-personal aesthetic experience. It is worth noting, however, that the issue of aesthetic testimony might provide some insight into the possibility of reaching objectivity of aesthetic experience. Kant's reflections on the peculiarities of the judgment of taste articulate a more general sense of unease where such judgments are concerned. On the one hand, objectivity about aesthetic judgment, in the sense an aesthetic property is of an

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<sup>2</sup> Marcolm Budd, "The Acquaintance Principle," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 4 (2003), Keren Gorodeisky, "A New Look at Kant's View of Aesthetic Testimony," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 1 (2010), Rob Hopkins, "Beauty and Testimony," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 47, no. September 2000 (2000), ———, "How to Be a Pessimist About Aesthetic Testimony," *Journal of Philosophy* 108, no. 3 (2011), Aaron Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony: Can We Learn from Others About Beauty and Art?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69, no. 1 (2004). Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism.", Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1974), Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1968).

object, leads one to the conclusion that universal assent would be required if it were true that aesthetic properties are of objects. On the other hand, subjectivity about aesthetic judgment, in the sense that aesthetic properties form part of a subject's experience of an object rather than the object itself, would explain disagreement about such judgments. Where this latter claim is concerned, however, it would be difficult to assess what a disagreement would be about without knowing what the judgment is, or judgments are, about. If objectivity about aesthetic judgment is true, it would seem unproblematic that aesthetic testimony is straightforward, or at least less problematic than might otherwise be thought: we can easily transmit knowledge about our aesthetic experiences of objects because we have direct perceptual access to those objects. If subjectivity about aesthetic judgment as defined above is true, it is less clear that aesthetic experiences are transferable because direct access to the objects or phenomena of another's experience is ordinarily thought to be exclusive to the person having, or having had, the experience.

I am in agreement with Meskin when he writes that our aesthetic experiences of nature are not determined or intended by a creative mind and that we therefore don't enter into the kinds of complications that art often offers up.<sup>3</sup> The intuition here is that we need not appeal to an artist's biography or to historical context, for example, to appreciate nature's aesthetic offerings. It is for reasons to do with how nature is present in perception that we can appeal to it in order that we may argue against the kind of unpalatable relativism that often manifests itself in aesthetic circles. This does not mean that we have to be austere about the perceptual nature of aesthetic experience, or rigidly objectivist about it by appealing to complex forms of knowledge. It just means that we can, with care, both scrutinise what we in fact perceive aesthetically and how that relates to the kind of content that we associate with it. Where aesthetic testimony is concerned, then, I would argue for a partial-realist stance, that some aesthetic knowledge is transferable and other such knowledge is not. It is at least part of the richness of aesthetics as a discipline that we should not reduce aesthetic experience either to austere types of formalism or to overly-stipulative accounts of knowledge. This is because

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<sup>3</sup> Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony: Can We Learn from Others About Beauty and Art?." 89.

accounts of aesthetic experiences that relate to external, extended, objects are based on those objects' perceivable properties.

The link between the idea of aesthetic perception, that aesthetic properties are appearance properties perceivable by us and nature's status as a subject matter for aesthetic experience is just as significant as art's. For, even though interest in the aesthetics of nature has increased, particularly since Hepburn's influential paper, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty"<sup>4</sup>, in keeping with the general trend in aesthetics to diversify into different branches (such as the 'everyday'), nature is still thought of as being less important than art. Of course, it is no mystery to me, as it should not be to anyone, why art is a meaningful paradigm for aesthetic experience. It is the source of great imaginative, intellectual, creative, human endeavour, objects through which we may learn about ourselves, our culture, history as well as cultures with which we are not familiar, and modes of thinking we may not have otherwise contemplated. Indeed, it can be the source of rapturous aesthetic experience so often described, in particular by philosophers such as Hegel or Schopenhauer.

What I mean to suggest is that nature, although often only cursorily acknowledged as an important subject matter of aesthetics, is often still not turned to as a paradigm of aesthetic experience or an important provider of aesthetic experience in the wider discipline. And, as Hepburn so eloquently wrote, nature is the source of an array of experiences that are distinct from art, but nonetheless moving and aesthetically engaging, without an artist mediating the process. The link between the idea of aesthetic perception and nature is premised on our capacity for experiencing objects in the world and is dependent on our existence and the existence of nature. We attend to external objects, sensually experience them and can articulate thoughts about them. These are necessary conditions for aesthetic experience, but not necessarily sufficient, depending on the object itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," in *'Wonder' and Other Essays*, ed. Ronald Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).

Making nature at least as central an aesthetic object as art rests both on the claim that our physical bodies are part of the natural physical world and are naturally predisposed to sensual, and hence aesthetic, experience. We exist as natural beings who sensually experience objects in the world, and those experiences are of discernible objects with discernible features, giving us reason to apply concepts and terms to them. This is because those are the features of objects that we experience, describe and discuss and nature is a subject matter to which which we have historically and continue to apply aesthetic concepts. In short, the argument sees nature as both a seemingly purposeful creator of natural objects to which we belong, but also as the provider of a richness of aesthetic properties that gives us some understanding of the external, natural world, but also of our experience of it.

Those experiences might be merely perceptual in some cases, but they might combine with what a subject knows or imagines about the object, creating a more particular aesthetic experience. To that end, I will be arguing for two inter-related strands of argument: one strand that takes account of perceiving aesthetically, which in the end will be formulated in terms of ‘whole formalism’, a distinction made by Zuckert<sup>5</sup> that allows for the idea that an object’s aesthetic properties are non-causally related to its non-aesthetic concepts; the second strand capturing what it is that is important about our experiences of nature. There will also be an historical dimension to the thesis in the hopes of ascertaining what has historically been thought about aesthetic perception and also of nature as a subject matter for aesthetic experience. To that end I address Plato’s skepticism about aesthetic properties, Aristotle’s teleology about them and Aquinas’ realism about aesthetic properties in chapter one. Chapter two will allow me to introduce concepts, such as immediacy, disinterest and aesthetic perception that are important to my own conclusions about perceptual, aesthetic, experience and the importance of nature as a subject matter for aesthetic experience. Chapter three will address the issue of priority being given to art or nature in the aesthetic realm, but will show that concerns about not allowing art conceptual priority in aesthetic realm, primarily linked to the idea

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<sup>5</sup> Rachel Zuckert, "The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, no. 4 (2006).

that nature is not intentionally created, are ill-founded and that nature is at least as important as art. This chapter will also introduce contemporary approaches to the aesthetics of nature. To provide further support for the importance of nature to aesthetics, despite its lack of intentionality, chapter four will confirm nature as a paradigm of aesthetic experience and concentrate on nature's expressive properties in order to reveal the richness of nature as an object of aesthetic appreciation. Chapter five will lay out the respective arguments put forward by contemporary, non-cognitive formalists about the aesthetics of nature and their opposing scientific cognitivists. This is important because both sides of the debate beg the question against each other, with one side insisting on an austere formalism that dispenses with, or at least minimizes, other valuable aspects of aesthetic experience, and the other side insisting on the role of knowledge. I argue that neither has the upper hand, that claims and counter claims have left them at loggerheads with each other without advancing the discourse by way of resolution, which I think begins with a perceptual account of the aesthetic. One possible resolution is articulated in chapter six, where the idea of 'whole formalism' takes a different approach from many austere formalists and is arguably the best interpretation of Kant's formalism. Here we discover a perceptually rich account of aesthetics that does not deny the possibility for non-formal, or non-perceptual elements of objects to figure in aesthetic experience and does not assume that the non-determinism, or lack of intentionality in nature means it should relate to an austere account of formalism.

Before beginning with chapter one, some background is needed on the philosophy of perception that is being assumed in my discussion. Explicitly placing the aesthetic in the realm of perception raises the problem, as Sibley wrote, of how to distinguish between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic.<sup>6</sup> There is the thought that with talk of the aesthetic we engage in a potentially more complex set of issues than we do when writing about shape and colour, or non-aesthetic contents of perceptual experience. There are some aesthetic features that are not perceptual features, but others that are, as we will see, but it is the perceptual aesthetic features that I'm concerned with here. The account I give

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<sup>6</sup> F. N. Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," in *Approach to Aesthetics*, ed. Betty Redfern John Benson, Jeremy Roxbee Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

below is based on a position in the philosophy of perception for which the following concepts are building blocks: ‘openness’, ‘transparency’ and ‘immediacy’. It will be the starting point for my perceptual account of aesthetic experience.

The argument being put forward in the dissertation is based on an account of perception that is related to the senses, that what we perceive is a result of what we see when we open our eyes, what we hear with our ears and feel with our fingers and skin. Its starting point is that the senses provide us with an “opening onto the world” that enables us to describe the world that we experience.<sup>7</sup> By ‘experience’, I mean the phenomenal character of our perceptual engagement with the world, but I will elaborate on this below. Descriptions of these experiences are rich and are of objects that are *prima facie* distinct from the particular experience being had, that is to say, objects that exist independent of mind.<sup>8</sup> We can describe our experiences of objects despite needing to commit ourselves to their status as experience- or mind-independent objects. However, this does not necessarily entail that the objects we experience should be “banished”.<sup>9</sup> This is important because whether or not we can come to show that external objects exist independently of mind, we have experiences of external objects that we can describe and characterise.

Following on from the idea of ‘openness onto the world’ comes the idea of ‘transparency’, the idea that our perceptual experiences themselves are of objects on which we can reflect, mind-independent objects to which our experiences open us up.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tim Crane, "The Problem of Perception," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Spring 2011(2001), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/perception-problem/>, John McDowell, "The Content of Perceptual Experience," *Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (1994).

<sup>8</sup> P.F. Strawson, "Perception and Its Objects," in *Perception and Identity: Essays Presented to A.J. Ayer with His Replies* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Crane, "The Problem of Perception.", MGF Martin, "The Transparency of Experience," *Mind and Language* 17 (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert Harman, "The Intrinsic Quality of Experience," in *The Nature of Consciousness* 663 - 676, ed. Owen Flanagan and Guven Guzeldere Ned Block (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1997), Martin, "The Transparency of Experience.", P.F. Snowdon, "The Objects of Perceptual Experience," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 64 (1990), Speaks, "Transparency, Intentionalism, and the Nature of Perceptual Content," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 79 (2009), Daniel Stoljar, "The

Reflection on what it is like to have a perceptual experience does not reveal a perceptual experience as such, but reveals the prima facie mind-, experience- independent object. In perceiving and reflecting on what it is like to perceive majestic Highlands, for example, I'm perceiving and reflecting on majestic Highlands, not the experience itself.

Another way of fleshing out the account of perception that underpins aesthetic perception is by suggesting that the contents of perception are like being "in a bucket" as opposed to mediated by the senses "like a newspaper":

When one speaks of the contents of a bucket, one is talking about what is spatially inside the bucket. An analogous use of "the contents of perception" would pick out what is 'in the mind' when one has a perceptual experience. In contrast, when one speaks of the contents of a newspaper, one is talking about what information the newspaper stories convey.<sup>11</sup>

By this I mean that I am primarily interested in the resulting phenomena that are presented by our senses, rather than how our senses mediate perceptual events, "like a newspaper" mediates current events in the world.<sup>12</sup>

Both 'openness onto the world' and 'transparency' are important presuppositions for the account of aesthetic perception that I'm going to develop below. Another important concept for this framework is 'immediacy'. Where aesthetics is concerned, Shelley writes that 'immediacy' is "the thesis that judgments of beauty are not mediated by inferences from principles or applications of concepts, but rather have all the immediacy

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Argument from Diaphanousness", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Supplementary Volume, no. New Essays in Language and Mind (2004), Michael Tye, *Consciousness, Color and Content* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Susanna Siegel, "The Contents of Perception," <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/perception-contents/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. I do not have the space to address the complications for this more direct account of perceptual experience that arise from the arguments from illusion or hallucination, although these [may be] alluded to, for this would develop into an argument about perception more widely conceived, rather than one that is more specifically concerned with aesthetic perception.



of straightforwardly sensory judgments; it is the idea, in other words, that we do not reason to the conclusion that things are beautiful, but rather ‘taste’ that they are”.<sup>13</sup>

The opening examples are intended to show that immediate, direct, perceptual experience provides us with the aesthetic features that are the content of those experiences. They also show that experiences have content that represents the mind-independent world as being a particular way. Part or all of that content, that is to say, the input provided by the senses, is aesthetic and is sometimes, but not necessarily, captured by concepts and terms such as ‘beautiful’. The input or content provided by our immediate experience of an artwork, a garden or a landscape, helps us to assess whether our, or indeed others’, experiences correspond to the world.

This is important because it is sometimes true that our senses trick us into making mistakes, perceiving things that aren’t there, as in hallucinations or illusions, or when it comes to resolving differences about colour perception or disagreements about an object’s aesthetic properties. If one of us finds *Maman* ‘beautiful’ and the other finds the sculpture ‘eerie’ it would be an important starting point for each of us to see it for ourselves and then to discuss how we have been drawn to different conclusions about the same object.

Perceptual experience more widely conceived is the experience of phenomena, features and qualities, as alluded above. It is, as Siegel writes, what is conveyed to the subject when she experiences something perceptually, using one or all or a combination of senses. In writing about a piano Siegel writes, for example, that “there is a way things look to you when you see them: they will look to have a certain shape, colour, texture, and arrangement relative to one another, among other things. Your visual experience conveys to you that the piano has these features.”<sup>14</sup> The term ‘experience’ is here in keeping with an intentionalist position, whereby its phenomenology, or phenomenal character, is exhausted by the properties the experience represents the world as having.

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<sup>13</sup> James Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic," In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed Edward N. Zalta. (2009), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/#AesAtt>.

<sup>14</sup> Siegel, "The Contents of Perception."

An aesthetic account of perceptual experience is one that focuses narrowly on how to locate the phenomenal, aesthetic features of such experience. ‘Perceiving aesthetically’ is the claim that our aesthetic experiences are essentially perceptual, reliant on perceptual experience more generally conceived. One of the issues that pertains to perceiving non-aesthetic perceptual properties, such as shape and colour, is whether or not the contents of our experiences meet accuracy conditions. These accuracy conditions are based on the object’s existence and my perceiving features that are attributable to it. Thus, that the content of my perceptual experience is of my dog lying curled up in his basket, is provided by my senses in such a way that they report to me that it is my dog who is lying curled up in his basket and not my cat. Part of the accuracy condition for looking at *Maman* is that I see a giant, eight-legged, spindly creature rather than something else, like, say, a horse.

Not all philosophers of perception agree that accuracy conditions are required in ordinary perception, but let us see how this might play out for perceptual experiences that contain aesthetic elements or aesthetic, perceptual experiences. Aesthetic properties are considered appearance properties that are constituted by more intrinsic, qualitative properties of objects such as their shape, lines, texture and colour. They are configurations of shape, lines, texture and colour from which aesthetic gestalts emerge, gestalts being the essence or shape of an entity’s complete form, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. They can be seen, heard and felt and structure both our descriptive aesthetic judgments and our evaluative, aesthetic judgments. On this account, accuracy conditions for whether the appearance corresponds to an external object is of secondary importance. The starting point is looking to the features of experience, scrutinising them, to be clear about how we can describe and come to characterise it before engaging with evaluative judgment.

Now that we have an outline of the structure of the dissertation, and some background on perception, I proceed to consider discussions of aesthetic perception that are foundational to my argument, and that were beginning to be laid out by the Greeks.

## **Chapter One: The Aesthetic and Mimesis**

### **§ Introduction**

This chapter is the first of three chapters that lay out the historical and philosophical foundations for arguing in support of the idea of aesthetic perception. The idea of aesthetic perception underpins the thought that the aesthetics of nature is at least as paradigmatic to the discipline of aesthetics as is art. The chapter traces the roots of the concept of the aesthetic back to ancient and medieval philosophy and analyses how it relates to nature and art in the metaphysical schemes offered by Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas in particular. The chapter analyses how these philosophers sought to characterise the relationship between perceptual aesthetic properties and what we know about them. The chapter also begins to lay the foundation for concepts that will play an important role in later chapters, such as the concept of disinterest, and perceptual transparency when it comes to the mediation of aesthetic properties.

On the argument being put forward in the thesis, aesthetic experience is necessarily perceptual. Perception is what enables us to have experiences of the external, mind- or experience-independent world. This includes the way external objects look, sound, smell and feel: their shape, colour, timbre, volume, power, taste and texture. It also includes things that give a distinctive kind of pleasure or displeasure, things for which we have aesthetic concepts and terms. Whether or not we think something has an aesthetic quality is dependent on perceiving it as such, where perceiving involves one or more of our sense modalities - seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Aesthetic experience is epistemic in that it yields knowledge of what is immediately and transparently perceived. Perceptual, aesthetic knowledge is derived from seeing, hearing, smelling and touching an object, in the immediacy of perceptual experience. We can simply perceive the beauty, ugliness or other aesthetic quality of an object without knowing much about it. This is especially true in the case of nature, which does not involve the expression or creativity of a human person and the complications that

involve understanding another human mind, emotion, expression or the pre-existing historical or cultural frameworks to which the object belongs. This does not mean that non-aesthetic knowledge is irrelevant to our understanding or overall experience of the object, but that talk of the aesthetic implies reference to what we perceive, which will be settled in the course of the argument being presented in the thesis.<sup>15</sup>

How beauty relates to non-perceptual, non-aesthetic, knowledge is an issue addressed by Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas along differing metaphysical lines. All three philosophers took the aesthetic to equate to beauty, unlike today's more varied understanding of the term, which can include both more varied positive and negative aesthetic qualities. They were also concerned with art's mimetic properties, the extent to which it represented non-art objects. Mimesis as a concept has featured in more recent aesthetic discourse, and is still of import today.

This is largely because of Kendall Walton's seminal *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, which explores the nature of representations in platonic style and which for Walton serve as props for fictional truths, such as in the make-believe games that children engage in and the fictional fantasies that adults engage with in their experiences of art, nature, novels, films.<sup>16</sup> Walton proposes that his view dissolves the problem of belief in fiction, fictional emotion and the paradox of tragedy. There are two types of fictional worlds, one according to the prop, where a set of functions is prescribed by the representation, and that of the consumer's imagining. In addition to Hume's 'Of Tragedy', and alongside philosophical works by Lamarque and Curie, this has generated an enormous literature

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<sup>15</sup> This thought is similar to Sibley's view that there are no criteria that determine aesthetic experience. This does not mean that aesthetic judgment is relative or completely subjective, but we'll see an argument presented for this in the course of the overall argument presented here. Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," in *Approach to Aesthetics: Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Betty Redfern John Benson, Jeremy Roxbee Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), Noel Carroll, "Critical Study: Mimesis as Make-Believe," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45, no. 178 (1995).

on the nature of fictions.<sup>17</sup> How can, and do, we relate representational props to the things the representations are of? The role of the imagination is clearly important for generating representational props, and the stories we like to tell about the world, but the concern here is to relate those stories to how the natural world in particular is presented to the senses, not just how we erect those props on the perceptual presentation of nature's aesthetics.

One of Carroll's concerns with *Mimesis as Make-Believe* is that it does not capture a distinction between fiction and non-fiction, "since all representations are, by definition, fictional for him" and that "there are no non-fictional representations *simpliciter* in his system".<sup>18</sup> With Plato, as we will see below, we face a similar problem. That is to say we face the problem that, especially where our experiences of nature are concerned, we do not know that of which we make both mental and artistic representations. Our experiences of nature, however, have an immediacy that does not necessarily require the complexities of human intentionality that come with make-believe or works of fiction. Nature manifests itself with a simplicity that need not require extensive cognitive machinery to make sense of. In this vein, I argue against Plato's scepticism.

Plato's writings were primarily concerned with art and not nature. This notwithstanding, he was sceptical about the idea that aesthetic properties were instantiated in artworks, thinking them impure or inauthentic compared, on the one hand, with the objects they were supposed to represent and, on the other hand, the 'forms' of which they themselves were imperfect replicas. This not only implies that he thought

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory Curie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Susan Feagin, "The Pleasures of Tragedy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1983), Peter Lamarque, "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21, no. 4 (1981), Peter and Stein Haugom Olsen Lamarque, *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Colin Radford, "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?," in *Driving to California* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), David Hume, "Of Tragedy," in *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary* (Indiannapolis: Liberty Fund, 1742). Kathleen Stock, "Imagination and Fiction: Some Issues," *Philosophy Compass* 8, no. 10 (2013). This is not an exhaustive list, but provides some of the main contenders in the debate on the nature of fictions.

<sup>18</sup> Carroll, "Critical Study: Mimesis as Make-Believe." 94-5.

aesthetic qualities were instantiated by non-art, but that the aesthetic qualities of non-art were of an importance that ought not to be distorted by art. If art's aesthetic qualities distort non-art's aesthetic qualities, Plato's argument goes, it can affect human behaviour in ways that are not conducive to society. His account stipulated, as we will see, that we should be inherently sceptical about what we perceive and the aesthetic qualities of performance poetry or the theatre, that these could be deceptive and encourage deceptive and basic behaviour. His view, however, was not an outright rejection of the aesthetic, but was a rejection of a particular kind of artwork that could misrepresent reality and negatively influence human behaviour. On my reading of Plato, non-artistic aesthetic properties are explanatorily prior to the aesthetic properties of art. Without them, art would have nothing to imitate. Aristotle turned the Platonic view upside down and thought that aesthetic properties were perceptual, their form indicative of their function and therefore their meaning in a sense to be articulated below. He embedded artistic creativity in nature's teleology so that art was viewed as being produced 'naturally', although it occupied an ontologically distinct space. Aquinas, inspired by Aristotle, saw form and meaning as intimately intertwined within the aesthetic idea, its instantiation a manifestation of God.

### § The Aesthetic, Mimesis and Plato

Much of what has been written about Plato's aesthetics has been concerned with his attack on the arts, the idea that they should be removed from the ideal republic.<sup>19</sup> This is because his view is thought to be counter-intuitive and seemingly denies what we hold to be important about the arts.<sup>20</sup> Plato's metaphysics were essentially sceptical about

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<sup>19</sup> Ian MacHattie Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, vol. I (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), G.R.F. Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry," in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Alexander Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media," *The Monist* 71 (1988), Richard Stalley, 11/01/2011.

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Poaitia, the Republic: Book 10*, trans. Irene Noel-Baker (Aldbrough: Alderburgh Bookshop, MMIV), ———, "Ion," in *Early Socratic Dialogues*, ed. Trevor J. Saunders (Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 412, 1987), ———, *Symposium*, trans. Percy

perception because he viewed it as “just a causal interaction with sensible qualities in the world” devoid of awareness of what such qualities were without a thinking subject who has a firm understanding of general, universal forms.<sup>21</sup> He was also sceptical about perception because artists may pander to human pleasures, rather than the truth about the world and its objects. Because the arts were considered essentially mimetic, or imitations of real-world objects, in that they imitated real world properties, they were necessarily prone to misrepresenting their object of origin. According to Plato this was true because artists by definition were not specialists on the objects depicted in their works and were liable to make mistakes in their depictions, especially if they lacked awareness of necessary, universal truth. Being a specialist about beautiful objects would mean being a specialist about people’s aesthetic pleasures.

In the case of producing a chair, for example, a carpenter designing or building a piece of furniture, is knowledgeable about non-aesthetic or non-perceptual properties that are required for a chair to be a chair: its form is related to its function and its function is essential to a chair being a chair, rather than another object. Carpenters are knowledgeable about chairs to the extent that they can produce pieces of furniture that function as chairs. If we now consider a painting of a chair, no knowledge of the good-making properties of chairs qua chairs is necessary. The representation, or image of the chair in a painting is merely an appearance and need not function as a chair. It possesses fewer of the properties required for it to function as a chair, than does a chair designed to be sat on. The painting of the chair is, therefore, of a “lower order”, illusory and false: a “man-made dream for waking eyes”.<sup>22</sup>

According to Plato, the artist draws on a creative source that differs from the reasoned planning that goes into the production of a functional object.<sup>23</sup> On his account,

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Bysshe Shelley (South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 385-380 bce), ———, *Sophist*, trans. Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, ed. *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). See the introduction to the volume especially.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Sophist*. 266c.

<sup>23</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York and London: University of Alabama Press, 1966), Eva Schaper, *Prelude to Aesthetics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968).

the artist draws on an inspired state, derived from the divine sources that produce the forms, which allow him access to ideal, real, beauty. This provides the artist access to beauty as a form, but he is not a reliable source of non-beautiful, or non-aesthetic, knowledge about the object depicted. Poets and artists can not provide us with truths about the world, such as what the carpenter knows are the good-making properties of a chair, but do provide us with works of art that are beautiful, potentially harmful or dangerous because they do not convey important non-perceptual or non-aesthetic knowledge about their content.

For Plato, then, the confusion between art and reality is a lack of distinction between aesthetic and epistemic properties. Mimesis, Schaper argues, gets in the way of access to knowledge in the following ways: it is not inspired by knowledge or reason but derived from divine inspiration; art is mimetic both in terms of its perceivable properties as well as its content; artworks are copies of copies and therefore inferior to the point of being deceptive, unnecessary and redundant; poetry is not knowledge, it is demarcated from rational discourse due to pretence and emotion.<sup>24</sup> I will go through some of the reasons attributed to Plato for being mistrustful of mimetic art.

The following interpretations of Plato's views, beginning with Crombie, can provide clarity on the negative characterisation Plato attributed to the relation between what we perceive, truth, and knowledge as well as how they relate to pleasure. The discussion will also contribute to the idea that however damning Plato was of the truth of aesthetic properties as they relate to art, he saw artworks as mimetic and dependent on real-world objects. So, where an artwork is potentially distasteful for the very reason that an ill-informed artist has created it, this would not seem to apply to nature, opening up the possibility that the aesthetic properties of nature may not be corrupted or corrupting.

Crombie writes, for example, that Plato's challenge to the senses is the association of what we perceive with truth itself.<sup>25</sup> If the artwork, be it a painting or a work of poetic performance, is perceived as claiming to have truth value or to be the truth, we run the risk of thinking that the artist has knowledge about the real object being depicted rather

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<sup>24</sup> Schaper, *Prelude to Aesthetics*.

<sup>25</sup> Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*.



than knowledge about its mimetic appearance. If the real object being depicted is itself bad or flawed, and the artwork based on it nonetheless appeals to basic human sensual pleasures, “dangerous encouragement is being given to our baser faculties” and therefore beautiful art is what’s best for society and the education of the young to develop more refined, more discerning, faculties, providing an explanation for why Plato might still have had a use for art. Regardless of what the epistemic content of an artwork, it “can have aesthetic qualities such as colour, shape, rhythm, harmony as much as any non-artistic object” that are perceivable. Such beautiful objects and our perceiving them, is not problematic for Plato. What is problematic for him is if we associate truth about the object being depicted with the content of our aesthetic perceptions.

One take on this that relates to the problem of pleasure, and the link between aesthetic perception and truth, as Halliwell and Nehamas have both documented and argued, relates specifically to theatrical performance. The nature of theatrical performance was mimetic to the extent that acting was imitative of ‘real’ human action. According to Halliwell and Nehamas, Plato seemed to think that much of Greek attic drama (such as Homer, Aeschylus, Theopsis, Euripides, Sophocles, Aristophanes) appealed to the audience’s basic, unrefined, human pleasures. The playwrights pandered to human pleasures by presenting performances that seemed to imitate reality, but in fact presented “a counterfeit reality”, performances that appealed to what pleased rather than what was the truth.<sup>26</sup>

Rather than emphasising ‘counterfeit’ reality, as Halliwell does, Nehamas addresses the issue of mediation and transparency in representation. The representation of an object mediates how the object itself is perceived, but does so in a way that is transparent (unless a real object is available for comparison): we simply, naively accept the representation of the object as true. For example, he writes:

To be inherently realistic is to seem to represent reality without artifice, without mediation and convention. Realistic art is, just in the sense in which Plato thought of imitation, transparent. This transparency, [...], is not real. It is only a result of

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Halliwell, "Aristotelian Mimesis Reevaluated," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (1990). 505.

our often not being aware of the mediated and conventional nature of the representation to which we are most commonly exposed.<sup>27</sup>

Nehamas draws the comparison between Greek drama, which were performed in theatres packed full of spectators armed with vegetables, ready to hurl them at whatever situation they did not like on stage (hence the platonic view that Greek attic dramas appealed to basic human pleasures and behaviour), 1980s American television and what Arthur Danto called ‘disturbational art’, such as Allan Kaprow’s ‘Happenings’ of the 1950s and 1960s.

According to Nehamas, each of these ‘artforms’ seems to be mediated and transparent. The former two can be accused of perverting the audience. Nehamas writes that “[...] Plato accuses poetry of perverting its audience. Poetry is essentially suited to the representation of inferior character and vulgar subjects: these are easy to imitate and what the crowd, which is already perverted to begin with, wants to see and enjoy.”<sup>28</sup> The problem for Plato was that perceiving these plays that he thought were designed to appeal only to sensual pleasures did not lead us to the truth: the senses, or perception, could not alone provide us with real knowledge about the beauty of the object of experience and could not distinguish between reality and a performance that imitates that reality. This appeal to sensual pleasure encouraged an audience to act on mere impulse or emotion. This was down to confusion between performance and reality and the audience’s absorption into performance despite themselves.<sup>29</sup> The difference was between perception, the use of the senses, and the use of the senses coupled with reason, the latter of which could put audience members in touch with the forms that constitute what they perceive.

The case of the ‘Happenings’, however, is peculiar, but illustrative nonetheless. For example, ‘18 Happenings in 6 Parts’, is considered by Danto, writes Nehamas, as being an atavistic introduction of reality into ‘art’.<sup>30</sup> Plato’s worry is turned upside down.

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<sup>27</sup> Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media.", 223-224.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>29</sup> Schaper, *Prelude to Aesthetics*. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Allan Kaprow, ‘18 Happenings in 6 Parts’, 1959, presented at the Reuben Gallery in New York. Kaprow synthesised his ‘training in action’ with his study of John Cage’s

Rather than the performance being confused with reality, reality can be considered performance. Although such projects as Kaprow's 'Happenings' were reacting against a perceived distance between 'aesthetic' and 'real world' domains, which in the 1950s and 1960s was firmly entrenched in a world of art that was autonomous and Modernist, distinct from the everyday experience or the experience of nature, Danto is right that they could not escape the world of art for the concept 'art' is required for the work to succeed as a work of art.

Whether or not a 'Happening' can be considered an artwork is an epistemic issue that, admittedly, plays on the idea of aesthetic perception and what that involves. Whether or not a 'Happening' or an ancient theatrical performance may be considered aesthetic is instead a matter of perception and perceiving the beauty or ugliness of that performance according to the Platonic view I've articulated. Whether or not either succeeds artistically is not necessarily bound up with its aesthetic status. Whether it succeeds aesthetically must depend on whether or not they instantiate perceivable aesthetic properties. We can see both in Plato's case, and the case of 'Happenings' as discussed by Nehamas, that the aesthetic can come apart from the artistic, that the experience of beauty is not predicated on the experience of art.

Similarly, Ferrari writes that Plato's worry about the 'counterfeit reality' or 'transparency' was that it encouraged the "tendency, in our estimation of poetry, to confound the values of performance with the values of understanding", but this does not mean, as the Kaprow example indicates, that aesthetic properties are not instantiated in either artistic or theatrical representation of the 'real world'.<sup>31</sup> Imitation by the actor in performances was imitation of behaviour that exists in the real world, outwith artistic

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events Kaprow gave instructions to audience members, requiring them to move to all the 'rooms' in the gallery. These rooms were sectioned off by semi-transparent sheets, by panels with references to the artist's previous work and by rows of plastic fruit. Unlike Cage, who wanted to minimise authorial control over his works, Kaprow used the audience to carry out his vision. Paul Schimmel, "Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel (Los Angeles, New York, London: MoCA Los Angeles, 1998). 61f Arthur C. Danto, "Art and Disturbation," in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, ed. Arthur C. Danto (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry." 95

representation, with the consequent potential for having a detrimental influence or effect on childhood imagination and the development of character.<sup>32</sup> Poetry or the arts were not only aesthetic, but essentially ethical, and could directly affect human action: no clear distinction was drawn between the aesthetic, the understanding and the ethical. The term 'kalos', for instance, which might be translated as 'beautiful' or 'handsome' was also used to express moral approval and Plato often used the beautiful and the good interchangeably.<sup>33</sup> There is no doubt, as the exclusion of the arts indicates, that Plato thought that the aesthetic and art had an impact on character and conduct.

To sum up, before moving onto specific points related to the overall argument being presented in the thesis, Plato's metaphysical system was built on the idea that reason, and not the senses, acquainted us with the ideas, or as he called them 'forms', of beauty, the good and justice. Any object that manifested these properties was not a pure instantiation of the true, abstract and complete forms it imitated. Plato thought this because he was sceptical that the senses could provide any knowledge about the forms. Instead, the use of reason would guide us back to the forms and help us make sense of the properties experienced through the senses. The causal interaction of our sense modalities with the particular objects of experience could not provide the true nature of those objects. However, our grasp of general concepts, the universal forms, could. Mimetic objects were even more dubious for the very reason that they could not claim to be the 'real' thing, hence their expulsion from the ideal republic.

There are a number of elements to be highlighted in relation to the idea of aesthetic perception here. One is that Plato thought perception essentially hollow, including the mere perception of aesthetic qualities in the sense that deeper meaning about what is seen and heard is required to understand it properly. Otherwise artists pander to their audience's sensual pleasures and the audience seeks no further improvement of character or behaviour. A second element relates to the idea that aesthetic qualities, in his case 'beauty', are not essentially perceptual and that understanding it requires that the general form, or concept, of beauty is understood insofar as this is possible. A third is that,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 111

<sup>33</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge Classics, 1970 (2001)).

because we know more about what Plato thought about how the ‘aesthetic’ related to ‘art’ than we do about what he thought about how the ‘aesthetic’ relates to ‘non-art’, it is difficult to disambiguate the concept of the ‘aesthetic’ from the concept of ‘art’, but it seems that aesthetic qualities are to be found in the objects that art represents and primarily so. Fourth comes the idea that aesthetic qualities must importantly and primarily be instantiated in non-art in order for art, if mimetic and representational in the way Plato describes it, to properly be mimetic and representational. I will take these each in turn.

First, the idea that perception in general is essentially hollow, and that perceiving art is complicated by the intervention of an artist who knows only about those qualities that will appeal to basic human pleasure, entails that aesthetic qualities were instantiated despite the audience not necessarily having the appropriate understanding or knowledge to properly understand the quality they perceive. Ridding his republic of the art that is potentially deceptive also removes the possibility for unnecessary deception, but this does not seem to equate to the thought that aesthetic qualities as they relate to non-art should be removed (only better understood).

Second, comes the idea that we need to understand what Plato meant by the general concept of beauty. According to Plato, it is only by appealing to non-perceptual knowledge, or to the universal, idealist, invisible, unchanging and eternal form of beauty, that we may either complement the beauty that we perceive, or dislodge it as inappropriate in that instance. Beauty can only be discovered in the abstract form of beauty, abstract because it transcends both space and time, as well as the perceivable realm of cause and effect. Many objects could be beautiful but the essence of beauty was abstract beauty. Mimetic artforms, being imitations of ‘real’ external objects, were therefore potentially harmful in their propensity for misrepresenting an object whose perceivable qualities were already dubious representations of reality, let alone when represented by artists who aren’t specialists on the object being represented or imitated. The distinction was between appearance and reality: the senses could provide us with an object’s appearance, but not what an object is in reality or in truth, or in its abstract

form.<sup>34</sup> The object's true nature could only be revealed through reason. Removing the mimetic object from his ideal republic meant removing what might be wrong or deliberately deceptive, an unnecessary layer that got in the way of the truth.

The trouble is, as indicated by disagreement between classicists and philosophers about how to characterise the forms, Plato provides no clear indication or valid argument for what he means by them. He seems to mean that they are a general concept for something we are already familiar with, something that we have previously learned. What we perceive as beautiful can be cultivated and can also cultivate our ability for abstract thought. We can recognise the beauty of a person because that instantiation of beauty participates in the general concept of beauty.

However, this again is premised on the idea that aesthetic qualities such as beauty are essentially perceptual, and that knowledge about them can be derived from our perceptual experiences rather than abstract, cognitive processes or criteria that appeal to universals. The force with which Plato excommunicated the arts was a testament to the power of aesthetic qualities. While we may want or need to be sceptical about what we perceive, and irrespective of abstract reasoning, aesthetic qualities are immediately instantiated, such as when we respond to the beauty of a sunset, the sublimity of mountainous landscapes, the prettiness of a forget-me-not, the glamour of a person or the grotesqueness of a Breughel. This is important to the argument presented here because beauty, and, ultimately, other aesthetic qualities, are not thought to be criteria-led, as we will see in my discussion of Sibley in the chapters below, but are led by paying particular attention to what we perceive and being clear about how we can characterise it.

Third, comes the issue about whether the aesthetic qualities of art that represents an object can tell us anything about that object's non-aesthetic qualities. As we have seen, because the artist is not knowledgeable about the object he represents in his art, we should be sceptical that art's aesthetic qualities could ground knowledge about the non-art objects it represents. We should indeed be further sceptical that the aesthetic quality of beauty could ground non-aesthetic knowledge about the object. Knowledge about

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<sup>34</sup> Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History*.

beauty can be found in the abstract, ideal, form of beauty, but it cannot be found in perception. According to his view, the senses are not sufficient for the provision for knowledge of the truth of what an artwork represents, especially if the artwork, a mimetic object, is a misleading imitation of its object of origin. We have, however, no explanation about how we can access abstract reasoning about the beauty of an object without first perceiving it as such, so there must be something primarily important about perceiving beauty before knowing to seek it proof in the general forms.

Fourth, there's the issue that aesthetic qualities can be found in non-art objects as well as art objects. It is true that Plato primarily wrote about art, but it doesn't follow from this that aesthetic qualities are not to be found in non-art objects and primarily so. The claim for mimesis was derived from the thought that the causal interaction of our sense modalities with the particular objects of experience could not guarantee the provision of the true nature of those objects. We must therefore accept that the artist may get things wrong and that those experiencing the artist's end product may get things wrong. Implied is the thought that non-art objects have qualities that can be imitated, or represented in artworks. Human intervention is required for the artwork to be created. Although Plato made no explicit demarcation between craft (*techne*) and fine art like we do today, he did make the distinction between productive, creative, crafts and acquisitive crafts that generates revenue for the artist or creator. In the case of productive, creative, crafts, a new product emerged out of the manipulation, assembly and transformation of a natural material. While it did not require knowledge about the object to be imitated or represented, it did require being able to perceive its qualities, including its aesthetic qualities, as well as knowledge about the materials being used to represent it. Presumably, then, non-artistic aesthetic qualities are importantly primary. It seems that the aesthetic is primarily linked with the non-artistic world. In chapters two and three we will see how priority is given to nature specifically in the eighteenth century.

To conclude, the imperfections and worries that Plato had about the arts were based on his suspicion of their claim to truth and on reasons for doubting that the senses could provide the requisite knowledge for making correct epistemic judgments. Non-art objects, too, according to Plato, could not embody the knowledge provided by the ideal

forms. Appreciating beauty in a particular object could lead one to appreciate beauty more generally, and this would cultivate an interest in the beautiful. Our perceptions of ordinary objects and mimetic artworks are incomplete and imperfect because the moment of perception does not provide us with the knowledge to fully comprehend our perception of the object and because the object itself is potentially misleading. If we could fully comprehend, we would be perceiving the forms themselves. The particular beauties we experience in the world can give us only a glimpse of the universal form of beauty, which in turn brings us closer to nature. I disagree with Plato that it is by appealing to our knowledge of the abstract form of beauty that we can prove the truth of beauty perceived. It may be that the abstract form of beauty is an explanandum of beauty perceived, but the truth of the existence of beauty, and other aesthetic properties, lies in perceiving them, which is what I will argue for in the thesis.

### **§ The Aesthetic, Mimesis and Aristotle**

Aristotle provided the most convincing historical underpinning for the idea of aesthetic perception of the three philosophers discussed in this chapter. This is because he put sensual experience and pleasure, even if cathartic pleasure, at the centre of his aesthetics, in addition to linking beauty with teleological function. He argued for the importance of perceptual experience without requiring an appeal to the forms as dictated by Plato or Aquinas' pantheistic metaphysics, as we will discover in the following section. His view of mimesis was not solely based on artworks being imitations of the objects we perceive, but also of the creative process being similar to the teleological, purposeful creative processes of nature.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle celebrated the mimetic, aesthetic properties of art, which he thought could communicate the deep complexities of human psychology. This was born out by his writings on tragedy, and the cathartic effect tragedy was to have on its audiences and his writings on perception. Catharsis was the process of releasing, and



thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.<sup>35</sup> His concern was therefore less about whether and how far fictional, artistic representations were true to the objects represented or were true to abstract general concepts and were more about the creative, psychological and productive processes that brought them into being, which for him were embedded in nature's teleological function. This, combined with his writings in *De Anima*, on human perceptual sophistication, challenged Plato's aesthetics by rejecting Plato's view that perception lacked awareness, in that perception was merely a causal relationship between perceiver and perceivable, sensible properties of external objects.<sup>36</sup> As we shall see, Aristotle thus challenged Plato's thoughts on perception and aesthetics by flipping his metaphysical picture around.

Aristotle's thoughts on mimesis contrasted with the 'transparency' or 'counterfeit reality' of Platonic mimesis by "acknowledg[ing] the dual aspect of mimetic representation: its status as created artefact, as the product of artistic shaping of artistic materials, as well as its capacity to signify and offer to the mind the patterns of supposed realities".<sup>37</sup> Although mimesis is often taken to merely mean the 'imitation' or naïve representation as in Plato's writings, Aristotle spoke of it as "both an intrinsic property of works of art and as the product of artistic intentionality".<sup>38</sup> Without mimesis, artworks could not be artworks. Artworks were imitations of objects in the external world and necessarily depicted properties of that external world, but human creativity was the vehicle through which this was achieved.

Aristotle's view was unlike Plato's because for him perception and mimesis did provide access to the aesthetic whereas for Plato both perception and mimesis lacked the ideal content of his original forms and artists and performers dealt not with the abstract forms, but with cheap and necessarily flawed and ugly imitations. Aristotle emphasised

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<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Ronald M. Polansky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ———, "Poetics," in *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Rorty, ed. *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*.

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*.

<sup>37</sup> Halliwell, "Aristotelian Mimesis Reevaluated." 505.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 505.

that the artwork remained causally related to the object represented and that this was due to artistic intentionality and creativity.

Although human creativity belonged to the productive capacities of nature, Aristotle separated the practical realm, to which 'art' belonged, from the theoretical realm, to which cognition and knowledge belonged. Both realms exemplified different sorts of rationale, but by separating them, Aristotle established autonomy for the arts. His approach created an ontologically distinct status of art, that not only held that an artwork was self-contained and followed an internal rationale, but invited a richness of sincere interpretations through the sensual experience of artistic form that is inherently linked with the work's content. For Aristotle, mimesis in art showed how nature worked and did so by constructing its own creation. Art imitated nature's productive activity and aimed to create representations as well as fictions about the world, as Schaper writes:

For Aristotle, what art imitates is nature's productive activity. Since nature in the Aristotelian scheme is a way of acting, art does not directly imitate what nature is in its products, but how nature acts. Imitation, in this usage, is not the production of a likeness, but the creation of a work of poesis. The poet imitates not by reason of copying or trying to copy, but by reason of making something, of creating a new thing.<sup>39</sup>

The creative process, akin to the creative processes of nature, occasioned an autonomous realm for the artwork to which both positive and negative aesthetic values and positive and negative artistic values could be attributed. Within this autonomous realm, the structure of the artwork and its internal relations could be observed.

Failure to take the above into account has resulted in mistaken interpretations of Aristotle's aesthetics being equated to a kind of narrow formalism similar to that which made its debut in early twentieth century thinking in aesthetics.<sup>40</sup> Formalism is the view that what's important when looking at an artwork are the form and colour it has as an

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<sup>39</sup> Schaper, *Prelude to Aesthetics*. 60-61.

<sup>40</sup> Dabney Townsend, "Introduction to Aristotle's 'Poetics'," in *Aesthetics: Classic Readings from the Western Tradition*, ed. Dabney Townsend (London: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2001).

autonomous work of art (not whether it is a meticulous imitation), a view that was originally advocated by Bell and Fry and, arguably, originally put forward by Kant.<sup>41</sup>

Yet Aristotle's interpretation of mimesis precludes the possibility for narrow formalism, not only in the sense in which nature's teleology is of marked importance, but also in the sense that human action and creativity belong within such a teleology. His aesthetics is about more than merely the artwork's or object's form and colour. In the *Poetics* seven and eight, for instance, Aristotle writes:

We have laid it down that a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, as a whole of some magnitude. [...] The unity of a plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject. An infinity of things befall that one man, some of which it is impossible to reduce to unity; and in like manner there are many actions of one man which cannot be made to form one action.<sup>42</sup>

Although the work is whole, complete and unified, I take it that it is not just the tragedy's formal qualities that are of import, but the infinity of things that befall the one man that merits attention, along with the many interpretation that may be had.<sup>43</sup>

Halliwel writes:

[...]Aristotle assumes that all mimesis is concerned to present and explore some idea of a *possible* world - a world whose sense the audience of art can grasp and evaluate in ways that are not sharply different from the ways in which they interpret the world outside art.<sup>44</sup>

For Aristotle, mimetic art could be a representation of the non-artistic, world, beliefs about the world, and normative ideas but it nevertheless offered the possibility of being judged in the same way we judge non-art. Whether behaviours on stage are morally valuable or not is not what's at stake, nor is the worry that an illusory 'transparency' can infect the populace. Although our responses to artworks are based on what we, in fact, perceive, that is to say, the aesthetic properties that are artistically, intentionally

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<sup>41</sup> We will see in the final chapters of the thesis that Kant was not a narrow formalist of this kind, and how perception can be linked with the idea of 'whole formalism'.

<sup>42</sup> Aristotle, "Poetics."

<sup>43</sup> This, however, is in keeping with the idea of 'whole formalism', which will be discussed in detail in chapter six.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Halliwel, "Entry On "Aristotle", " in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David E. Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). 12.

instantiated in them, cognitive and affective elements form part of the structure of our experience in our aim to understand them and should put to rest any thought that only formal qualities mattered. Aristotle was not a narrow formalist for he advocated that the experience as a whole is of import. This resembles the Kantian view that what is perceived is a whole entity whose qualities and features form an integrated whole, and that this sort of Gestalt is linked with other non-causally related features such as knowledge and affect.

According to Aristotle, there was a correlation between the elements that make up the arts and human feeling, where artworks need not be restricted to meticulous, visual representation. Aristotle brought a relational and imaginative meaningfulness into artistic production that was non-existent in Plato. He allowed each of the arts to develop imaginatively, allowing them to adopt an internal coherence, so that an aesthetic pleasure and continuity could be created for the subject perceiving it.

Not only that, aesthetic qualities existed both in nature and art, as Townsend writes:

Oak trees, for example, may be pruned and cut for wood, but they grow into their natural shape because they are that kind of tree. But things that have to be made must be given their form according to externally determined patterns and purposes. Thus they follow some other form and are imitations.<sup>45</sup>

While things in nature make their own aesthetic presence, the creation of works of art or tragedies follow the artist's rationale, which follows its own natural patterns and motivations.

Aristotle's explored the arts and their capacity to relate to what we are given by nature: the senses, emotion, thought. He viewed creative intentionality and cathartic response as parts of the natural creative process. Not only was the creative process a natural creative process, it used the environment as a source for both aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities, and transposed them to the arts. For Aristotle, the aesthetic and the artistic were bound up together.

Aristotle thus focused on human creativity, which to him was not only analogous to the creativity of nature, but communicated the depths of human psychology through

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<sup>45</sup> Townsend, "Introduction to Aristotle's "Poetics"." 21.

aesthetic properties that were inextricably tied with the artwork's content. Sensible, aesthetic properties were the means by which meaningful content was both communicated and consumed. He emphasised the importance of perception, human psychology and artistic creation as embedded in nature's teleology. Aesthetic properties were considered in terms of teleology, as manifestations of an object's function. Artistic creativity was embedded in nature's teleology, and aesthetic properties were considered in terms of human productivity and expression.

What this means for my overall argument in the dissertation is that Aristotle gives us the historical underpinning for the idea of aesthetic perception and that human existence, and the products of human creativity, are themselves a part of nature. While we may not be tempted to think otherwise, it should also not be surprising that this gives us reason to be interested in nature's aesthetics and how they relate to our responses. Rather than being sceptical about perceiving aesthetic properties, as Plato was, he welcomed it as a natural human creative process without denying the intellectual sphere the aesthetic may lead us to. Although there was an ontologically distinct realm for the arts, the arts were firmly rooted in nature's creative processes, providing another reason for arguing that the aesthetics of nature is at least as important as the aesthetics of art.

### **§ The Aesthetic, Mimesis and Aquinas**

I now turn to Aquinas' writings on beauty. For Aquinas, like Aristotle, beauty was a compound idea that encapsulated both form and content. Unlike Plato, he was not sceptical about perceiving aesthetic properties and thought that beauty was made up of wholeness, balance and radiance. Beauty was a real property that was endowed with divine content. In respect of beauty being a real property, he was influenced by Aristotle and understood form as the manifestation of an object's function. An object's aesthetic property, beauty, the subject's conception of it and the intellectual content held in the concept were part of one idea, but the perceivable property and the intellectual content were held by Aquinas to be logically different. Aquinas was concerned with ontologically situating the concept of beauty, the object of which could fit into a whole

range of categories. For him, both seeing and understanding were cognitive acts, the former a kind of discernment and the latter an attempt of thought to make sense of the object discerned.

Medieval philosophers and theologians were interested in beauty as an aesthetic concept that was woven in Christian theology, and were little concerned with drawing a distinction between aesthetics, the philosophy of art and the philosophy of nature. Beauty was part of a teleological, ordered, pantheistic metaphysics that drew on a range of aesthetic objects that was much less restricted and focused than aesthetics came to be after post-Kantian Idealism. Art was considered to be “the technical construction of objects” and “had little to do with the production of beautiful things or the stimulation of aesthetic pleasure”, writes Eco.<sup>46</sup> For Aquinas in particular, “beauty [was] considered to be [...] transcendental, it acquire[d] a metaphysical worth, an unchanging objectivity, and an extension which [was] universal”.<sup>47</sup> However, he was interested in how it could be possible for a subject to experience beauty that manifests itself in such a metaphysically and teleologically ordered reality.<sup>48</sup>

Aristotle’s influence on Aquinas can be seen in Aquinas’ interpretation of mimesis in art and his reliance on form as a vehicle for aesthetic transcendence, the transcendence of beauty. Aquinas’ influence can in turn be seen in Kant’s aesthetics, where disinterest plays a significant role in the apprehension of beauty, although Kant’s metaphysics lacked the realism that grounded medieval and other eighteenth century aesthetics. Here, the link between Aristotle, Aquinas and Kant is the idea that at the core of aesthetic experience lies is the human ability to perceive aesthetic features without self-interest (hence disinterest). As we will see in chapter two, this idea was first made explicit by the British empiricists, but crystallized in Kant’s approach to aesthetics. The immediate aim here is to show the further historical precedence for the view that the aesthetic, and the aesthetics of nature is at least as relevant to aesthetic experience as is art (if not more so).

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<sup>46</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (London: Radius, 1988).3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 47.

Eco suggests that artistry in medieval times was “object creation”, a kind of craftsmanship that “completed, integrated, or prolonged nature”.<sup>49</sup> Like Aristotle, Aquinas thought that the artist would observe and imitate nature, but such imitation was not a meticulous naturalistic representation of the world, or as Eco writes the “servile copying of natural models”, it “was productive like nature and continued nature’s creative labours” and “human technology [was] seen as an extension of nature”.<sup>50</sup> An idea and its exemplified form were thus tightly linked:

Hence, properly speaking, there is no idea corresponding merely to matter or merely to form; but one idea corresponds to the entire composite - an idea that causes the whole, both its form and its matter.<sup>51</sup>

The exemplified form was conceived in thought, the thought of the craftsman, and the created object was perceivable by a subject other than the craftsman. The object’s form became the template for the form perceived by the subject who could also learn of its content. According to Aquinas, the idea, the exemplified form and the form of the resultant object are coextensive and require perceiving with awareness and intellectual engagement. One difference that might be noted in relation to Kant’s ‘whole’ account of formalism, which we will turn to in chapters four and five, was that Aquinas was prepared to accept divine knowledge and the object itself were part of its form whereas for Kant there was a clear distinction between the object and how we perceive it. However, for Kant, what we perceive is non-causally linked with cognitive and emotive elements of experience.

But what does such an intellectual engagement with the object as described by Aquinas consist in, and how does it fit in with Aquinas’ views on disinterest, a concept we will have a closer look at chapter two, and that will feature in later chapters too. For the moment, we might define as an experience that marvels in an object’s aesthetic qualities rather than its function? Just because the medievals had a wider conception of the aesthetic than has been the case in more recent conceptions of philosophical

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>51</sup> Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae De Veritate* (1256-1259).III, 5c. Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*.168.

aesthetics and didn't explicitly distinguish between nature, function or art, doesn't mean that they shied away from the possibility of aesthetic experience, as would be the case if one thinks that the aesthetic is premised solely on art. Here is Eco again:

The intellect scrutinizes a thing in its objective truth in order to grasp it accurately and adequately. It strives to define the object, to explore it in its depths and in its meaning, in its substantial and its accidental structure. It knows the object in analytic detail, sees it as true, desires it as good. During the quest for the judgment of truth, there may well be concern for an aesthetic outcome; but a disinterested perception, concentrated upon formal values, occurs only after the judgment. Only then is there an aesthetic experience.<sup>52</sup>

The issue seems to be, contra my claim above, that the aesthetic and the cognitive are not coextensive at all according to Aquinas, but that the aesthetic judgment comes after having grasped the object in its entirety. The aesthetic only emerges in light of an accurate, adequate and objective truth about an object determined by a scrutinizing intellect: "The aesthetic *visio* comes to birth as a culmination and completion of intellectual knowledge at its most complex level. [...] [B]eauty sinks its roots deep into a complex knowledge of being."<sup>53</sup> Whether Eco's is a correct exegesis of Aquinas, I do not endeavour to pursue here.

Yet Eco's own view is tinged by an understanding of disinterest that is ambiguous. In the previous quotation above, disinterest equates engaging in a mental process that requires abstracting what is perceived into just formal qualities, that is "concentrated upon formal values". Later, he writes: "[Aesthetic pleasure] is a sense of joy and triumph, of pleasure in a form which has been discerned, admired, and loved with a disinterested love, the love which is possible for a formal structure."<sup>54</sup> Here 'disinterest' is of the kind that is selfless, in the sense that self-gratification and desires are not pursued.

What is most striking about Eco's interpretation is his explicit aim to interpret Thomist aesthetics "in the light of modern aesthetics".<sup>55</sup> For in his aim to do so, the

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<sup>52</sup> Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*. 199.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 200.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 200.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 200.



aesthetic becomes not only secondary, but also accidental, for it is not by virtue of cognitively scrutinizing an object with an aim for judgment and truth that beauty necessarily emerges. The question that arises is: at what point would ‘disinterest’ kick in for the aesthetic experience to occur? Eco does not provide an answer to this question. In order to see why this is the case, let us return to the above quotation by Aquinas:

Hence, properly speaking, there is no idea corresponding merely to matter or merely to form; but one idea corresponds to the entire composite - an idea that causes the whole, both its form and its matter.<sup>56</sup>

Aquinas, at least in this short extract, is allowing for the aesthetic form to be coextensive with matter within one idea: there is a direct relationship between form, substance and object. In addition to this, the intellect, upon scrutinizing the object, is cognitively engaged but not, à la Aristotle, conceptually loaded with scientific or practical meaning. The process of acquiring knowledge and understanding, including aesthetic knowledge and understanding, occurs with the mental, integrative, action through perception, experience, the senses and thoughtful attention. We thus begin to see, as Haldane writes, “parallels with Kantian aesthetics”.<sup>57</sup> Subjective, intellectual fulfilment and contentment are sought with the process of a lovely and open-ended engagement with the object. One fundamental difference with Kant needs to be observed, however. This is a metaphysical difference that belies Aquinas’ naïve realist metaphysics and epistemology and Kant’s “regarding the contemplated forms as being structural elements of a mind-independent reality”, as we will see in the next chapter.<sup>58</sup> While Kant was sceptical of the noumenal realm, what Aquinas has in common with him is the idea that the aesthetic is perceptual, that it is real in virtue of our being able to experience it.

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<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae De Veritate*.III, 5c. Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*.168.

<sup>57</sup> John Haldane, "Thomas Aquinas," in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David E. Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

## § Conclusion

This chapter has sought to trace Plato's scepticism about perceiving aesthetic properties. It has also sought to show how Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas conceived of the relationship between perceiving aesthetic properties and non-perceptual, viz. non-perceptual epistemic properties. Plato's thoughts about mimesis are puzzling for the very reason that he valued mimetic representation that is meticulously detailed, yet provides no characterization of the truth of beauty they are intended to replicate.<sup>59</sup> These are unknowables and those representations that do figure in experience can only ever be diluted representations of objects that themselves are impossible to discover in the highest, inaccessible realm of reality in which the forms reside. That the arts were a false transparency that occasioned negative behaviour in its audience, behaviour that itself mimicked dubious performances caused Plato to reject art. My contention on this score is that while Plato banished the arts, he did not (nor could he) banish the aesthetic: the aesthetic qualities that he found deplorable in mimetic representations were representations of 'real' objects in which those self-same aesthetic qualities could be found, but their instantiation was to be found in perception, not in Plato's constitution of reality through his universal forms. Aristotle, on the other hand, allowed the arts to have their own realm, a realm, which was creative and productive in the same way nature, was, where the aesthetic qualities that inhered in it, inhered in the object of origin. While both Plato and Aristotle wrote primarily about art, Aquinas was rather interested in ontologically situating the concept of beauty, a concept that could only arise as the result of a cognitively loaded process, as pervasive and not just associated with art. This relates to the idea of aesthetic perception in two ways. First, whether aesthetic properties are rejected for their potential to deceive or welcomed as a means of expression and catharsis, they are available to us provided we attend to the object. Not only that, even if we did reject them as instantiations or reinforcements of undesirable human behaviour, many non-artistic aesthetic properties would be available to us through nature. In the

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<sup>59</sup> Jason Gaiger, *Aesthetics and Painting*, ed. Derek Matravers, Continuum Aesthetics Series (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008). 27-33.

next chapter, I will explore how philosophers in the eighteenth furthered the idea of the aesthetic by making perception central to it in addition to immediacy and disinterest.

## **Chapter Two: The Aesthetic and the Eighteenth Century**

### **§ Introduction**

This chapter traces the roots of historical, philosophical, concepts that emerged in the eighteenth century and that are relevant to the idea of ‘aesthetic perception’, including immediacy, the judgment of taste, subjectivity and disinterest, and will culminate in a section on Hutcheson’s characterisation of aesthetic perception as epistemic, a particular kind of knowledge, but epistemic only in relation to what is perceived rather than to universal forms, rules, or categories of knowledge. In particular, the chapter aims to make salient concepts that arose during that time as well as their relevance to aesthetic perception, and to bring out the importance of nature as a paradigm of aesthetic experience by outlining the eighteenth century debate between rationalism and subjectivism about aesthetic experience. The idea is to provide historical support for my overall argument that if aesthetic experience is rooted in perceptual experience, many objects can be the objects of such experience, including nature, and that nature is at least as paradigmatic an aesthetic object as is art.

What is significant about nature, as was tacitly acknowledged in the eighteenth century, is its link with the very existence of animal and plant life but also our own existence. It should not come as a surprise that as creatures born of nature we also have a capacity to experience, discern and evaluate it. Nature not only endows us with the capacity for perception and responding to our surroundings in meaningful ways, as well as purposeful creativity, it provides the natural objects of which we have such experiences. We may and do doubt whether those experiences are veridical or true. That we do exist, and are able to perceive in the way that we do, however, gives us reason to return to Descartes’ idea that natural objects exist and that, furthermore, we respond to how they appear, which in many perceptual experiences involves perceiving aesthetic qualities. The aesthetic element comes in when we discern and describe the natural world aesthetically, using aesthetic concepts and terms. The eighteenth century is the context in which such concepts emerged and helped form the field of aesthetics. That it

formally came into existence as an academic discipline is attributable to Baumgarten, who introduced the idea of *epistêmê aïsthetikê* as “the science of what is sensed and imagined”.<sup>60</sup>

This chapter’s first section chronicles the concepts mentioned above as emerging in response to the seventeenth century rationalism about aesthetics, influenced by the Cartesian method and an over-reliance on Aristotelian principles that underwrote tragedy, and that sought to provide a priori reasons for the existence, and our experience of, beauty. This had an enduring impact on the creative arts, especially the theatre, where, in France, for example, Corneille’s *Le Cid* and Molière’s *L’école des Femmes* were full of witticisms about critics sitting in their audiences, seeking to ridicule them or assiduously reject the rigidity of the formulae for successful plays, as we will see.

The subjective turn to be investigated in this chapter enabled a turning away from criteria-led requirements for artworks to be successful and correctly appreciated and entailed an interest in subjective, perceptual experience that was theorised within a wider context of the aesthetic. It did not restrict the aesthetic to art and did not assume artistic priority, that art was the essence of the aesthetic. Baumgarten took the aesthetic to be essentially perceptual, arguing in the *Metaphysica*, in which the term ‘aesthetica’ first appeared and where Baumgarten argued for a ‘science of sense knowledge’.<sup>61</sup> Schaper writes that Baumgarten’s ‘science’ of aesthetics was not a philosophy of art or a philosophy of aesthetic experience, but both. He was influenced by the Greek tradition which, as we have already seen, particularly in Aristotle, the arts were rooted in natural creative process which included some rules for making and producing. The subjective turn thus initiated an interest in subjective response, and with it an interest in perception, ‘internal sense’ theories, and aesthetic properties.

The second section presents a historical account of the concept of disinterest, a concept that was borne of a desire to reject the egoism and self-interest evident in Hobbes’ philosophy. Aesthetics was neither prescriptive by reason, as was claimed by

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Guyer, "18th Century German Aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Fall Edition (2008).

<sup>61</sup> Eva Schaper, "Review of Baumgarten's "Philosophische Betrachtungen Über Bedingungen Des Gedichtes", " *British Journal of Aesthetics* 25, no. 3 (1985). 278-279.

rationalism, nor was it fundamentally or genuinely self-interested. Rather, its focus was the object, but through subjective experience. The prefix 'dis', expressing negation, did not refer to lack of interest, but rather lack of self-interest. This meant that the experience of beauty was the subjective experience of an object with which that subject was genuinely and perceptually engaged, rather than engaged with for reasons of self-interest.

With Hutcheson comes an explicit discussion on the idea of aesthetic perception as it relates to nature and an argument that beauty belongs to the realm of perception, rather than rule-governance. Thus the subjective turn that occurred in the eighteenth century brought the aesthetic into the realm of subjective experience, which meant that philosophers began to address the nature of that subjective experience, which included addressing the nature of aesthetic perception in a wider sense that was primarily focused on nature rather than art.

### **§ The Judgment of Taste and Immediacy**

I will begin by giving some examples of the rationalist approach to aesthetics in order to draw a contrast with the subjective turn that followed. Taste theories and the 'immediacy thesis' evolved as a response to the over-reliance on the strictures of rationalism. Subjectivism was most clearly brought about by the Abbé DuBos in France and Hutcheson and Hume in Scotland, who, as we will discover below, articulated the important distinction between a judgment born out of reason and a judgment that results from felt experience.

Descartes' scepticism about the senses puts him in the same philosophical position as Plato because, on his account, any perceptual experience was potentially deceptive. However, rather than appealing to the universal forms as Plato did, Descartes sought epistemic certainty by appealing to what he could know with certainty, innately and with clarity. In the realm of aesthetics he appealed to mathematics, which is borne out in the

*Compendium Musicae*.<sup>62</sup> Here, we can see his mathematical interests at work in his desire to prove that musical harmony could be articulated mathematically, by showing that its origins lay in mathematical proportions. On the other hand, dissonances such as the striking of thunder, are not the proper objects of music for they are unpleasant to hear, their dissonance not in keeping with the elegance of arithmetic proportions. Here is Descartes, quoted in Sepper's book:

For this delight there is required a certain proportion of the object with its sense. Whence it happens, for example that the din of muskets or thunder does not seem suitable to music: because namely, it hurts the ears, just as the very great brilliance of the sun [hurts] eyes directed towards it.<sup>63</sup>

The dissonance that we hear in the sound of thunder or in the cacophony of musket fire lacks arithmetic proportionality and is, for this very reason, unpleasant to the human ear. Sepper writes: "The theory is expressed in the mathematics of proportions, but this mathematics is precisely what is detected or perceived in the sensation of sound, in its aistheisis."<sup>64</sup> That is to say, in the way that it is experienced aesthetically, through the senses.

Descartes' *Compendium Musicae* predates his search for certainty and clear and distinct ideas to be found in the *Meditations*. In the former, he was attempting to justify pleasurable sensual experience by appealing to reason, mathematical proportion, rather than perceptual or sensual experience. It was this sort of reasoning that had implications for the production of art. The thought was related to a quest for the clear articulation of phenomena through reason, through arithmetic. Just as arithmetic explained the sounds that we hear, so must the creative arts be rule-governed, as the critics who were proponents of Descartes held. Some of those critics, like Crousaz, looked directly to Descartes for inspiration. Others, like Boileau and Batteux, looked to historical premise, the rules set out in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

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<sup>62</sup> René Descartes, *Compendium Musicae* (Amsterdam, apud Joannem Janssonium Junioem, 1656).

<sup>63</sup> Dennis L. Sepper, *Descartes' Imagination: Proportion, Images and the Activity of Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 44.

Crousaz, using noticeably Cartesian terminology, was also pre-occupied with underpinning a logical definition of beauty:

Les sentimens, sur tout, qui l'accompagnent s'emparant de l'attention, ne lui permettent pas de s'arrêter assez sur cette idée pour la remarquer bien distinctement. Par là elle demeure vague & reste dans une confusion qui donne lieu à une infinité de mal entendus.<sup>65</sup>

Je rappellerai ici un principe que j'ai établi ailleurs, [*Logique*, partie I, chapitre II], & dont on conviendra sans peine, dès qu'on l'aura bien compris. Je distingue deux sortes de perceptions; j'appelle les unes *idées* & les autres *sentimens*. Quand je pense à un Cercle, à un Triangle, [...] je forme des idées. Mais quand je mange, quand je me place auprès du feu, quand j'approche une fleur de mon nez, les perceptions de *Saveur*, de *Chaleur*, d'*Odeur* qui me frappent, & qui me saisissent, font du nombre de celles que j'appelle des *Sentimens*, & non pas de simples idées. [...] Les idées occupent l'Esprit, les sentimens interessent le Coeur [...]. [...] On exprime aisément les idées, mais il est très difficile de décrire ses sentimens, il est même impossible d'en donner par aucun discours une exacte connoissance à ceux qui n'en ont jamais éprouvé de semblables.<sup>66</sup>

Crousaz wrote that felt human responses, sentiments, to works of art evade our attention, or our reason, or rationality, are difficult to articulate and communicate, and therefore can not, by their very nature, relate to clear and distinct ideas.<sup>67</sup> Human sentiment is vague and confused, giving rise to an infinite number of misunderstandings. He thus made a distinction between two sorts of perception, one sort being ideas, and the other being sentiments. When we think of circles or triangles, we form ideas. On the other hand, when we eat, sit close to the fire, smell a flower, the perceptions of taste, heat and scent hit us and take hold of us, evoking sentiment rather than simple ideas. On his account, ideas belong to the spirit, what we would now call the mind, and sentiment belongs to the heart. Ideas are expressed with ease, but it is very difficult, indeed impossible to describe our sentiments, to glean precise forms of knowledge from them, especially if others have not had the same sentiment.

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<sup>65</sup> Jean Pierre De Crousaz, *Traité Du Beau* (Amsterdam: Chez l'Honoré & Chatelain, 1724). 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>67</sup> This idea pre-empts the issue of private language and inter-subjective agreement discussed in chapter six.



Other critics, for example, Boileau, appealed to reason in a different way to determine the aesthetic value of a genre and logic to literary compositions. They appealed to the classical forms of beauty which were innate ideas for Boileau, ideas that appealed to reason:

Quelque sujet qu'on traite, ou plaisant, ou sublime,  
Que toujours le bon sens s'accorde avec la rime :  
L'un l'autre vainement ils semblent se haïr ;  
La rime est une esclave, et ne doit qu'obéir.  
Lorsqu'à la bien chercher d'abord on s'évertue,  
L'esprit à la trouver aisément s'habitue ;  
Au joug de la raison sans peine elle fléchit,  
Et, loin de la gêner, la sert et l'enrichit.  
Mais, lorsqu'on la néglige, elle devient rebelle,  
Et, pour la rattraper, le sens court après elle.  
Aimez donc la raison : que toujours vos écrits  
Empruntent d'elle seule et leur lustre et leur prix.  
Boileau, *L'Art Poétique*, Canto I<sup>68</sup>

The creation of poetry for Boileau was not unconditional. It was subject to the existence of a series of fixed genres that were perfectly determined by an authority higher than the poet himself, as we can see from the above extract, in which he exalts reason's powers to enrich aesthetic experience.

Reason's powers were determined by classical, literary rules laid out by Aristotle in his *Poetics* amongst others, which came to be central to the dispute between the rationalists and the subjectivists.<sup>69</sup> Artistic genres existed already and could not be improved upon, re-created or made up.<sup>70</sup> Batteux, one of Boileau's cohorts, also held this view. Batteux evoked, for example, the numbers of Greek tragedies written by Eschyle, which numbered 160, and Sophocles, which numbered 120, with the aim of

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<sup>68</sup> M. l'abbé Batteux, ed. *Les Quatre Poétiques, D'aristote, D'horace, De Vida, De Despréaux : Aves Les Traductions Et Des Remarques* (Paris: Chez Saillant et Nyon, Desaint Libraire, 1771).

<sup>69</sup> One could also argue that this debate pre-empts that between cognitivists and non-cognitivists or formalists about aesthetic experience that we will address in chapters five and six.

<sup>70</sup> Émile Krantz, *L'esthétique De Descartes*, ed. Littérature Classique Française au XVIIe Siècle, Deuxième ed. (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1898).

reminding us that such numbers of theatrical production and performance make concrete the rules of the genre:

Mais, quand il est question de former un Art, c'est-à-dire, d'indiquer à des Artistes ce qu'ils doivent faire ou éviter pour avoir du succès, les défauts observés fervent autant que les beautés. Ils fervent plus, parcequ'ils font sortir plus fortement la règle. La Poësie étoit donc assez avancée du temps d'Aristote, pour qu'il fût en état d'en poser les vrais principes, & d'en développer les détails. [...] D'un autre côté, toute la Grèce, passionnée pour les ouvrages de Poësie, de Peinture, de Sculpture, dont elle s'occupoit depuis plusieurs siecles, avoit un gout aussi exercé que délicat. Il ne s'agissoit presque, pour faire une Poétique, que de recueillir ses jugemens, & de les rappeler aux principes sur lesquels ils étoient fondés.<sup>71</sup>

Batteux adulated Aristotle's treatise on the rules of tragedy, catharsis and the purgation of the soul. The proliferation of Greek tragedies, which offered examples of both good and bad theatre, meant that taste was both exercised and practiced, and therefore delicate, apt at forming good judgments. Aristotle's great achievement, according to Batteux, was reminding his readers of the principles on which such judgments were formed.

There were difficulties with this view, reliant as it was on reason and rule governance. Firstly, it relied too heavily on the rules of tragedy as seemingly prescribed by Aristotle, and secondly it 'turned away' from nature, which was not taken to be central to aesthetic experience in the same way that the production of art was.<sup>72</sup> I will address this latter problem, which is a problem for anyone convinced of the importance of nature in aesthetics, in chapter three. The acceptance and over-reliance on priori knowledge for the rules of tragedy forced the rationalist perspective to focus on the creative process of theatrical production and how it should be experienced. This meant that what was prioritised was whether a theatrical production followed the rules set out by tragedy, rather than the response, or experience. It is not that I think that the rules of tragedy are irrelevant, but what is central to experiencing a theatrical performance aesthetically is attending to the performance itself, discerning qualities about it and

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<sup>71</sup> Batteux, ed. *Les Quatre Poétiques, D'aristote, D'horace, De Vida, De Despréaux : Aves Les Traductions Et Des Remarques*. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Krantz, *L'esthétique De Descartes*. 244-254.

describing it, the characters, and being able to articulate what has been discerned. This is not dissimilar to Descartes' discovering the mathematical, proportional, underpinnings of harmony in music and how it might tell us something interesting about the relationship of music to mathematics and proportions, rather than our distinctly aesthetic, sensual, perceptual, responses. While it may be that the rules of tragedy according to Aristotle and Descartes' mathematical approach can explain the underlying reasons for the success of a tragedy or the sound of music, neither need be seen as stipulative for aesthetic response, which is properly located in perceptual, sensual, experience.

This rationalistic approach could not characterise or explain distinctly aesthetic, subjective response. Proportionality and rule-governedness is important because it results in a particular kind of experience, but subjective experience need not be ignored even if we do emphasise proportions and rules. It imposed the rules of creation for playwrights, but also made claims about what ought to be appreciated aesthetically. Playwrights, although themselves sometimes close friends of their critics, also took pot-shots at the critics, as did Molière and Corneille in their plays *Tartuffe* and *Les Discours* respectively. Corneille wrote, as quoted in Beardsley's history of aesthetics:

It is easy for critics to be severe; but if they were to give ten or a dozen plays to the public, they might perhaps slacken the rules more than I do, as soon as they have recognized through experience things it banishes from our stage.<sup>73</sup>

Molière wrote:

If plays written in accordance with the rules do not please, whereas those which please are not in accordance with the rules, then it necessarily follows that the rules were badly made. Let us therefore disregard this quibbling whereby public taste is restricted, and let us consider in a comedy mere the effect it has upon us.<sup>74</sup>

The frustration with rule-driven artistic production was evident in the dispute between the 'Ancients' and the 'Moderns'. At that time, the 'Ancients' advocated either a priori or rule-driven artistic production and aesthetic response and the 'Moderns' appealed to

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<sup>73</sup> Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History*. 145.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

felt responses. Noteworthy in Molière's quotation above that we should "consider in a comedy merely the effect it has upon us", which is reminiscent of the subjective turn that we will see with DuBos and Hume below.

The frustration was not only evident in the theatre and poetry, but in the realm of painting. The conflict in the realm of painting occurred as a result of a dispute over colour and whether or not colour could be the foundation of painting. For example, those who favoured paintings by Poussin (as opposed to Rubens) agreed with him that judgment is based on drawing, which appeals to reason and not on colour, which appeals solely to the senses. Because drawing can provide a foundation for painting by its delineating, for creating properties, it appeals to reason, by its ability to depict a visually distinctive, recognisable object rather than blobs of colour. It appeals to the rational, organising and designing principles of the mind.<sup>75</sup>

The Abbé DuBos, having traveled to England and met the likes of Locke, read Addison, Shaftesbury and probably other British counterparts, considered "[t]hat it is useless to dispute, whether the part that takes in the design and the expression be preferable to that of the colouring", the title to chapter XLIX of his *Critical Reflection of Poetry and Painting*, the opening lines for which are:

That a sensible pleasure arises from poems and pictures, is a truth we are convinced of by daily experience; and yet 'tis difficult matter to explain the nature of the pleasure, which bears so great a resemblance with affliction. And whose symptoms are sometimes as affecting, as those of the deepest sorrow. The art of poetry and painting are never more applauded, than when they are most successful in moving us to pity.<sup>76</sup>

The thought here is not about whether there are a priori principles or rules that underpin our aesthetic experiences but that the importance of the experience is based on the response that it evokes in us, a similar claim as that made by Molière above. The way in

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<sup>75</sup> Jacques Morizot, "18th Century French Aesthetics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006). In Edinburgh, you can see an example of Poussin's classical painting *The Sacrament of Extreme Unction* (1664). That can be compared with the rich colours and light and shade of Rubens' *The Feast of Herod* (1635-1638).

<sup>76</sup> Abbé DuBos, *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*, trans. Thomas Nugent, Fifth ed. (London: Lamb, 1748). 1.

which the subject has been impressed by the work of art is what matters to DuBos. Morizot writes, for instance, that DuBos “underst[ood] that sensuousness decides in the favour of painting, because it is a sensible medium”.<sup>77</sup>

Theories of taste found their basis in subjectively felt responses, among which Montesquieu’s *Essay on Taste*, Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Gerard’s *An Essay on Taste* and Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. Montesquieu, diverging from his rationalist predecessors, wrote:

These [...] pleasures of the mind constitute the proper objects of *taste*, those objects which we term beautiful, good, agreeable, natural, delicate, tender, graceful, elegant, noble, grand, sublime and majestic, as also the qualities to which we give the name of *Je ne sais quoi*.<sup>78</sup>

The sources, therefore, of beauty, goodness &c. lie within us, and of consequence, when we enquire into their causes, we do no more than investigate the springs of our mental pleasures.<sup>79</sup>

We perceive objects to which we attribute qualities internally: our aesthetic responses are therefore subjective, pleasures of the mind which are both their cause and our enjoyment.

Along these lines, Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Hutcheson notably articulated what was meant by the ‘internal sense’:

Let it be observ’d, that in the following Papers, the Word Beauty is taken for the Idea rais’d in us, and a Sense of Beauty for our Power of receiving this Idea. Harmony also denotes our pleasant Ideas arising from Composition of Sounds, and a good Ear (as it is generally taken) a Power of perceiving this pleasure.<sup>80</sup>

It is of no consequence whether we call these Ideas of Beauty and Harmony, Perceptions of the External Senses of Seeing and Hearing, or not. I should rather

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<sup>77</sup> Morizot, "18th Century French Aesthetics."

<sup>78</sup> DeMontesquieu, "Essay on Taste," in *An Essay on Taste with Three Dissertations on the Same Subject by Mr. De Voltaire, Mr. D'alembert, Mr. De Montesquieu*, ed. Alexander Gerard (Edinburgh, London: A. Kincaid and J. Bell in Edinburgh; A. Millar in the Strand, London, 1759). 258.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 259.

<sup>80</sup> Francis Hutcheson, "An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises." (London 1726). 23.

chuse to call our Power of perceiving these Ideas an Internal Sense, were it only for the Convenience of distinguishing them from other sensations of Seeing and Hearing, which men have without Perception of Beauty and Harmony.<sup>81</sup>

Part of Hutcheson's project was accounting for non-perceptual objects that are "accompanied by pleasure", like the "beauty perceiv'd in Theorems, or universal Truths, in general Causes, and some extensive Principles of Action".<sup>82</sup> Hutcheson made room for a priori and universal knowledge but made the important distinction that a priori universal knowledge is not the means by which we experience pleasure in the beautiful, but that the external senses are. In a note to this introduction to his own essay, Gerard wrote of Hutcheson that Hutcheson terms the internal sense as "subsequent" or "reflex" senses "because they suppose some previous perception of the objects, about which they are properly referred to our external organs".<sup>83</sup>

Hume, who was influenced by Hutcheson, thought that taste was based on immediate, felt, subjective response. Such responses were accurate or inaccurate, correct or incorrect, depending on how refined or experienced the subject. Experience, in this sense, did not mean discerning the a priori mathematical, formal values underpinning beauty, nor did it entail appealing to universal criteria. Rather, it entailed the ability to objectively and sensibly discern and appreciate beauty or to recognise deformity. This claim was straightforward especially where our experience of, for example, nature was concerned. However, Hume conceded that reason played a role, insofar as it helped us to refine the 'internal sense', in the experience of objects that prima facie did require an appeal to universal principles, such as works of art. He writes, as Shelley quotes:

[I]n order to pave the way for a [judgment of taste], and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained. Some species of beauty, especially the natural kinds, on their first appearance command our affection and approbation; and where they fail of this effect, it is

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>83</sup> Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste with Three Dissertations on the Same Subject* (Edinburgh, London: A. Kincaid and J. Bell in Edinburgh; A. Millar in the Strand, London, 1759). 2.

impossible for any reasoning to redress their influence, or adapt them better to our taste and sentiment. But in many orders of beauty, particularly those of the fine arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning in order to feel the proper sentiment.<sup>84</sup>

In relation to art, taste was an internal sense for Hume, and one that could be developed by the art critic through practice and experience. The more we have experienced and have internalised those experiences, the more we could rely on those internalised experiences to guide our judgments of taste. This does not mean that the external senses had no role to play, just that we have aesthetic ideas that correspond to the properties of art that we experience through our external senses.

Importantly, Hume mentions that “some species of beauty, especially the natural kinds, on their first appearance command our affection and approbation; and where they fail of this effect it is impossible for any reasoning to redress their influence or adapt them better to our taste”.<sup>85</sup> Here we see a direct correlation between beauty and the aesthetic that in contemporary aesthetics has expanded, thanks to Sibley, to include a wider range of positive and negative aesthetic qualities. However, Hume is also suggesting that where natural beauty is concerned, there is something primal about our response to it, one that no reasoning or justification could alter. This contributes to the overall argument that sees the aesthetics of nature as at least equivalent to the aesthetics of art precisely because it is immediate in the sense that it does not require the kind of theorising or contextualising that our experiences of art do.

In any case, if resisting the rule-governed basis on which the rationalists built their concept of the aesthetic was what subjectivists were doing to in part, and that resulted in emphasising perception and internal sense; how could we distinguish genuinely aesthetic response from ‘ordinary’ perception both in nature and in art? This is where ‘disinterest’ becomes a key concept, a concept that we will return to throughout the thesis, because it is the distinctive feature that differentiates aesthetic perceptual experience from non-

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<sup>84</sup> David Hume, "Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals," in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A Selby-Bigge and P. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1751), Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic."

<sup>85</sup> Hume, "Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals." Section One.

aesthetic perceptual experience. A proper understanding of disinterest allows us to see why perceptual, aesthetic, experience need therefore not be dependent on an intentionally created art object, but on many objects, including nature and other non-art objects.

## § Disinterest

Disinterest is a concept that emerged alongside the concepts of taste and immediacy in the eighteenth century, and reached its fullest and most detailed articulation in Kant. My aim in this section is to make sense of the concept within its historical context and re-assert its importance to aesthetic experience and aesthetic perception specifically. Disinterest was important both because of its relationship with the aesthetic and because of its relationship with virtue. Indeed disinterest in eighteenth century British aesthetics found its genesis in the philosophical desire to reject that moral action and aesthetic appreciation should be based on self-interest and desire rather than attending to virtuous actions or external objects.<sup>86</sup> Kant then explicitly made a clear demarcation between the aesthetic and the moral.

Just as the eighteenth century concept of taste countered overly rigid, rule-driven rationalism, the eighteenth century concept of disinterest countered the psychological egoism and ethical self-interest in, for example, Hobbes' philosophy that describes the human psychological state as acting solely out of self-interest, curbing self-interest only to ensure civility in contractual relations with others. The 'dis' in disinterest thus referred to the denial of self-interest, rather than the denial of a subjective, non-selfish, interest in an object. We will see the importance of the following discussion on ethics to aesthetics as the concept of disinterest comes to fruition below and in subsequent chapters when it will re-emerge. I now focus on the ethical to explain the background against which the concept of disinterest came to fruition. The conclusion I will draw later in my thesis is that disinterest does not necessarily entail aesthetic formalism or attitude theories, but is the very locus that enables aesthetic perception due to the kind of

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<sup>86</sup> Shaftesbury was one example of this. Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, Earl of, "Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times." (London: John Darby, 1711).



perceptual attention it entails. I turn first to the 'state of nature' and 'self-interested' view, before turning to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson who contested it.

Chapter thirteen of Hobbes' *Leviathan* is known for his negative and pessimistic outlook on human self-interest and compulsion for war. Here he writes for example:

For [...] equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthelesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their owne conversation, and sometimes their delectation only,) endeavour to destroy or subdue one an other.

And from this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himselfe, so reasonable, as Anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him. So that in the nature of man, we find three principall causes of quarrel. First, Competition; Secondly, diffidence; Thirdly, Glory.<sup>87</sup>

The natural state of man, according to Hobbes, is a state in which he is not empowered by reason to seek peace through proper relations with others in society, is overcome with self-interested desire to the extent that he enters easily into disagreement.

Shaftesbury denied the view that we enter easily into struggles with others because of our self-interested desires. He viewed ethics as being derived from reason and sentiment and gave a pejorative account of self-interest, one which does not serve the public good, even when used in a religious context:

It may be consider'd withal; That in this religious sort of Discipline, the Principle of *Self-love*, which is naturally so prevailing in us, being no-way moderated or restrain'd, but rather improv'd and made stronger every day, by the exercise of the Passions in a subject of more extended Self-interest; there may be reason to apprehend lest the Temper of this kind shou'd extend it-self in general thro' all the Parts of Life. For if the Habit be such as to occasion, in every particular, a stricter Attention to Self-good, and private Interest; it must insensibly diminish the Affections towards Publick Good, or the Interest of Society; and introduce a certain Narrowness of Spirit, which (as some pretend) is peculiarly observable in the devout Persons and Zealots of almost every religious Persuasion.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, New York: Penguin Classics, 1651). 184-185.

<sup>88</sup> Shaftesbury, "Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times." 25-26.

This way of thinking challenged the spirit of Hobbesian self-interest and will have implications in the aesthetic context and for aesthetic perception. Self-interest in political and religious contexts should be rejected according to Shaftesbury, but not just for the greater good of public life, for society, but for their value as intrinsic entities.

And a Life without *natural Affection, Friendship, or Sociableness*, wou'd be found a wretched one, were it to be try'd. 'Tis as these Feelings and Affections are intrinsically valuable and worthy, that *Self-interest* is to be rated and esteem'd. A Man is nothing so much *himself*, as by his *Temper*, and *the Character of his Passions and Affections*.<sup>89</sup>

Our self-interest is embedded in the relations we have with others, our affections and social interactions. A life without these is not desirable. Hobbes' view of man's natural state could not be right, for such a state leaves her without those things that are intrinsically valuable and worthy, rather than valuable to her own self-interested projects. Natural affection and friendship and attending to objects for their own sake was as, if not more, important than one's self-interested projects.

For Stolnitz, this was a pre-cursor for disinterest. "[T]he virtuous man", writes Stolnitz about Shaftesbury's view, "is like nothing so much as the art-lover, from whom he differs only in the objects which he apprehends."<sup>90</sup> The virtuous man, in this context, is one who does not display the characteristics evident in Hobbes' characterisation of man in his natural state. If man is virtuous, that is to say, not in a state of self-interested desire, he is able to contemplate objects of aesthetic interest, namely, art. In support of this Stolnitz quotes the following passage:

The case is the same in *mental* or *moral* Subjects, as in ordinary *Bodys*, or the common Subjects of *Sense*. The Shapes, Motions, Colours, and Proportions of these latter being presented to our Eye; there necessarily results a Beauty or Deformity, according to the different Measure, Arrangement and Disposition of their several Parts. So in *Behaviour* and *Actions*, when presented to our Understanding, there must be found, of necessity, an apparent Difference, according to the Regularity or Irregularity of the Subjects.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>90</sup> Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Significance of Lord Shaftesbury in Modern Aesthetic Theory," *Philosophical Quarterly* II, no. 43 (1961). 133.

The Mind, which is Spectator or Auditor of *other Minds*, cannot be without its *Eye* and *Ear*; so as to discern Proportion, distinguish Sound, and scan each Sentiment or Thought which comes before it. It can let nothing escape its Censure. It feels the Soft and Harsh, the Agreeable and Disagreeable, in the Affections; and finds a *Foul* and *Fair*, a *Harmonious* and a *Dissonant*, as really and truly here, as in any musical Numbers, or in the outward Forms or Representations of sensible Things.<sup>91</sup>

Stolnitz' point about the link Shaftesbury makes between virtue, aesthetics and art, "that the capacity for such perception and for the feeling of approbation or disapprobation is virtue" is apt. The quotation taken from Shaftesbury also makes evident the view that the qualities of beauty, harmony or deformity are perceivable and indicate something about "Sensible" qualities, as is being argued here. Such perceiving is not about advancing one's own self-interested motivations, but about attending to the qualities of the "Sensible" object. We perceive these qualities and therefore have an opening on objects in the external world. These qualities are vivid and tell us something about those external objects and potentially about the state of affairs external to us.

Stolnitz's article on the concept's etymology and its historical usage helps to locate the term within the philosophical writings of the eighteenth century.<sup>92</sup> Stolnitz argued that 'disinterest' first appeared in the writings of Shaftesbury, that the concept then evolved in the writings of Hutcheson and Burke, achieving its status as an object-oriented phenomenological experience in Alison, rather than a subject-oriented one. In what follows, I am going to settle on a discussion of Hutcheson, because of his important contribution to our understanding of 'disinterest' and because Hutcheson's views on these matters have figured in recent debates concerning the nature of aesthetic properties, aesthetic experience and the very essence of the aesthetic.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Shaftesbury, "Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times.", Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins Of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 2 (1961). II.3. 133.

<sup>92</sup> Stolnitz, "On the Origins Of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness".

<sup>93</sup> Noël Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory," in *Beyond Aesthetics*, ed. Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), ———, "Non-Perceptual Aesthetic Properties: Comments for James Shelley," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44,

Hutcheson's contribution chimes with that of Shaftesbury, but he makes explicit the thought that 'disinterest' is borne of virtue and characterises it as 'lack of self-interest':

Self-love, or Desire of private Interest; since all Virtue is either some such Affections, or Actions consequent upon them, it must necessarily follow, That Virtue springs from some other Affection than Self-Love, or Desire of private Advantage. And where Self-Interest excites the same Action, the Approbation is given only to the disinterested Principle.

As to the Love of Benevolence, the very Name excludes Self-Interest. We never call that Man benevolent, who is in fact useful to others, but at the same time only intends his own Interest, without any desire of, or delight in, the Good of others. If there be any Benevolence at all, it must be disinterested; for the most useful Action imaginable, loses all appearance of Benevolence, as soon as we discern that it only flowed from Self-Love or Interest.<sup>94</sup>

Another important concept that links in with the judgment of taste and disinterest needs to be mentioned here. That concept is 'immediacy', as referred to in the introduction. It needs to be mentioned not only because of its importance in relation to disinterest, but also because of its importance in relation to knowledge. That disinterested aesthetic judgments are not dependent on a priori reasoning was a claim used against rationalism as written in section one of this chapter, and it is a claim I wish to vindicate for my characterisation of aesthetic perception later in my thesis.

That claim is based on the view that disinterested aesthetic judgment is immediate: we do not reason our way to the sensual pleasure but perceive it and feel it in the immediate moment. Hutcheson acknowledges the possibility of attributing our knowledge of aesthetic qualities to a priori knowledge and universal principles by invoking the 'internal sense'. Experience that arises out of the 'internal sense' is similar to the experience to be had via the five senses as resulting from the external sense, but not accountable by them. Non-perceptible aesthetic qualities are attributable to the former:

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no. 4 (2004), Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic.", James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 4 (2003).

<sup>94</sup> Hutcheson, "An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises." 102, 103.

There will appear another reason perhaps hereafter for calling this power of perceiving the ideas of beauty an *internal sense*, from this, that in some other affairs where our external senses are not much concerned, we discern a sort of beauty, very like, in many respects, to that observed in sensible objects, and accompanied with like pleasure. Such is that beauty perceived in theorems, or universal truths, in general causes, and in some extensive principles of action.<sup>95</sup>

The beauty of a theorem is not perceived through the external senses, but through the internal sense. And yet, non-perceptible aesthetic qualities are not determined by a priori, reasoned, rational universal principles either in the case of the internal sense or in the case of the external sense, as written in the paragraph with the subheading “*Its [Internal Pleasure’s] pleasure necessary and immediate*”:

This superior power of perception [the internal sense] 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 of the usefulness of the object, but strikes us at first with the idea of beauty. Nor does the most accurate knowledge increase this pleasure of beauty however it may superadd a distinct rational pleasure from prospects of advantage, or from the increase of knowledge. [...] And farther, the ideas of beauty and harmony, like other sensible ideas, are *necessarily* pleasant to us, as well as any prospect of advantage or disadvantage, vary the beauty or deformity of an object. For as in the external sensations, no view of interest will make an object grateful, nor detriment distinct from immediate pain in the perception, make it disagreeable to the sense. [...] Hence it plainly appears that some objects are *immediately* the occasions of this pleasure of beauty, and that we have senses fitted to for perceiving it, and that it is distinct from that *joy* which arises upon prospect of advantage.<sup>96</sup>

For Hutcheson, because we can apply the concept of beauty to *a priori*, rational, theoretical objects as well as objects perceived through the senses, it would be implausible to think that aesthetic response comes from knowledge rather than perception, as did the Cartesian philosophers and critics, hence his need to establish the immediacy of experience for both the internal sense and the external senses. The beauty of internal or external objects is grasped immediately, non-self-interestedly, viz. disinterestedly, with senses “fitted” for the discernment of beauty or deformity.

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<sup>95</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Harmony, Design*, ed. Peter Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1725). 34.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 36-37. James Shelley, "18th Century British Aesthetics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(2010), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-british/#Hut>.

Furthermore, because Hutcheson did not draw any distinction between the external object perceived and its representational counterpart in the mind, he claimed that “external objects were beautiful in their own right” and that what we perceive is their beauty.

We can bring this back to the claims about moral self-interest made by Shaftesbury. A person “who is generally fair-minded or able to take the point of view of the disinterested spectator in moral situations would likewise be able one supposes, to take the point of view of a ‘man in general’ when exercising critical judgment”.<sup>97</sup> If we are able to put our self-interested desires to one side in the case of morality, there seems no reason to think that this shouldn’t be possible in the case of aesthetics. In the case of morality, as in aesthetics, we are thereby encouraged to treat others and external objects as ends in themselves, and in the case of aesthetics. In the aesthetic case, however, it is rich qualities attributable to the object of experience that we must attend to.

For Kant, this meant that our pleasure in the beautiful was not linked to action, as is the case in morality, but that our pleasure in the beautiful is “merely contemplative”.<sup>98</sup> Kant systematised the concepts discussed above, namely, disinterest, immediacy and taste. In Kant’s philosophy, disinterest was one of the defining criteria of taste. A judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment, grounded in a subjective response, in perceptual appearance, rather than grounded in our cognitive capacities. It is a judgment that can be taken seriously once we are certain that it is not grounded in interest: those judgments that appeal to our idiosyncratic tastes, or those that are related to the things we know already, that we desire or those that we relate to how we think the world ought to be are not pure judgments of taste.

If disinterest is a criteria for the pure judgment of taste, than a judgment of taste relates to the qualities of my phenomenal experience, rather than whether or not the object of my phenomenal experience is agreeable to me. A judgment that is related to what is agreeable to me, such as my penchant for sweet, juicy, chunky pieces of

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<sup>97</sup> Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003). 150-151.

<sup>98</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1790), Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic."

pineapple does not have the immediate novelty that my recent discovery of the savoury saltiness of edemame beans, although this too, might turn into an agreeable judgment, rather than one of taste. In other words, I should recognize that my judgment of pineapple, or my future consumption of edemame beans is agreeable because I have a penchant for them however much my initial judgments of them may have been pure, without a pre-existing interest in them and therefore without the judgment being mixed with desire. Because I now have a pre-existing penchant for them, it is likely that I will desire them. Once this happens, it is likely, although not necessary, that I am attending to the nature of my idiosyncratic taste for them, rather than their qualities.

A judgment of taste is also interested, and therefore not a pure judgment of taste, according to Kant, if it is linked with the good. If the judgment is linked with the good, it is also automatically linked with purpose, desire and outcome. Again, the issue is nuanced. Kant is concerned that the judgment should be linked to the qualities of phenomenal experience, rather than thoughts about how a person should act, or the role the aesthetic object has in action. Propaganda seems a plausible, if extreme, example: if a subject is a Nazi sympathiser and declares Leni Riefenstahl's films to be beautiful, it is unclear whether that judgment is made based on the film's phenomenal aesthetic qualities or whether it is based on the subject's political sympathies. If based on the latter, the Nazi-sympathiser's desire for the construction of a world that would appeal to him, who sees good in a world free from anyone but the Aryan race, that judgment is not a judgment of taste, but an interested judgment: one that "[consequently] will[s] a satisfaction of the existence of an object or of an action, i.e. some sort of interest".<sup>99</sup> Hence the Nazi-sympathiser willing the good (according to him), namely, existence of a society like that depicted in the film. It is still possible that Leni Riefenstahl's films may be exemplars of film-making in terms of its aesthetic qualities, however unpalatable the views expressed or implied in it. It may also be true that the moral case against them trumps the aesthetic case for them, but the point is that the Nazi-sympathiser's judgment will clearly be interested insofar as he wills the society depicted or implied in the film.

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<sup>99</sup> Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 93.

Another way of looking at this is to compare the judgment of taste with a moral judgment. In the first instance, a moral act is permissible, according to Kant: if a maxim can be formulated to capture a reason to act a proposed way; if that maxim can be taken as a universal law of nature (and all rational agents must follow that law); if acting in that way is conceivable in a world governed by this law of nature, and if it is rationally possible to will to act according to the maxim in such a world. Given that a judgment of taste is immediate and aesthetic, rather than cognitive, a categorical imperative for taste that is based on reason is not possible: the judgment comes to fruition, and terminates, in the pleasure of the beautiful, judgment of taste “whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective”.<sup>100</sup> The kind of explanation that we can provide for the moral lives we unreflectively get on with cannot be provided in the aesthetic case.

One final way of understanding disinterest in light of its historical background is by appealing to Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer, self-interested desire was a kind of suffering, one that could only end by not desiring, by liberating ourselves from our desires and from our restlessness. Disinterest for Schopenhauer entailed the “temporary escape from the will because it is the disinterested appreciation of the art object which forces us to set aside our normal concerns”.<sup>101</sup> It is through our experiences of art that we can gain access to, and hence knowledge of, the objects beyond cause and effect, the platonic forms or the noumenal objects of Kant’s metaphysics. Because true art is the product of genius, an artist whose creativity and imagination is able to transcend cause and effect, it gives us a glimpse of what is not ordinarily known. It is suited to disinterested contemplation, free from the will, practical reason and desire. Carroll writes that according to Schopenhauer: “The domain of art is the senses; art gives us sensitive or sensuous knowledge via perception.”<sup>102</sup> Our disinterested, aesthetic experiences allow us to transcend both our individual selves and the phenomenal world, giving us freedom practical, self-interested concerns. Here is a pertinent section that

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<sup>100</sup> Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic."

<sup>101</sup> Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). 83.

<sup>102</sup> Noël Carroll, "Arthur Schopenhauer," in *The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy*, ed. Robert C. and David Sherman Solomon (Blackwell Publishing, 2003).



makes vivid Schopenhauer's account of disinterest and one to which aesthetic experience is often equated:

Raised by the power of the mind, a person relinquishes the usual way of looking at things, stops tracing, as the forms of the principle of sufficient reason prompt him to do, only their interrelatedness, the final goal of which is always a relation to his own will. He ceases to consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, and looks simply and solely at the *what*. He does not allow abstract thought, the concepts of the reason, to take possession of his consciousness, but instead, gives the whole power of his mind to perception, immerses himself entirely in this, and lets his whole consciousness be filled with the quiet contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether a landscape, a tree, a crag, a building, or whatever it may be. He *loses* himself in this object (to use a pregnant German idiom), *i.e.*, he forgets his very individuality, his will, and continues to exist only as the pure subject, the clear mirror of the object, so that it is as if the object alone were there without anyone to perceive it, and he can no longer separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, because the whole of consciousness is filled and taken up with one single sensuous picture. [...] The person, rapt in this perception is thereby no longer individual (for in such perception the individual has lost himself), but he is a pure, willless, painless, timeless *subject of knowledge*.<sup>103</sup>

When a subject is attending to an object for its own sake, without willing to satisfy a need or a desire or without it serving some moral purpose, they experience it for its properties, which may include positive or negative aesthetic properties. The subject also attends to the experience as one of interaction between perceiver and perceived. Hence the thought that disinterest contributes to sympathetic attention, attending to the object as an end in itself.

## § Aesthetic Perception and Hutcheson

Now that we have looked at the judgment of taste and disinterest, the aim of this section is to trace the roots of the idea of aesthetic perception and Hutcheson's appeal to nature as the paradigm of such experience, an idea that was most clearly articulated by Hutcheson in the eighteenth century. The secondary literature on Hutcheson focuses on

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<sup>103</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Truebner & Co, Ludgate Hill, 1886). 102.

whether he views aesthetic perception as requiring knowledge. By the end of this section I hope to present a convincing argument for the view that Hutcheson's characterisation of the aesthetic is perceptual and epistemic, but epistemic without needing to appeal to categories of art or science, which further supports the perceptual account of aesthetic experience I wish to support as well as the importance of nature as a paradigm of aesthetic experience.

The controversy about whether or not Hutcheson characterised aesthetic perception as epistemic is important because it has repercussions for how philosophers have construed aesthetic perception as contributing to aesthetic attitude or formalist theories of aesthetics. Philosophers who have argued that Hutcheson's view is non-epistemic because of his claims about disinterest, taste and immediacy, have seen a clear progression from Hutcheson's aesthetics to twentieth century aesthetic attitude and formalist theories which is celebrated by some philosophers as purely aesthetic or derided by other philosophers for negating the importance of content or context.<sup>104</sup> Either way, his view on this account is characterized as merely perceptual, lacking awareness or content that relates to non-perceptual features (such as contextual, historical information about the object). If, on the other hand, we can isolate his view that beauty is a matter of aesthetic perception, while acknowledging that that beauty has an underlying, material and measurable structure, we can see that an epistemic correlate may be at play, that there's a link between our reflexive response and the beauty the structure of which we may or may not be aware.

To recap how Hutcheson contributes to an 'internal sense' theory, his contribution makes the connection between what we perceive aesthetically, via the senses, and the internal, aesthetic responses to the qualities of external objects presented to the mind presented via those senses. It also retains a plurality of possible internal responses and at least implicitly rejects a need for epistemic categories. We know already that disinterest, pleasure in the beautiful rather than self-interested awareness of pleasure in the

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<sup>104</sup> Stolnitz, "On the Origins Of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness".", Peter Kivy, "The "Sense" Of Beauty and the Sense Of "Art": Hutcheson's Place in the History and Practice of Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 4 (1995).

beautiful, was an important factor for Hutcheson.<sup>105</sup> Another related factor for him was that our perceptions of beauty are accompanied by pleasure and are not subject to our will: they can be either pleasurable or displeasurable and we cannot procure or be guaranteed of either one or the other. Furthermore, we know that Hutcheson included in his theories on aesthetic perception the internal sense, a sense that could be applied to abstract objects, such as mathematical theorems as well as external objects that are made available to the mind by the senses:

It is of no consequence whether we call these Ideas of Beauty and Harmony, Perceptions of the External Senses of Seeing and Hearing, or not. I should rather chuse to call our power of perceiving these Ideas, an internal Sense, were it for the convenience of distinguishing them from other sensations of Seeing and Hearing, which men may have without Perception of Beauty and Harmony.<sup>106</sup>

Hutcheson's idea of beauty was an idea of internal sensation that found its origin in corporeal sensation but was brought about by a reflection.<sup>107</sup> The inner sense of beauty includes both 'absolute' or 'original' beauty and 'comparative' or 'relative' beauty. The former is described as "uniformity amidst variety", also referred in the secondary literature as a "compound ration" and relates to works of nature, harmony in music, some works of art when these are not mimetic. The latter, 'comparative' or 'relative' beauty is mimetic and therefore essentially dependent on another object. Absolute beauty is to be discovered by the internal senses, which include "the good ear" and a "sense of harmony".<sup>108</sup>

The internal sense relates to the beauty of mathematical theorems as well as the external qualities of objects. Hutcheson is allowing for the possibility that aesthetic qualities are measurable and analyzable mathematically, and his view starts to resemble the Cartesian rationalism I discuss above, in particular the thought that aesthetic beauty

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<sup>105</sup> Stolnitz, "On the Origins Of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness"." 134.

<sup>106</sup> Hutcheson, "An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises." 23.

<sup>107</sup> Emily Michael, "Francis Hutcheson on Aesthetic Perception and Aesthetic Pleasure " *British Journal of Aesthetics* 24, no. 3 (1984). 243.

<sup>108</sup> Hutcheson, "An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises." xi-xxiii.

can be measured proportionally and that ugliness and dissonance would lack such proportionality. He is also allowing for the possibility of comparison and not, I would propose, just the comparison of mimetic object with its object of origin, but the comparison of mimetic object with previously perceived objects of a similar kind. The reason for this is that, in his more general theory of perception, Hutcheson gives an account of the "Idea of the Imagination", a "weak idea of things previously perceived".<sup>109</sup> In looking at a painting of a chair, I may, in my own mind, compare it with the particular, original chair on which it is based, if I have been fortunate enough to see it. I may alternatively compare it to any chair I have seen or I may compare to paintings of other chairs. This, however, is only possible if, according to Hutcheson, I have seen these other objects and use my imagination to evoke them.

Aesthetic perception is subjective, on Hutcheson's account, but it is also universal in that, given we are creatures of more or less similar dispositions, we can experience absolute beauty through uniformity amidst variety and comparative beauty through comparisons of external objects with objects of similar kinds. These comparisons are epistemic to the extent that they rely on discernment, but that internal sense has, unless very young or inexperienced, already been moulded by previous experience in the case of comparative beauty. In the case of absolute beauty, although we may not be able to provide a mathematical explanation for the accompanying pleasure we feel in a positive experience of beauty, it is likely that an experience that has mathematical proportionality will be accompanied by the idea of beauty.

Those who take Hutcheson's view to be non-epistemic argue that he "excludes any concern for knowledge of the object", that the object is "wholly different from the enjoyment of beauty" and can have no effect upon the experience of beauty.<sup>110</sup> If the internal sense equates to taste, that is to say if taste is "immediate, instinctive and disinterested", than knowledge can by definition have no role to play in the resultant

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<sup>109</sup> Michael, "Francis Hutcheson on Aesthetic Perception and Aesthetic Pleasure ". 243.

<sup>110</sup> Jerome Stolnitz, ""The Aesthetic Attitude" In the Rise of Modern Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36, no. 4 (1978). 5.

experience.<sup>111</sup> Some argue that Hutcheson's notion that the aesthetic is immediate is inconsistent with his second definition of beauty: if relative beauty is comparative, it is necessarily epistemic and requires a mode of cognition that the immediacy Hutcheson seemingly espouses cannot capture.<sup>112</sup> Others suggest explicitly that Hutcheson momentarily divorces knowledge from aesthetic perception by referring to Hutcheson's claim that "[m]any of our sensitive Perceptions are pleasant, and many painful, immediately, and that without any knowledge of the Cause of this Pleasure or Pain, or how the Objects excite it or are the Occasions of it [...]".<sup>113</sup> This divorce between the perceptual and the epistemic is supposed to have been the genesis of formalism.<sup>114</sup>

We do not have to look very far to establish that Hutcheson was not making a claim denying any link between perceptual aesthetic properties and knowledge. Shelley, for example, argues that Hutcheson was merely claiming that we cannot reason ourselves into experiencing beauty, that perceiving beauty is, well, a matter of perception. Furthermore, given that Hutcheson emphasized the importance of the internal sense, which accounted for theoretical, abstract beauty, it would have been obviously inconsistent to deny the relationship between aesthetic perception and knowledge. Since beauty could exist as an internal sense and could be linked with theoretical knowledge, a relation between the two could be established. For Hutcheson, beauty belongs to the category of the sensible, rather than the rational, categories and that he is claiming "what Sibley does when Sibley claims that aesthetic properties are perceptual", a comparison that Shelley makes.<sup>115</sup>

Sibley writes, for example, that taste is about the discernment of aesthetic qualities in things, the ability to recognise aesthetic merit and make judgements of aesthetic worth.

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<sup>111</sup> George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic*, First ed. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974). 81.

<sup>112</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, "The Two Beauties: A Perspective of Hutcheson's Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 38 (1979/80).

<sup>113</sup> Hutcheson, "An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises." 20.

<sup>114</sup> Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory." 25.

<sup>115</sup> James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 4 (2003). 376-377.

This involves looking to see whether “things have aesthetic properties about which correct or mistaken judgments can be made and defended” and “whether it is possible to defend, as beyond question, various general principles of *evaluation*, for example that if something is graceful it has, pro tanto, and barring special explanation, some aesthetic merit.”<sup>116</sup>

## § Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to give an account of the origins of the subjective turn that occurred in the eighteenth century. For aesthetics, this entailed a turning away from rational principles that dictated the production and appreciation of aesthetic properties. Eighteenth century philosophers explored the concept of taste, disinterest, immediacy and aesthetic perception. Through Hutcheson especially, we can see an account of the aesthetic that was sensitive to the perceptual aspects of the aesthetic, in that beauty was part of the sensible, but it was a property that could be applied both to external objects and internal knowledge. Rather than necessarily leading to aesthetic attitude or formalist theories, it attempted to characterize what it is that is distinctive about aesthetic perception. I will leave to a later chapter the provision of my own account of aesthetic perception, but the idea is that our faculty for perceptual discernment that is fundamental to the aesthetic, as we have seen with the development of the aesthetic in the eighteenth century, and its culmination in Sibley’s writings.

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<sup>116</sup> F. N. Sibley, "About Taste," in *Approach to Aesthetics*, ed. Betty Redfern John Benson, Jeremy Roxbee Cox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). 52.

## **Chapter Three: Nature versus Art**

### **§ Introduction**

This chapter follows on from the previous two chapters by focusing explicitly on nature as an aesthetic object, immediately and aesthetically perceivable, in the areas of the history of philosophy presented in chapters one and two. The first section presents a discussion of nature in ancient and medieval philosophy, in which nature was broadly thought to be prior to art, explained by the idea that mimesis is essentially nature, or the external world, represented. The section then turns to the idea that both Descartes' philosophical method and his *Compendium Musicae* eliminated nature from the aesthetic and artistic realms. Section two goes onto to show that Hutcheson and Kant saw nature as the central case in aesthetics and culminates in a discussion of Hegel's explicit rejection of nature from aesthetics. Section three rejects the idea that some concepts, such as 'disinterest' and 'formalism' necessarily follow from Hutcheson, Kant and their aesthetics of nature as the precursor for a narrow understanding of the aesthetic. It then turns to contemporary philosophers who have brought nature back into the aesthetic realm and begins to locate their respective views so that I may later show that nature is at least as important an aesthetic object as is art, especially if aesthetic properties are thought of as perceptual properties. All sections sketch varying approaches to the aesthetics of nature taken by philosophers that help show that nature is an aesthetic paradigm.

### **§ The Turn Away from Nature: from the Ancients to Descartes**

In chapter one, we saw that despite Plato and Aristotle's opposing metaphysical differences about the importance of art and the aesthetic, both would have acknowledged the importance of aesthetics more widely conceived. We should note, at this stage, that the term *aesthesia* dates back to Greek times and meant 'to sense', 'to apprehend', and 'to feel' through the senses and was a term that implied 'perception'. Plato rejected art

from his ideal republic but he did not reject the universal concept of ‘beauty’. While Aristotle made no reference to nature as an aesthetic object as such, he did conceive of human creativity, and its resulting aesthetic properties, as part of nature’s teleology, an extension of nature’s creative powers and an important locus for understanding human nature. Aristotle ranked sensory pleasure, which for him were sensual pleasures, suggesting that our aesthetic experiences could be experiences of any object.<sup>117</sup>

It is clear from ancient poetry that its authors thought that the characters featured in their plays were embedded in their natural contexts. Nature itself thus played an important role. Grand emotions were felt by characters and written about in relation to overpowering natural spectacles. That the examples from plays and literature cited below incorporate nature indicates an interest in nature over and above human affairs. Many Greek tragedies incorporated significant roles for the sun, the sea or forests. One such example is *Philoctetes*, where the Isle of Lemnos has a role that rivals the hero’s:

#### ODYSSEUS

This is the shore of the seagirt land of Lemnos, untrodden by mortals, not inhabited. Here it was, you who were reared as the son of the noblest father among the Greeks, son of Achilles, Neoptolemus, that I once put ashore the Malian, the son of Poeas-on the orders of those in command-whose foot was dripping from a malady that was eating it way; since we could not pour libations or sacrifice in peace, but he filled the entire camp with savage and ill-omened cries, shouting and screaming. But why must I talk of that? It is not the moment for long conversation, for fear he should learn that I have come, and I should spill out the whole scheme by which I plan at once to take him. But from now on your task is to help me, and to see where in this place there is a cave with two mouths, such that when it is cold there is a double seat in the sun, and in summer a breeze wafts sleep through the cavern with its opening at both ends. A little below it, on the left, you may see a spring with drinking water, if it is still there. Go forward quietly, and tell me whether he still occupies the same place or he is somewhere else; so that for the rest of our discussion you may listen and I explain, and each may make his contribution.

#### PHILOCTETES

Come now, as I depart I will call upon the land! Farewell, home that shared my watches and water nymphs of the meadows, and strong sound of sea beating on the promontory, where often my head was drenched inside my cave by the battering of

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<sup>117</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, Rorty, ed. *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, Schaper, *Prelude to Aesthetics*.



the wind, and often the mountain of Hermes brought back to me a groan answering my voices as we are leaving you, we are leaving now, though we had never dared to trust this hope. Farewell, Seagirt land of Lemnos, and waft me on a peaceful voyage that I cannot complain of, to where mighty Fate is taking me, and the will of my friends and the all-subduing god who has decreed this!<sup>118</sup>

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, a few lines set a natural scene before the play begins. These read:

*The scene is a rural setting, near the sacred grove of the Eumenides at Colonus, northwest of Athens. Somewhere in the middle of the stage a rock, which can be used as a seat, is visible; the grove is bounded by a low ridge of rock, and one could sit upon its edge. On the stage can be seen the statue of the hero Colonus. Enter OEDIPUS and ANTIGONE.*<sup>119</sup>

And nightingales are almost immediately mentioned:

#### ANTIGONE

Unhappy father, Oedipus, the walls that surround the city look to be far off; and this place is sacred, one can easily guess, with the bay, the olive, and the vine growing everywhere; and inside it many feathered nightingales make their music. Relax your limbs here on this unhewn rock; for you have gone a long way for an aged man.<sup>120</sup>

On one view, Sophocles incorporated the nightingale, known for her “sweet song, but also for her association with lament, arising from the tragic myth of Procne and Tereus”, “an important symbol of tragic poetry and its transformative function”.<sup>121 122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Sophocles, "Philoctetes," in *Sophocles Ii: Antigone, Women of Trachis, Philtetes, Oedipus at Colonus*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Harvard, London: Harvard University Press, 409 b.c.). 258, 407.

<sup>119</sup> ———, "Oedipus at Colonus," in *Sophocles Ii*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Harvard, London: Harvard University Press, 406 b.c.). 413, 415.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 415.

<sup>121</sup> Aara Suksi, "The Poet at Colonus: Nighthingales in Sophocles," *Mnemosyne: A Journal in Classical Studies* 54, no. Fasc. 6 (2001). 646. Sophocles, "Oedipus at Colonus," in *Sophocles Ii*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Harvard, London: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>122</sup> It may be thought that there's an issue here about whether these quotations, or references to them, support a nature first view, given that they occur in plays that are themselves aesthetic works. However, that objects of nature appear at all in these works is of importance because Sophocles will have deliberately chosen to write about them.

The idea that symbolism related to nature also played an extensive role in the Medieval period. Scholastic writers of the medieval period, like John Scotus Eriugena, were thought to have “read” nature “as if it were a vast store of symbols” that “conceived of the universe as a revelation of God in His ineffable beauty, God reflected both in material and ideal beauty, and diffused in the loveliness of all creation”.<sup>123</sup> This was also evident in texts like *Guigemar*, one of the *lais* of Marie de France, courtly stories intended as oral performances for lords and ladies. These *lais* were about war, love and magic, steeped in the idea that nature is divine knowledge and eloquence. They also featured symbolic representations of nature, not unlike the nightingale above, that symbolised the concept of love:

De tant I out mespris Nature  
Kë unc de nule amur n’out cure.<sup>124</sup>

Which translates as:

But Nature had done him such a grievous wrong that he never displayed the  
slightest interest in love.<sup>125</sup>

At the beginning of the story, nature is what is supposed to (and will later) provide Guigemar the Knight, the *lais’* hero, with an interest in love. A clearer example of symbolism, however, would be that of the stag:

En la flur de sun meillur pris  
S’en vait li ber en sun païs  
Veeir sun pere e sun seignur,  
Sa bone mere e sa sorur,  
Ki mult l’vaeient desiré.  
Ensemble ode us ad sujurné,  
Ceo m’est avis, un meis entier.  
Talent li prist d’aler chacier.

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We can say that post-Cartesian authors did not include elements in their plays, hence the thought that they were distinctly human and social affairs.

<sup>123</sup> Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986). 18.

<sup>124</sup> Marie de France, *Guigemar* (Durham: Durham French Texts, mid-13th Century). Lines 57-58.

<sup>125</sup> ———, "Guigemar," in *The Lais of Marie De France* (London: Penguin Books, 1986). 44.

La nuit sumunt ses chevaliers,  
 Ses veneür e ses berniers;  
 Al matin vait en la forest,  
 Kar cil deduiz forment li plest.  
 A un grant cerf sunt aruté,  
 E il chien furent descuplé.  
 Li veneür curent devaunt,  
 Li damaisels se vait targaunt:  
 Sun arc li portë uns vallez,  
 Sun ansac e sun berserez.  
 Traire voleit, si mes eüst,  
 Ainz ke d'iluec se remeüst.  
 En l'espeise d'un grant buissun  
 Vit une bise od un foün;  
 Tute fu blaunche cele beste,  
 Perches de cerf out en ta teste.  
 Sur l'abai del brachet sailli.  
 Il tent sun arc, si trait a li,  
 En l'esclot la feri devaunt;  
 Ele chaï demeintenaunt.  
 La seete resort ariere,  
 Guigemar fiert en tel maniere  
 En la quisse desk'al cheval,  
 Ke tost l'estuet descendre aval;  
 Ariere chet sur l'erbe drue  
 Delez la bise k'out ferue.  
 La bise, ki nafree esteit,  
 Anguissuse ert, si se paineit.  
 Après parla en itel guise:  
 'Oï, lase! Jo sui ocise!  
 E tu, vassal, ki m'as nafree,  
 Tel seit la tue destinee:  
 Jamais n'aies tu medecine,  
 Ne par herbe ne par racine!  
 Ne par mire, ne par poisun  
 N'avras tu jamés garisun  
 De la plaie k'as en la quisse,  
 De si ke cele te guarisse  
 Ki souffera pur tue amur  
 Issi grant peine e tel dolor  
 K'unkes femme taunt ne suffri,  
 E tu referas taunt pur li;  
 Dunt tut cil s'esmerveillerunt  
 Ki aiment et amé  
 Avrunt

U ki pois amerunt après.  
Va t'en de ci! Lais M'aveir pes!<sup>126</sup>

Which, translated into English would be:

At the height of his fame this noble knight returned to his homeland to see his father and his lord, his loving mother and his sister, who had all longed for his return. He had spent a month with them I think, when the fancy took him to go hunting. That evening he summoned his knights, his hunters and his beaters, and in the morning went off into the forest, for hunting brought him great pleasure. They gathered in pursuit of a large stag and the hounds were unleashed. The hunters ran in front and the young man lingered behind. A servant carried his bow, his hunting-knife and his quiver. If the opportunity arose, he wished to be ready to shoot an arrow, before the animal had stirred. In the heart of a large bush he saw a hind with its fawn; the beast was completely white with the antlers of a stag on its head. When the dog barked, it darted forth and Guigemar stretched his bow, fired his arrow and struck the animal in its forehead. Immediately the hind fell to the ground, but the arrow rebounded, hitting Guigemar in the thigh and going right through into the horse's flesh. He was forced to dismount and fell back on the thick grass beside the hind he had struck. The animal, wounded and in great pain, lamented in these words: 'Alas! I am mortally wounded. Vassal, you who have wounded me, let this be your fate. May you never find a cure, nor may any herb, root, doctor or potion ever heal the wound you have in your thigh until you are cured by a woman who will suffer for your love more pain and anguish than any other woman has ever known, and you will suffer likewise for her, so much so that all those who are in love, who have known love or are yet to experience it, will marvel at it. Be gone from here and leave me in peace.'<sup>127</sup>

The stag's wound would have been read or heard (as these are fragments of the oral tradition that were written down) as a symbol of love and the dark side of love that has nevertheless been granted to the protagonists of the story. It is a prefiguration for the characters who fall in love, heal their hearts, heal the warring factions who are the backdrop to the story, and also heal the stag of the pain inflicted on it.

To contrast with this symbolist view, not dissimilar to contemporary views in semiotics, Aquinas presents a slightly different ontological picture. Although we find, in both Eriugena's and Aquinas' approaches, no contrasting sensibilities when it comes to aesthetically experiencing art and nature, both types of experience are of one kind. Aquinas makes an explicit distinction between art and nature whereby art is

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<sup>126</sup> France, *Guigemar*. Lines 69-122.

<sup>127</sup> ———, "Guigemar." 44.

ontologically dependent on nature and nature is not intended to be read like a book of symbols. Eco writes:

Aquinas' universe was a hierarchy of real existents, each of which acquire its individual value through participation, a value made concrete within definite and stable limits. In such a universe all beauty is good, and at the root of every good is a manner of being which consists in the definite perfection associated with a certain act of existing.<sup>128</sup>

This is important because beauty is primarily found in nature as God's creation and it is good for its own sake. Aquinas did not, however, associate the aesthetic with the artistic, as Hegel, Bell and Wollheim did, as we will see. Art, the product of human creativity could not trump that of divine creation. Again, according to Eco, for Aquinas, art is limited by the fact that it can never fully and completely imitate nature, and attempts to only insofar as it can; art operates on the natural material which precedes it and is therefore ontologically dependent on a "material substratum whose substantial nature is not altered".<sup>129</sup> This does not mean that art cannot provide the "values of proportion and integrity" but it can do so only because nature, i.e. God, has not only created the external world, but the artist's own physical, bodily, existence.<sup>130</sup> An artist may create an artwork, a building, a sculpture but they can only do so by altering materials that already exist, materials like stone, clay and colour pigments.

While there seems to have been a genuine, if not always entirely explicit interest in nature in Ancient and medieval times, Cartesian philosophy flipped the medieval metaphysical picture around and caused a turning away from nature.<sup>131</sup> It encouraged a form of idealism that drew on antiquity's ideas, that may itself have applied to or incorporated nature, but it did not draw on or seek inspiration from nature itself. In seeking what he could be certain of, Descartes, in *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, found that he could be certain that he was a thinking being. God would then intervene by being the source of our clear and distinct ideas so that he could be certain of things other his existence as a thinking being. Despite this, his was a form of extreme subjectivism

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<sup>128</sup> Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*. 52-3.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* 174-175.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>131</sup> Krantz, *L'esthétique De Descartes*. 244-254.

that ended in accounting for human consciousness as being separate from the body and was, at least in the first instance, concerned with subjectivity. Descartes' philosophy inspired the idea that external objects, including nature, were not of primary importance, since our senses (or an evil demon) may trick us in certain ways. We must be sceptical of what we perceive.<sup>132</sup>

Of central importance for Cartesian philosophy was a proof for the existence of God, whose status as a perfect being is called upon to explain human consciousness and enables us to believe in our perceptual experiences and thereafter in the existence of an external world. God provides us with clear and distinct ideas, which are true. The external world, nature, is at our disposal and therefore thinking subjects are of primary interest, not the external world. It is God that proves the existence of nature rather than nature that proves the existence of God. We turn away from our external, bodily, senses as well as the world in order to seek truth in God and our capacity for abstraction. Nature is thus insignificant except in its capacity to fit in with the a priori.

### **§ The Turn Away from Nature: from Hutcheson to Hegel**

We might now recall Hutcheson's internal sense theory and the conclusion Hutcheson draws that perceiving aesthetically is an epistemic act, not an act guided by internal knowledge, but an act guided by attending to the object of aesthetic interest. The beauty seen in an object was that object's beauty, the uniformity amidst variety that it displayed and that is picked up by the mind. On his view, because an object's quality is not determined by the category that the object belongs to, but by its "uniformity amidst variety", the object itself is the foundation for "our Sense of Beauty in the Works of Nature".

Hutcheson muses on the beauty of nature, the "vast Profusion" of which is noteworthy in expanses across the universe, in grand landscapes and within "minuter

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<sup>132</sup> René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. Robert Stoothoff John Cottingham, Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Works of Nature”. “Original”, “Absolute” beauty is thus to be discovered in nature both on a universal scale, where great variety abounds within species of animals, plants and vegetation. Most of Hutcheson’s examples of absolute beauty, the perception of uniformity amidst variety that stands alone and without comparison, are, unlike relative beauty, drawn from nature. His view was similar to Aquinas’, as he considered nature to be beauty’s original source. Anything else was in relative contrast to nature. He showed an interest in the causes of nature, in nature as a discrete object, without appealing to or requiring the sceptical machinery that Descartes brought into his metaphysical scheme. That interest carried over into nature’s aesthetic properties and our perception of them, but perceiving its properties did not entail understanding its causes.

Understanding Hutcheson’s account of aesthetic perception can help us understand the reasons for which nature is paradigmatically aesthetic. For Hutcheson, the complex, real, primary qualities generated secondary, sensible qualities. These secondary, sensible qualities (such as heat, cold, bitterness, sweetness) were sensible by virtue of our external senses being able to access them, to see, hear, smell and feel them. For Hutcheson, the very “uniformity amidst variety” that nature displays professes an excellence that is fitted to the pleasurable and natural response we have towards it. “[A]esthetic pleasure is therefore a natural response to and a natural mark of excellence in objects [...]”<sup>133</sup> However, while we have sensibilities that are well adapted to receiving aesthetic, sensible information about the world, there is nothing in that sensibility that provides the more complex information about primary qualities. While Hutcheson thought that aesthetic properties were real, he did not believe that they automatically acceded to complex ideas, or knowledge about the underlying structure of the property concerned: felt heat, for example, did not equate to knowledge about the underlying causes of heat. Here is Michael:

We can, over time, acquire an understanding of the causes of these sensations by means of observation and inference. But there is nothing in a sensible idea of heat from which one could abstract an intellectual idea of the small bodies in motion which have the power to excite this sensation. That is, data adequate to acquire a correct intellectual idea of the simpler real qualities is directly provided in sense

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<sup>133</sup> Michael, "Francis Hutcheson on Aesthetic Perception and Aesthetic Pleasure ". 251.

experience; but proper sensibles of the external senses are no more than signals or indicators of certain complex real qualities.<sup>134</sup>

Sensible ideas do not themselves provide knowledge of their underlying causes. It is by observing and attending to them, and drawing inferences, that we can potentially reach a correct and true understanding of an object's primary, objective and underlying properties.

The necessity of inferring from sensed qualities to properties of objects would require that we treat those objects as ends in themselves. Sensed qualities of objects were the components of "uniformity amidst variety". Experiencing the seemingly designed "uniformity amidst variety" of nature perceptually and aesthetically is necessarily non-instrumental in the sense that we might use it to some end that is beneficial to us. This is because the very excellence the natural object displays requires it to be treated as an object in itself and because of its pre-existing suitability for having been experienced aesthetically. It requires a kind of attention to the pleasure of sensible qualities that rules out thoughts about the object's utility or the subject's self-interest. It resembles what Kant came to formalise as the concept of disinterest, of which I will say a few words below and will be addressed in more detail in the next section.

Disinterest is one of the defining criteria of the judgment of taste in Kant's aesthetics. Like Hutcheson, Kant's primary concern was with nature. Disinterest was the locus for accounting for nature's aesthetic properties, its "varieties to the point of opulence, subject to no coercion from artificial rules" that "provide taste with lasting nourishment".<sup>135</sup> Kant, however, provided explicit reasons for the priority of nature over the priority of art. For example, he writes about birdsong:

Even the song of a bird, which we cannot bring under any musical rules, seems to contain more freedom and thus more that is entertaining for taste than even a human song that is performed in accordance with all the rules of the art of music:

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 244.

<sup>135</sup> Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 126.



for one grows tired of the latter far more quickly if it is repeated often and for a long time.<sup>136</sup>

It must be nature, or taken to be nature by us, for us to take such an immediate interest in the beautiful, and even more so if we are to be able to expect of others that they should take this interest in it; which in fact happens, as we consider coarse and ignoble the thinking of those who have no feeling for beautiful nature (for this is what we call the receptivity to an interest in its contemplation) and who confine themselves to the enjoyment of mere sensory sensations at table or from the bottle.<sup>137</sup>

The freedom that Kant finds in nature, such as that which he associates with birdsong, resembles the purity of Hutcheson's absolute beauty. Freedom marks the "free play" of the imagination with understanding that characterizes aesthetic judgment. The idea is that the mind is grasping the beauty of an object, not by applying determinate concepts, as might be the case of an environmental scientist attempting to make sense of the decline of a particular butterfly species when making observations about it in the field, or the scientist who looks at the foxglove as a source of heart medicine. In a moment of distraction both scientists, having set down their tools, might look upon the High Brown Fritillary butterfly or the foxglove not by applying scientific concepts, but by attending to their beauty, an experience where the subject's imagination becomes immersed in the object's aesthetic properties without being determined by pre-existing concepts. This moment is disinterested not because there is a lack of interest or intentionality, but in the sense that it is free from prejudice and free from scientific, practical or self-interested concerns.<sup>138</sup>

Kant also had a conception of dependent beauty that resembled Hutcheson's relative beauty. In §16 of *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant wrote about 'free' and 'dependent' beauty:

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 182.

<sup>138</sup> The origins of 'disinterest' were introduced and characterised in chapter two, §2 and its status as a historical concept will further be discussed in the following section of this chapter. It gets picked up again in chapter 4, §2 where it plays a significant role in distinguishing between art and life, and helps lay to rest Wollheim's worries about confusing art with life if art is not considered the paradigm aesthetic object.

There are two kinds of beauty, free beauty (*pulchritude vaga*) and merely accessory beauty (*pulchritude adhaerens*). Free beauty does not presuppose a concept of what the object is [meant] to be. Accessory beauty does presuppose such a concept, as well as the object's perfection in terms of that concept. The free kinds of beauty are called (self-subsistent) beauties of this or that thing. The other kind of beauty is accessory to a concept (i.e. it is conditioned beauty) and as such is attributed to objects that fall under the concept of a particular purpose.<sup>139</sup>

Something possesses dependent beauty in proportion to its approximation to the standards of perfection for an object of that type. The faculty of taste is not required for judgments of dependent beauty, for which determinate concepts of ends and perfection suffice: we can judge a horse as a beautiful horse relative to the concept of a perfect horse, a particular butterfly relative to its species. In the case of free beauty, no such dependence on a concept is required. The scientist may view the beauty of a particular High Brown Fritillary butterfly as related to what he knows of the species in general or he might attend to its beauty. The first is a case of dependent beauty, the latter a case of free beauty.

A further element to take into consideration where nature is concerned is the objective purposiveness that Kant ascribes to it. He says that it “can rightly be called an analogue to art” in the sense that we ascribe beauty to it in relation to reflecting on it seeming to have been designed. By this, Kant means that nature is analogous to art because “inner natural perfection, as is possessed by those things that are possible only as natural ends and hence as organized beings, is not thinkable and explicable in accordance with any analogy to any physical, i.e., natural capacity that is known to us”. “Since we ourselves belong to nature”, and are hence not nature's creator, the analogy with art is misleading. The thought is that we can perceive nature's properties and conceive of them as “as if” they have been designed to please. In fact, this seeming intentionality can only be ascribed to nature itself and cannot be determined either by supernatural or, presumably, other causes, for these other causes would issue determinate concepts in order to make sense of the natural world aesthetically perceived,

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<sup>139</sup> Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 114.

problematic for Kant because aesthetic experience could not be governed by concepts.<sup>140</sup> This claim does not entail that we first need to have a concept of art but that we need Kant's 'as if' concept of 'purposiveness without purpose', that the external world was created as if to delight.<sup>141</sup>

Despite the fact that the noumenal realm is beyond our grasp, and that the beauty we see in the world ought not to be determined by concepts, ought not to be rule driven, Kant writes that "we can and should be concerned to investigate nature, so far as it lies within our capacity, in experience, in its causal connection in accordance with merely mechanical laws [...]". However, judging the natural object's form as dependent on those mechanical laws would entail closing off the possibility of "obtain[ing] even one experiential concept of the specific form of these natural things".<sup>142</sup> The point here is that on the one hand, we can be interested in nature's teleology, but this is a distinct activity from attending to it aesthetically. However on Kant's account artistic beauty based on the judgment of natural beauty, because "[a] beauty of nature is a beautiful thing; the beauty of art is the beautiful representation of a thing".<sup>143</sup> Nature is thus a more fundamental aesthetic object than art.

After Kant, there came another shift against the incorporation of nature into the aesthetic realm. While Descartes did not explicitly reject nature, although I've attributed such a rejection to him on the basis of the *Compendium Musicae* and his *Meditations*, Hegel was explicit in his rejection:

By the above expression [aesthetics] we at once exclude the *beauty of Nature*. Such a limitation of our subject may appear to be an arbitrary demarcation, resting on the principle that every science has the prerogative of marking out its boundaries at pleasure. But this is not the sense in which we are to understand the limitation of Aesthetic to *the beauty of art*. [...] We may, however, begin at once by asserting that artistic beauty stands *Higher* than nature. For the beauty of art is the beauty that is born - born again, that is - of mind; and by as much as the mind

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 254-255.

<sup>141</sup> This 'as if' idea of 'purposiveness without purpose' will figure in the discussion in chapter four, where the art-first view is articulated and rejected.

<sup>142</sup> Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 35-36.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 189.

and its products are higher than nature and its appearances, by so much the beauty of art is higher than the beauty of nature. Indeed, if we look at it *formally* i.e. only considering in what way it exists, not what there is in it - even a silly fancy such as may pass through a man's head is *higher* than any product of nature; for such a fancy must at least be characterized by intellectual being and by freedom. [...] Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in the higher element and as created thereby. In this sense the beauty of nature reveals itself as but a reflection of the beauty which belongs to the mind, as an imperfect, incomplete mode of being. As a mode whose really substantial element is contained in the mind itself.<sup>144</sup>

Hegel is concerned solely with the products of the human mind, imagination and expression which seemingly has aesthetic value and which are ranked higher than nature. And yet, there is no doubt in his mind that we speak as though nature does have aesthetic value, however reluctant he might be to attribute aesthetic value to it:

It is true that in common life we are in the habit of speaking of beautiful colour, a beautiful sky, a beautiful river, and, moreover, of beautiful flowers, beautiful animals, and, above all, of beautiful human beings. We will not just now enter into the controversy of how far such objects can justly have the attribute of beauty ascribed to them, or how far, speaking generally, natural beauty ought to be recognized as existing besides beauty.<sup>145</sup>

And yet, he provides no reason why art's status as aesthetically valuable should be ranked any higher than nature. Hegel's minimising of the possibility for nature to be the proper object of the highest form of aesthetic experience relates to his wider philosophy, his idealism, in which he, like Descartes, saw human rationality as the true provider of freedom and the material world as obeying the laws of reason. Any thought about what nature might be beyond the bounds of human experience or rationality could not make sense to Hegel because he was an idealist and therefore rejected Kant's noumenal reality. Gardiner's explanation for Hegel's apparent rejection of nature was that, for Hegel, "we can not find our selves in what is objectively presented to us, the natural

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<sup>144</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1886). 3,4.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

world takes on the appearance of a ‘limitation’ or a ‘barrier’”.<sup>146</sup> This did not tally with the freedom that Kant found in nature, the fact that it was unbound by rules. For Hegel, works of art were activities of the “spirit”, expressions of truth and had an ‘indisputably cognitive dimension’.<sup>147 148</sup>

Hegel was attempting to provide an account of the necessary historicity of works of art and some contemporary writers argue that he in fact aimed to ‘re-enchant’ nature.<sup>149</sup> Whatever we think about Hegel’s metaphysics, his thoughts about the necessary historicity of the human experience of nature, or his alleged efforts to re-enchant nature, it is worthwhile for Hegel to attempt to make sense of why it is “that in common life we are in the habit of speaking of beautiful flowers, beautiful animals, and beautiful human beings”.

One way of doing this would be to go back and appeal to Descartes’ rationalism. As we saw above, Descartes attempted to explain beauty by demonstrating its mathematical integrity and proportionality. However, this then raises the question of whether understanding a mathematical explanation provides an account or characterization of the very beauty perceived. Understanding the underlying mathematical equation for an object’s being beautiful, formal, or proportional does not necessarily entail perceiving or experiencing beauty, for the latter implies something about subjective sensibility to an object, rather than the mind’s ability to understand the object or its secondary features. A person might experience beauty knowing nothing about underlying mathematical explanations. We can experience proportionality without recognising that that is what we’re experiencing and without understanding the mathematical functions that can explain it. While this might be enough for a rationalist like Descartes that it is just the

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<sup>146</sup> Patrick Gardiner, "Kant and Hegel on Aesthetics," in *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, ed. Stephen Priest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). 166.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>148</sup> The cognitive dimension of art is what is argued by Hegel and others after him, as we will see with Wollheim especially, who also argues for artistic priority. It is also an important precursor to some contemporary cognitivists about the aesthetic experience of nature who seek to provide scientific, cognitivist grounds for our aesthetic experiences of nature.

<sup>149</sup> Alison Stone, "Hegel, Naturalism and the Philosophy of Nature," *Hegel Bulletin* 34, no. 1 (2013).

proportionality that explains or justifies our aesthetic response does not warrant that other potential features of the experience are irrelevant.

Another way to make sense of why it is we speak of beauty in nature, as Hegel wrote, is by appealing to how eighteenth century philosophers articulated the ‘subjective’ turn that predates Hegel’s view. Both the external senses and the existence of external, material, objects, are central to these theories. Because the concept of taste was central, and taste was an internal sense, it was not automatically or primarily applied to art. At this time, nature was the original source of aesthetic response because it was the source of external objects, their causes and their qualities. The concept of taste facilitated the articulation of the sensations we feel when we come across objects and their properties. Nature’s centrality did not mean art was not accepted as an aesthetic object, but that art was secondary because it did not hold the same importance in terms of providing an explanation for the existence or essence of objects in the world that surrounds us. Nature provided the objects and materials used in artistic practice and could provide the route to understanding the cause of things.

This section and the previous section end in accounts that turn away from the external world, and hence nature, for different reasons. The subjective turn that followed Descartes’ extreme scepticism entailed an interest that turned inwardly, and that wished to provide mathematical justifications for aesthetic response. Hegel, who rejected Kant’s noumenal world, thought that the human spirit could provide the most sophisticated articulation of aesthetic expression, and therefore pushed art into the foreground. The third section below will address how more contemporary philosophers have reopened subjective, aesthetic, experience to nature, as well as some complexities to do with the residual effects that ‘disinterest’ and ‘formalism’ have had not only in the genealogy of art history, but in the neglect of nature.

### **§ Beyond Art: the Return of Nature**

Since Hutcheson and Kant, much progress has been made in the aesthetics of nature. This is primarily due to Hepburn, who refocused attention on nature with his influential

essay 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Nature'.<sup>150</sup> It is also due, however, to more recent, vibrant contributions made by Brady, who offers an approach that integrates subject and object in nature appreciation; to Budd, who argues for a 'nature as nature' approach; to Carlson, who offers a cognitivist, science-based approach to nature appreciation; and to Carroll, who puts forward the arousal theory of nature appreciation.<sup>151</sup>

Before delving into these respective, contemporary approaches to the aesthetic appreciation of nature, we will first turn to an issue that is of significance to the wider argument being put forward here, and that has been addressed in a discussion between Carroll and Shelley touched on in chapter two.<sup>152</sup> It is about the historical status of 'disinterest' and 'formalism' that have been mischaracterised, but whose mischaracterisation has had, directly and indirectly, a residual influence on both the aesthetics of nature and the philosophy of art. We will, by the end of the section, see how Sibley and Levinson can help provide an account of aesthetic experience that can help accommodate Carroll's criticism of aesthetic experience.

In "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art History", Carroll argues that art has been subsumed into the concept of the aesthetic, an aesthetic inspired by Hutcheson, Kant (and later Bell and Beardsley) due to the residual influence of certain historical concepts like 'beauty', 'aesthetic perception', 'disinterest' and 'formalism'. This focus on the aesthetic, perceptual features of aesthetic experience, and therefore of art, has unfortunately resulted in other, epistemic, features (notably contextual, historical, moral

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<sup>150</sup> Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty."

<sup>151</sup> Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), Noël Carroll, "On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Noël Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), ———, "Emotion, Appreciation and Nature," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Noël Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>152</sup> Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory.", James Shelley, "Aesthetics and the World at Large," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47, no. 2 (2007).

and political features of art), being excised from experiences of art. The residual influence of concepts related to the aesthetic echoes in the genealogy of art history, the argument goes, and causes confusion, because the aesthetic in art is pursued at the expense of artistic intention, art history, morality and politics and, presumably, non-perceptual art. Part of the reason for this is that the historical concepts mentioned above are based on nature, since for Hutcheson and Kant, nature was the paradigm of aesthetic experience and since the idea of the aesthetic originates in their writings.

In 'Aesthetics and the World at Large', Shelley goes some way to showing Carroll's interpretation of Hutcheson's aesthetics as misplaced. Shelley writes that Hutcheson's aesthetics did not reject the idea of reflexivity or cognitive elements, even where nature was concerned. As, as we saw in the chapter two, and section two above, there was, rather, a complex relationship between sensible, perceptible properties, such as beauty, and the knowledge we have internalised. Just as the concept of 'disinterest' resisted Hobbesian conceptions of egoism and self-interest, both Hutcheson's and Kant's aesthetics rejected rule-governed approaches to aesthetics such as those that we saw in Descartes' philosophy, for example. Beauty, both according to Hutcheson and according to Kant did not arise as a conclusion to rational deliberation, but, as Shelley writes "a sensation that strikes us at first", whereby "you need not be schooled in principles, proportions, or causes in order properly to judge the beauty of things".<sup>153</sup>

Despite these objections to Carroll's argument, there are reasons to sympathise, as Shelley himself does, with Carroll's concern that aestheticians (analytic or not), have "laboured under the crippling prejudices of theories they take themselves to have abandoned".<sup>154</sup> We might suggest that these crippling prejudices have not only affected aesthetics, the philosophy of art, and art itself, but have contributed to trivialising the importance of nature in aesthetics, as Hepburn came to argue.<sup>155</sup> Of course, there is an interesting overlap between nature, the practice of art, the aesthetics of nature and the aesthetics of art, and there has been a resurgence of interest in the aesthetics of nature.

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<sup>153</sup> Shelley, "Aesthetics and the World at Large." 178,180.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 171.

<sup>155</sup> Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty."



However, it is worthwhile to try making sense of why it is that nature was itself sidelined by a narrow form of aesthetics that Carroll repudiates in the philosophy of art and that forms part of the crippling prejudices under which some aestheticians labour.

Carroll's repudiation of aesthetic experience narrowly construed, however, should not be based on the idea that aesthetics as a discipline was built upon nature as the paradigm object of aesthetic experience, but on a misunderstanding of disinterest, as addressed in chapter two, and the austere accounts of formalism that have been posited by some aestheticians, as we will see in chapter five. Carroll also suggests that the concept of beauty as conceived by Hutcheson and Kant has loomed large in the analytic tradition, but this is simply not true if we consider, for example, the influence that Sibley has had in analytic aesthetics, by having opened up the category of the aesthetic, as we will see below. It is important to contest the claims that Carroll makes about nature, disinterest and form and beauty, because this contributes to the idea that nature is not as important as art and because it could be seen as undermining the claim that aesthetics as a discipline is grounded in perception.

Because the aesthetic, at least according to Hutcheson, Kant and later Sibley, is non-condition governed, and because we do have experiences of beauty (and other aesthetic properties), there must be another way to explain beauty as well as other aesthetic properties. It is for this reason, presumably, that the Greeks thought of them as perceptual properties, as the original definition of aesthetics suggests, as do more contemporary aestheticians, like Brady, Gould, Levinson, Sibley, and others too. Aesthetic properties might be thought of as Locke's secondary properties, in that they originate both in the object and the subject in question. In chapter six we will explore this idea more fully. However, suggesting that perceptual and phenomenal grounds constitute an aesthetic experience does not mean that what we know about the object of experience or about our subjective response to it is completely irrelevant to the overall experience. In order for it be aesthetic, the experience should at least be grounded in such perceptual features.

Disinterest, as characterised in chapter two and section two of this chapter above, means precisely that we are in "rapt absorption", it means that the object is of some

importance, because it is the thing of which we are having an experience and it means that a person is of importance to the aesthetic experience too because her physical presence and capacity for experience enable her to experience the object aesthetically. This does not mean, contra Bell and Carroll, that disinterested aesthetic experience collapses into the kind of detachment or austere formalism aspired to by Bell, where “we need to know nothing whatever about the artist”, “when things were made”, or “why they were made”.<sup>156</sup> It just means that we attend to the object of aesthetic interest in its entirety (and not just to its formal properties), that its perceivable features are central to the idea that our experience of it can be aesthetic.

It is interesting to note that Carroll’s arguments against defining art aesthetically are similar to those provided by philosophers who deny nature’s place in aesthetics, as we will see in chapter four: one such argument, for example, is a worry about confusing art with life, as Wollheim suggested, or aesthetic and non-aesthetic, as Sibley suggested. Now that we have lamented, alongside Carroll, the residual effects of formalism and (misconstrued) notions of disinterest, and, with Shelley’s help, countered some of Carroll’s claims about disinterest in particular, I also briefly want to make a point about Sibley’s contribution to the opening up and diversifying the category of aesthetic terms to include terms other than beauty, the sublime, and picturesque, and to include terms related to art, which is another historical, tacit influence in contemporary aesthetics, according to Carroll. Sibley writes:

Aesthetic terms span a great range of types and could be grouped into various kinds of subspecies. [...] Their most endless variety is adequately displayed in the following list: *unified, balanced, integrated, lifeless, serene, sombre, dynamic, powerful, vivid, delicate, moving, trite, sentimental, tragic*. The list is not limited to adjectives; expressions in artistic contexts like *telling contrast, sets up a tension, conveys a sense of, or holds together* are equally good illustrations.<sup>157</sup>

While it may be that beauty figured large in analytic (and non-analytic) aesthetics, there’s also a case for saying that thanks to Sibley, analytic aesthetics has been opened up to a

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<sup>156</sup> Bell quoted in Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory." 32-33.

<sup>157</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts." 1-2.

great range of terms and concepts, many of which apply both to the ‘world at large’ as well as ‘art’.

Sibley was interested in pinning down an argument for a sui generis class of aesthetic concepts, which, contra Carroll shows an active interest in aesthetic properties other than beauty, but which are nonetheless perceptual properties. On Sibley’s account, what was important to aesthetics was the having of perceptual, aesthetic experiences, and how those could be distinguished from non-aesthetic experiences, as we will see in chapter four below. Sibley was also interested in expanding the range of aesthetic subject matter beyond art such that nature and smells could be incorporated in the realm of the aesthetic and so that a diversity of rich aesthetic experiences of non-art, nature, could be accounted for too. This does not mean, as we might infer from a Carrollian view of the matter, that other features do not matter, but that it is important to be clear about and scrutinise what it is that is of aesthetic interest.

It is important to Sibley’s argument, therefore, that experiencing objects perceptually is crucial to having aesthetic experiences. It is what aesthetics is about, though not in the sense that the object’s non-aesthetic features, such as Cartesian mathematical properties, will provide conditions for the application of an aesthetic concept, but in the sense that they provide the aesthetic qualities that give their correlating concepts structure. By saying that aesthetic concepts are “non-condition governed” or, not involving reason or rational support, Sibley seems rather to be indicating the importance of perceiving the aesthetic object’s features, rather than projections or constructions of aesthetic concepts.

This takes me to another claim that Sibley may have contested, but is one that will fully be developed in chapter six. It gives credence to the importance of perceptual features in both our experiences of both nature and art. The thought is that in saying that aesthetic concepts are non-condition governed, there is something to which we refer when we judge an object aesthetically and that something is an ‘appearance property’ as notably argued by Levinson.<sup>158</sup> It may be tempting to think that such a perceptual,

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<sup>158</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility," in *Aesthetic Concepts: Essays after Sibley*, ed. Emily Brady and Jerrold

aesthetic account does not fully do justice to either our aesthetic experiences of art or our aesthetic experiences of nature because it does not capture those elements Carroll wishes to include.

On the other hand, perceiving aesthetically, according to Sibley, is the perceiving of the richness of aesthetic features that are (probably) afforded by the object. There's no mysterious leap from the non-aesthetic, that is, knowing the historical, political, moral (or other non-perceivable) status of the art object or natural object to the aesthetic, as per Hutcheson and Kant, you either see the object's aesthetic features or you don't. There seems to me to be a claim to realism, although Sibley himself resists making it. Furthermore, that cultural, historical, political, moral (or other non-perceivable) influences may be at play in the immediacy of perceptual experience can be borne out and addressed through critical discourse according to Sibley.

To sum up, and before moving onto the aesthetics of nature within the contemporary debate, I began with Carroll's discussion of the residual influence of the idea of the aesthetic and beauty on the philosophy of art. This allowed me, following Shelley, to argue that, while it might be thought that the idea of the aesthetic has had a pernicious influence on the philosophy of art, it need not have done. The idea of the aesthetic, and related concepts, have themselves been misconstrued to adopt a meaning that can also be said to have been detrimental to the aesthetic appreciation of nature. It also allowed me to introduce Sibley, who opened up the category of the aesthetic to a rich variety of aesthetic concepts and perceivable aesthetic properties.

The fault line between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic is not equivalent to the fault-line that distinguishes whether an object is a work of art or not.<sup>159</sup> It is rather, as

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Levinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), ———, "What Are Aesthetic Properties?," in *Contemplating Art*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

<sup>159</sup> As Carroll writes, Dickie, Nelson and Danto wanted to move away from phenomenal, perceptual, aesthetic definitions of art to be able to accommodate works of art that could not be said to be 'aesthetic' in the traditional sense or to allow for cognitive elements. George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," in *Aesthetics, a Critical Anthology*, ed. Richard Sclafani George Dickie, Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), Danto, "Art and Disturbation.", Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal*

suggested by Hutcheson, Kant and Sibley and as we will explore more fully in chapter six, a matter of perceiving aesthetic properties that emerge from, but are not reducible to, the non-aesthetic properties that constitute them. All this having been said, I now turn to contemporary approaches to the aesthetics of nature.

If anything, and despite not having the kind of intentionality behind its appearance that art does, history, politics or morality in the same sense that they are attributable to art, nature provides us, as argued by Hepburn and Brady, with a richness of perceptual, by which I mean multi-sensual and multi-perspectival, expressive, emotive and imaginative resources for aesthetic experience. Not only this, but the imaginative aspect that we can associate with it, as both Hepburn and Brady have also argued, reveals a sometimes simple but nevertheless profound engagement with nature, one in which we recognise our own existence relative to it, and its existence relative to us. The imagination is important because part of the definition of imagination is that it is not rule- or epistemically-governed.

Hepburn's essay on the neglect of nature was first concerned with bringing nature back into aesthetic, philosophical discourse, by characterizing the experience of nature, and distinguishing it from our experiences of art.<sup>160</sup> This is important given complaints about an overly-narrow conception of aesthetic experience as argued by Carroll, and one that, as we will see in chapter four below, helped to push nature out of the realm of the aesthetic. Hepburn advocated an aesthetic that centred on the perceptual, but also one that attended to the object of experience as well as its effect on the subject:

The object is also the centre of, and is the occasion of, many possible lines of reflection or movements of the mind, transformations of perception, attitudes and feelings that might affect a person's life and modify the quality of his experience long after he has ceased to contemplate the particular object itself. No doubt, some trains of reflection prompted by works of art or contemplated natural objects can be aesthetically irrelevant, idiotic, syncretic, fortuitous. But others can be highly

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*of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964), ———, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, no. 2 (1974), ———, "Iniscernibility and Perception: A Reply to Joseph Margolis," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39, no. 4 (1999). Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>160</sup> Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty."

relevant, part of what makes the object worth contemplating, part of what gives seriousness to the aesthetic dimension of human life.<sup>161</sup>

He thought that we typically experience nature both as subjects and as engaged in an activity, such as taking a walk; the natural object is not demarcated by a frame or a plinth, but is part of the environment and most often engages multiple senses; the formal qualities of shape, colour, pattern and movement may be taken into consideration, but do not exhaust the aesthetic experience of nature; the imagination comes into play in an attempt to process what forces might be responsible for the natural object or phenomenon. Our aesthetic experiences of nature are singular and particular to a moment that has not been intended by an artist, but that nevertheless offers vast, ever-changing possibilities. Nature has a vast potential for the aesthetic with complex inter-connections to be made between it and our experience of it.

Like Hepburn, Berleant pursues the idea that nature provides a rich and meaningful resource for aesthetic experience and has argued for aesthetic experience to be an active, engaged immersion in the natural world.<sup>162</sup> Berleant's view dismisses some of the traditional concepts related to aesthetics. First among those is 'disinterest'. Like Carroll he thinks it an overly narrow approach to aesthetics more generally, but especially to the aesthetics of nature. This is because he thinks that 'disinterest' abstracts and objectifies what we see, and does not allow for the multi-perspectival, multi-sensual, fully immersive experience that we have of nature. His environmental aesthetics explore the values that we associate with the environment, the everyday and the their transformative possibilities.<sup>163</sup>

For reasons that we saw above I do not think that disinterest is incompatible with an immersive view of aesthetic experience. This is why Brady's 'integrated aesthetic' is an

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<sup>161</sup> Ronald Hepburn, *"Wonder" And Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984). 1-2.

<sup>162</sup> Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

<sup>163</sup> ———, "Beyond Disinterestedness," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, no. 3 (1994), Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Arnold Berleant, "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

attractive approach to the aesthetics of nature. It grounds multi-sensuous engagement, imagination, emotion and knowledge in the concept of disinterest.<sup>164</sup> As we saw in the last chapter, historically, the concept of disinterest, according to Hutcheson, Hume and Shaftesbury, resisted the idea of self-interest and, according to Kant, celebrated the idea that “our duty with regard to beautiful things is exhausted in our judging them aesthetically to be beautiful”, meaning it is “merely contemplative”.<sup>165</sup> This contemplation is in keeping with multi-sensuous engagement, imagination, emotion and knowledge insofar as concepts and rules do not govern the experience.

Although most aesthetic philosophies of nature acknowledge the complex inter-relationship between nature and art, and also acknowledge that we may sometimes look at nature through the artistic styles, most think that the aesthetic experience of nature is distinctive of the aesthetic experience of art. However, some philosophers, namely Davies, Savile and Wollheim, argue that aesthetically appreciating nature requires adopting an aesthetic attitude as though nature were art.<sup>166</sup> This sort of view is normally stated as part of an aesthetic theory that sees art as its paradigm object. It is not about the aesthetics of nature as such, but about the aesthetics of art, and will be addressed in chapter four.

There are, however, views in the aesthetics of nature that argue that nature should be seen as ‘nature’ and not as ‘art’, which do not deny that we can perceive aesthetic properties in nature and that these relate primarily to nature. The experience states that we should be true to what nature actually is, that is, not art. It further states that trying to discover any underlying, philosophical, aesthetic, theory to explain our aesthetic experiences of nature are tantamount to a ‘chimerical quest’.<sup>167</sup> The idea here is that nature affords us freedom that art cannot and does not provide. According to Budd, we are free from the limitations of art, from its frames and conventions and we are free from

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<sup>164</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*.

<sup>165</sup> Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic."

<sup>166</sup> Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), Anthony Savile, *The Test of Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*.

<sup>167</sup> Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. 146.

the manner in which we appreciate art: we are not constrained by Walton's 'categories of art', the idea that we need to know about art and how it is categorised to be able to make correct aesthetic judgments about it.<sup>168</sup> "Freedom", according to this view, "is integral" to the appreciation of nature.<sup>169</sup>

Budd's main target in this regard is the scientific, cognitive, positive model of aesthetic appreciation. Here we can find support for the thought that nature is a proper objects of aesthetic experience to be experienced in a different way to that in which we experience art, for example in the way we traverse landscapes, use our senses, and the differences perspectives we adopt in relation to it. The origins of the cognitive model arose out of Carlson's adoption of Walton's categories. Just as Walton argues that the aesthetic properties that an artwork possesses are a manifestation of the category to which it belongs, for Carlson, the aesthetic properties of natural objects have correct categories to which they belong.<sup>170</sup> The idea here is that we can appeal to biological or scientific theories to ensure correctness of aesthetic judgments made about natural objects. The companion thought to this argument is that nature is essentially aesthetically good, positive. The difficulty with this view will be explored in detail in chapters five and six, but it may be worth mentioning that it is difficult to establish the correct scientific categories on which to base our aesthetic responses to nature, for they are not necessarily settled. Even if they were settled, there's a question that centres on whether nature is idealised in a sense that is not necessarily in keeping with negative human responses to it, such as disgust or fear. Finally, there's the issue of whether a 'categories' approach to nature can really work, for nature's aesthetic properties change over time, we have no frames to bound it, no correct or incorrect perspective from which to view it, nor do we have artistic intentionality or history to keep our experiences "in check".

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<sup>168</sup> Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art," in *Marvelous Images*, ed. Kendall L. Walton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>169</sup> Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. 147.

<sup>170</sup> Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*.



Finally, another contemporary approach to the aesthetics of nature is one Carlson and Parsons have called new formalism, which we will address at length below.<sup>171</sup> Formalism, as we have seen, is the view that the perceivable qualities of shape, pattern and design are of aesthetic value. Both moderate and extreme formalism have been argued by Zangwill to apply to nature: the former, to organic nature and the latter to inorganic nature. The difference between them is the extent to which non-aesthetic, non-perceivable properties, or reference to history or context, are required for aesthetically experiencing them.<sup>172</sup> In both cases, perceivable, aesthetic properties are required, but in the case of inorganic nature, non-perceivable properties are not required. Both, however, seem to require an abstraction of what is seen into formal properties rather than attending to what is, in fact, seen.

## § Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to show that there are historical, philosophical reasons for arguing that nature is a paradigm in aesthetics. While the ancients did not have a neatly delineated discipline of aesthetics, nature featured as an object of mimetic practice, which indicates an interest in nature that did not feature so prevalently later, for example in eighteenth century French theatre. In medieval times nature was a rich resource for symbols, such as the stag's representing love in *Guigemar*. In ancient and medieval times beauty was found in the natural world, and the natural world provided resources for contextualising human experience. Mimetic practice itself was considered representation of the 'world at large'. Hutcheson and Kant, too, thought nature to be central to aesthetic enquiries, holding it up as a paradigm, a rich resource that matched the mind's capacity for experiencing it. Problematic for nature were rationalist views, such as Descartes', that aimed to show that the experience of beauty was the result of understanding the underlying mathematical structures and proportionalities. Also

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<sup>171</sup> Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, "New Formalism and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>172</sup> Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001).

problematic for nature was Hegel's thought that because art was the highest manifestation of human creativity, nature should not figure in an analysis of aesthetics. These negative arguments worked against nature being included in the aesthetic domain and combined with an overly narrow interpretation of certain Hutchesonian and Kantian concepts, such as 'disinterest' and 'form' that pushed aesthetics toward a rarefied form of aesthetic objects: Modern art. Despite these negative arguments, the aesthetics of nature has developed into a vibrant field, one that has difficulties, difficulties that will be addressed in the coming chapters.

The chapter's role in the thesis has been to provide historical precedence for nature's importance as a paradigm in aesthetic experience and the historical reasons its role as an aesthetic paradigm has been downplayed. This helps set up the framework for arguing that nature is at least as rich and engaging an aesthetic object as art, if for different reasons. In chapter four I bring this debate up to date, by looking at reasons why our aesthetic experiences of nature were thought to be beyond the bounds of explanation, despite the expressive properties that we attribute to it.

## Chapter Four: The Aesthetic, Nature and Art

### § Introduction

In his paper “Art or Nature?”, Diffey’s first sentence is “I begin by asking a big cloudy question, namely, which is aesthetically prior, art or nature?”.<sup>173</sup> The question about the priority of art or nature is not so much the aim here as showing, at least in one strand of the argument, that nature is at least as important a paradigm of the aesthetic as is art. Nevertheless the question brings with it difficulties, such as, how do we define the ‘aesthetic’, and how does it relate to the objects of art or nature? If we can begin to provide answers to these questions, we may well also make inroads into why “the issue [Diffey’s question] seeks to address is not concealed far below the surface of contemporary aesthetics”.<sup>174</sup> Diffey’s argument is really an argument for an aesthetics-first view, taking seriously the idea that the aesthetic is a *sui generis* category of experience that ranges both over nature and art. I agree with Diffey, but will take a different direction in this chapter, from the direction he takes. I intend to show how it could be true that nature is as important, if not more important, than art, bearing in mind the kind of perceptual account of the aesthetic that I will develop in the final chapters below.

The chapter builds on the historical discussions that have preceded it, by complementing the interpretation of ‘disinterest’ as defended by Shelley and the historical arguments that have contributed both to the idea that nature is the paradigm of aesthetic experience and to the idea that art is the paradigm of aesthetic experience. I do this first by laying out the reasons for why art has been seen as being the best exemplification of the aesthetic. The idea was addressed by Hegel, Bell, Wollheim, and Savile and is premised on the idea that because nature lacks the kind of intentionality that is behind art, it doesn’t offer the kind of significance we might attribute to art, and is

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<sup>173</sup> T.J. Diffey, "Art or Nature?," in *Aesthetic Concepts: Essays after Sibley*, ed. Emily Brady and Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

therefore less significant. The main problem with this view is that it obfuscates the aesthetic significance of our experiences of nature and its pertinence to how we relate to nature, to our own thoughts and feelings. More important than this, however, is the existential claim that is being made: art would not exist without humans and humans would not exist without nature. Moreover, nature offers an exploration for the structure of our own mental states, as we will see below.

Section two builds on the historical material I considered in the first three chapters and shows that nature is a rich resource for aesthetic experience and that many of the assumptions that are made by aestheticians who support art as the most significant paradigm of the aesthetic. Such assumptions include, for example, that an aesthetic experience can only occur when “the concepts in the mind of the artist are met by the concepts in the mind of the spectator”, and that we might confuse art with life if art is not considered the paradigm of the aesthetic, or that we can look upon nature as purposively having been designed.<sup>175</sup> In section three, I will show that nature is a meaningful object of aesthetic experience by making sense of the emotive properties that are used in our experiences of it, such as the following examples, taken from Howarth: “The angry sea rages, thunders, is turbulent, frenzied, destructive, forceful, sashes against the cliffs” and “[t]he cheerful brook moves much as a cheerful person might: it babbles and plays, pauses awhile, ruses on, darts, has a quick, light movement.” As she says “[t]hese are similarities between human styles of behaving, and movements of nature.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> I have pulled the arguments (that nature lacks determinacy, that human intentionality in the creation of artworks is the key to the aesthetic and aesthetic meaning, that we might confuse art with life, that nature’s purposiveness means we should take it as having been designed by an artist) from Hegel, Bell, Fry, Wollheim and Savile respectively as there hasn’t been an exposition or explicit argument for art’s being the paradigm of the aesthetic. The arguments they present are part of philosophical endeavours that relate to their broader aesthetic philosophies, rather than an engagement with arguments in the aesthetics of nature. There may be other ways of fleshing out an art first view, but I will limit myself to those that have been articulated.

<sup>176</sup> J.M. Howarth, "Nature's Moods," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 2 (1995). 115.

## § Art and the Aesthetic

It has been assumed and argued by Davies, Savile and Wollheim, following Hegel, that it is art that best instantiates and exemplifies the aesthetic. If art is the source and provider of experiences deemed to be paradigmatically aesthetic, an appeal to the concept of art is necessary for aesthetic experience more broadly conceived, including the aesthetic experience of nature and the everyday. Appealing to the concept of art is necessary because art is the best instantiation of the aesthetic. It is the best instantiation of the aesthetic because its very purpose is to be aesthetic: another human mind has intended it to be an aesthetic object. According to this view, presumably, it is unclear that nature is intended to be aesthetic. Moreover, even though we do have aesthetic experiences of nature, our aesthetic experiences of nature are contingent on the one hand because of its indeterminacy, and on the other hand, because the subject's experience of it is accidental. It is not a pre-requisite of our experience of nature that it should be aesthetic in the same way as it would be with most artworks.

On this account, the aesthetic is tightly linked with art, because art demarcates the range of objects that can properly be called aesthetic. One of the important features of the argument is that human freedom and intentionality lie behind the creation of works of art. The concept of art encompasses a range of objects that involve the expression or application of human creative skill, imagination and ideas. It incorporates the notion that an artwork is a creative work, a perceivable object, involving human creative intentionality insofar as it requires decisions about how the artwork will be and appear.

As we saw in chapter three, Hegel explicitly excluded the beauty of nature from aesthetics because he thought of art as the highest expression of the human mind as the highest expression of nature. Nature's beauty existed relative to the human mind. Natural beauty was to be explored through scientific practice, but the real and proper interest of aesthetics was art.<sup>177</sup> Following on from this the early formalists, Bell and Fry, also argued that although there is form in nature the beauty of nature is not a question for aesthetics. According to them, the beauty of nature is not a form to which

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<sup>177</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. 3-4.

we can attach significance in the sense that we might attribute significance to forms in art. The reason for this was, they argued, that human intentionality is not behind nature's aesthetic form.<sup>178</sup> Bell's definition of 'Significant Form' was that it is a "quality shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions" and that in each object "lines and colours combined in a particular way" that "certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions".<sup>179</sup> Significant form was an emotion Bell thought could only be evoked by valuable works of art but rarely by nature:

Everyone, I suspect, has called a butterfly or a flower beautiful. Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture; surely, it is not what I call an aesthetic emotion that most of us feel, generally, for natural beauty? I shall suggest [...] that some people may, occasionally, see in nature what we see in art, and feel for her an aesthetic emotion; but I am satisfied that, as a rule, most people feel a very different kind of emotion for birds and flowers and the wings of butterflies from that which they feel for pictures, pots, temples and statues. Why these beautiful things do not move us as works of art move us is another, and not an aesthetic, question. Nature does not have significant form and art does. Because nature does not have significant form, we cannot experience it aesthetically.<sup>180</sup>

Bell's formalism might make it sound as though intentionality does not matter, but he clearly states that whatever it is that moves us in nature is not an aesthetic emotion. Fry helps provide an explanation for the thought that the lack of intentionality matters in aesthetic experience by attributing a "creator" to nature:

I have admitted that there is beauty in Nature, that is to say, that certain objects constantly do, and perhaps any object may, compel us to regard it with that intense disinterested contemplation that belongs to the imaginative life, and which is impossible to the actual life of necessity and action; but that in objects created to arouse the aesthetic feeling we have an added consciousness of purpose on the part of the creator, that he made it on purpose not to be used but to be regarded and enjoyed; and that this feeling is characteristic of the aesthetic judgement proper.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928). Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," in *Vision and Design*, ed. Roger Fry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920).

<sup>179</sup> Bell, *Art*. 8.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* 12-13.

<sup>181</sup> Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics." 38.

Bell and Fry followed Hegel's view that when responding to, or experiencing nature, we do not attribute intentionality behind the beauty that we see, unless of course, we believe in God as the creator of all things. In the case of art, because the artist is behind the creation of an artwork, we can gain essential, and essentially human, meaning, from the artwork.

A more demanding view comes from Wollheim who wrote that the artist has produced an artwork for the contemplation of the perceiver who brings with her a "matching correspondence between the concept in the mind of the spectator and concept in the mind of the artist".<sup>182</sup>

Wollheim also thought that art was the primary source for aesthetic experience. The aesthetic attitude is created based on the experience of art, and the intending subject, and only thereafter extends to other objects, including nature. Nature, on his view, is only contingently and unpredictably aesthetic. Once we have aesthetic experiences of art we can properly have aesthetic experiences of nature, but only in virtue of being able to draw on the concept of art and our experience of it:

For the central case, which must be our starting point, is where what we regarded as a work of art has in point of fact also been produced as a work of art. [...] This, of course, is not to deny that we can regard objects that have not been made as works of art, or for that matter pieces of nature that have not been made at all, as though they had been: we can treat them as works of art. For once the aesthetic attitude has been established on the basis of objects produced under the concept of art, we can then extend it beyond this base: in much the same way as, having established the concept of person on the basis of human beings, we may then, in fables or children's stories, come to apply it to animals or even to trees and rocks, and talk of them as though they could think and feel. [W]hen the Impressionists tried to teach us to look at paintings as though we were looking at nature – a painting for Monet was *une fenêtre ouverte sur la nature*, this was because they themselves had first looked at nature in a way they had learnt from looking at paintings.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*. 113.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 112. This point is also made by Stephen Davies, who writes: "an aesthetic response to artworks is primary and ... an aesthetic response to nature is derivative." Davies, *Definitions of Art*. 193.

Wollheim's concern was that art could be trivialised as superfluous. Art was made by Kant to be dependent on life and, secondly, could therefore be trivialized as superfluous. Kant's aesthetics was premised on the idea that both pure aesthetic experience and artistic expertise come from nature. Wollheim, on the other hand, was really concerned with art's psychological importance.<sup>184</sup> If we don't know the difference between 'art' and 'life', we have no means of truly being able to ascertain the difference between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic.<sup>185</sup> Not only that, we fail to acknowledge the value of an artwork as more than just a combination of "bare constituents". Wollheim seems to have based his idea of the aesthetic attitude on an interpretation of Kant's aesthetics that I rejected in chapter two, an interpretation that assumes the preclusion of being able to delve into the human meaning, expression and intentionality that lie behind the artwork's constituents and make it meaningful. In the case of art, according to Wollheim, the aesthetic is not contingent as it is in nature:

For when we listen to the bird songs in Wagner, even in Messiaen, we are not simply reduplicating the experiences that we might have in the woods or fields. In

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<sup>184</sup> I go along with the generally view that Kant thought nature to be more fundamental to experiences of the aesthetic than art. However, there is a debate about whether Kant thought nature was prior to art. In the *Critique of the Power Judgment*, Kant restricts his examples primarily to nature, thinking nature a purer manifestation of the aesthetic, that provides an immediate, intellectual and moral interest in the beautiful: "Now I gladly concede that the interest in the **beautiful in art** [...] provides no proof of a way of thinking that is devoted to the morally good or even merely inclined to it. By contrast, however, I do assert that to take an **immediate interest** in the beauty of nature [...] is always a mark of a good soul, and that if the interest is habitual, it at least indicates a disposition of the mind that is favourable to the moral feeling, if it is gladly combined with the **viewing of nature**." Or "This pre-eminence of the beauty of nature over the beauty of art in alone awakening an immediate interest, even if the former were to be surpassed by the latter in respect of form, is in agreement with the refined and well-founded thinking of all human beings who have cultivated their moral feeling". Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. §42, 178-179. Guyer, for example, has written a paper in which he argues that "Kant's own theory of art and our response to it actually allows beauties of art to have just as much claim to this intellectual interest as do objects of natural beauty." Paul Guyer, "Interest, Nature, and Art: A Problem in Kant's Aesthetics," *The Review of Metaphysics: a Philosophical Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1978). 581-582.

<sup>185</sup> This is not dissimilar to Plato's concerns and issues that arise from artistic 'Happenings' as discussed in chapter one.



the aesthetic situation it is no mere contingency, as it is in nature, that we hear what we do.<sup>186</sup>

On the other hand, according to Wollheim, it would be rather “absurd” to attempt to show concern “by concentrating on the action of the yokel who rushed up on the stage to save the life of Desdemona”.<sup>187</sup> I take it that, by this, Wollheim means that it would be absurd to act like the yokel, that he has made a mistake, and that his actions are not in keeping with maintaining an aesthetic attitude. If non-art were the paradigm of aesthetic experience, we would end up in absurd situations where our responses to art could be responses to ordinary experiences, such as racing up on the theatre stage to save a character in a play from their tragic fate.

Savile gives a more precise articulation for the view that our experiences of nature are art-like aesthetic experiences, by relying on Kant’s ‘as if’ ‘purposiveness without purpose’. Nature, following Savile’s argument, should be seen as if it were art, as if an artist had created it:

The natural object is not one that comes into existence in God’s studio as the construction of something answering to a problem posed within aesthetic constraints, but none the less it is perfectly possible for us to view it in that light.<sup>188</sup>

Kant’s purposiveness without purpose is the thought that nature looks to us as if it were designed to appeal to our aesthetic sensibilities without our being certain about what the purpose entails. However, Savile takes this idea one step further by arguing that if nature looks as if it were designed to please, it looks as if we have a solution to a creative problem. If it looks like a solution to a creative problem, it ought to evoke the correct and appropriate response in us. Savile asserts that the difficulty with this is that a natural object will always look beautiful *qua* some artistic style or other. The solution to this

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<sup>186</sup> Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*. 118. This is an interesting contrast with the quotation I used from Kant in chapter three: “Even the song of a bird, which we cannot bring under any musical rules, seems to contain more freedom and thus more that is entertaining for taste than even a human song that is performed in accordance with all the rules of the art of music: for one grows tired of the latter far more quickly if it is repeated often and for a long time. Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 126.

<sup>187</sup> Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*. 114.

<sup>188</sup> Savile, *The Test of Time*. 176.

dilemma, he proposes, is that the subject can freely choose a style relative to the natural object and ascertain whether a description of that natural object fits into the artistic style chosen. Rather than turning away from nature, Savile uses this artistic-aesthetic-experience account of nature not only to unify the objects of aesthetic experience under a general rubric that provides a unified account of our aesthetic experiences of art and nature, but also to give an account for our love of nature and our desire to be and feel integrated within it. The difference between Savile's interpretation of Kant's 'as if' principle and my own is that I don't think Kant is making the further claim that a natural object ought to fit into some artistic style, just that it seems to have been designed to appeal to us aesthetically, and as a natural object. We will return to this idea in my discussion of whole formalism in chapter six.

To sum up, then, the arguments for denying nature its place in aesthetics are principally due to viewing human creativity as the most sophisticated expression of aesthetics, that a meeting of minds occurs between the artist and the subject experiencing her work, that we would otherwise end up in the situation of not being able to tell the difference between art and life (and therefore fail to value art accordingly) and that because we have no access to the real purpose behind nature's apparent 'purposiveness', we are offered no possibility but to aesthetically experience art as if it did have a creator. These are the elements that make cogent the idea that responding to an artwork or artefact aesthetically is prior to, or instantiates the aesthetic in a paradigmatic way compared with art.

## **§ The Aesthetic and its Objects**

Let us take a closer look at these claims. First, we have the Hegelian claim that the sophistication of the human spirit exemplifies design and creativity at a level not otherwise seen in nature, as discussed in chapter three. It is true that human production through the ages has resulted in works of architecture, music, painting, sculpture and in the creation of drinks and foodstuffs, such as tea, coffee, wine, cheese, and a history of cookery, that are exemplified in world regions and that are attributable to distinctly

human endeavours. These are examples of the sorts of human-made objects to which we have aesthetic responses and in whose experience and value we should, of course, be keenly interested.

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of criticisms to be made of the Hegelian claim. I'll recap on these because more contemporary accounts, such as those provided by Davies, Savile and Wollheim, that are sceptical of the attribution of aesthetic properties to nature are premised on similar arguments. One is that although we can and do have aesthetic responses to human-made objects, this does not mean that we don't respond meaningfully to non-human-made objects. Naturally occurring objects may not be human-centred in the sense that a person has created them, but they may, and often do, offer the possibility for aesthetic response such as delight or awe. While the Hegelian is not committed to denying that nature offers aesthetic experiences, he is committed to denying the objective presence of and our openness to nature's aesthetic properties. A look at what he says might help in this regard:

Indeed, if we look at it *formally* i.e. only considering in what way it exists, not what there is in it - even a silly fancy such as may pass through a man's head is *higher* than any product of nature; for such a fancy must at least be characterized by intellectual being and by freedom. [...] Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in the higher element and as created thereby. In this sense the beauty of nature reveals itself as but a reflection of the beauty which belongs to the mind, as an imperfect, incomplete mode of being. As a mode whose really substantial element is contained in the mind itself.<sup>189</sup>

With the emphasis being on the human mind rather than nature, Hegel does not take account of the objective existence of nature's aesthetic properties, nature's aesthetic and expressive properties or the subject's distinctly perceptual experience of it, since "even a silly fancy such as may pass through a man's head is *higher* than any product of nature". His justifications for turning to the products of the human mind are precisely the justifications, hyperbole excluded, for allowing nature its place in aesthetic discourse. We will see one of the reasons this is true in this chapter's final section on expressive

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<sup>189</sup> This is part of the quotation used in section one, chapter three. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. 3,4.

properties and other reasons for this later in the thesis, when we come to address the perceptual nature of aesthetic properties.

One objection to the Hegelian view is how we can make sense of the idea that we can have experiences of an object not intentionally created for our aesthetic delight? Secondly, and a point that was made by Aristotle in chapter one, the human person is herself a product of nature. Third, and a point that was made by Aquinas, the objects of human creation are themselves derived from naturally occurring materials. The objection to the Hegelian view I'll focus on is one that aims for a shift of emphasis from the idea that art has the kind of priority expounded by Hegel and other philosophers who clearly do take an art-first approach to aesthetics, to nature and our distinctive aesthetic experience of it. The objection is an existential claim about us, about nature and about the complex relational dynamic between nature and ourselves, as I'll detail below.

It would not seem true to think that if all aesthetic experiences of art were wiped from our memories and all artworks, galleries or human-made products were, due to some fluke, eradicated from the planet, aesthetic experiences would disappear altogether. What of our responses to rainbows, waterfalls, moors, meadows, deserts and forests? Seriously approaching nature as an aesthetic object can bring with it different experiential, imaginative, integrated, multi-sensual emphases, as Hepburn and Brady have written about, and as discussed in chapter three, that not only bring us closer to valuing nature in itself, but that encourage us to engage with the aesthetic and moral complexities linked with how we value it and how we perceive it. Furthermore, it may well be that these different experiential emphases re-orientate our approaches to attending to and experiencing art, particularly art that is to be experienced with more than just the visual sense and from multiple perspectives.

The art-first philosophers aren't committed to denying that we can experience aesthetic properties in nature or that this can subsequently influence our experience or appreciation of art. However, the emphasis they place on art's being revelatory of the human mind and human intentionality, and that art is therefore the paradigm of aesthetic experience, has meant a historical, pre-eminent and residual interest in art to the detriment of nature. This is not to suggest that art is of little or no value or importance,

which would be senseless, but that we should consider it as part of a broader understanding of the aesthetic that recognises that art is dependent on the artist, who is ultimately dependent on nature: it is an existential claim about the importance of the aesthetics of nature, an aesthetic dimension that differs from the aesthetics of art. Nature offers a richness of aesthetic content that we can integrate into the fabric of our experience, whilst recognising its objective independence.

The point made by Wollheim, that the concept of the mind of the spectator meets that of the artist when the spectator is experiencing an artwork is very compelling too, and may be true in many experiences of art.<sup>190</sup> One way of undermining the art-first view that holds that aesthetic experience involves a meeting of the minds of the artist and the artwork's perceiver is that we have no reason to think that we don't have meaningful experiences of nature despite nature's not having been intentionally created. In the case of art, though, one possibility of experiencing the work might be to see, look for, understand, what the artist has expressed or hopes to express. However, we are not bound by what the artist wanted to express, or the concept in her mind, when we do experience the work aesthetically, as Wollheim later conceded. This is especially true if we think of aesthetic properties as perceptual properties first and foremost, which is the argument being established here. An artwork's aesthetic properties are not necessarily linked to the artist's intentions. There may be many other ways of making sense of the work's aesthetic properties, such as how they relate to the social, geographical and political context in which it was created, how it fits into a particular style, works in relation to preceding and succeeding works by the same, or other, artists. We might learn about perspective, or even imagine our own story in relation to it. How we experience it need not necessarily be determined by how the artist intended it. Another point to make here is that the artist may not be held responsible for what she has created: it is not

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<sup>190</sup> It is worth bearing in mind that Wollheim sought to make sense of 'projective' or what we might also think of as 'expressive' properties of nature, as we will see in the section below. If aesthetic properties are like expressive properties, he probably thought that these were projected too. If they are projected, he must have thought they were necessarily evaluative rather than descriptive.

inconceivable that artwork would be created as a result of a mental disorder or unusual set of beliefs. This does not mean that I reject the possibility that attending to artistic intention is one possible way of approaching an artwork; I merely contest the view that it is the *only* way to do so.

This does not mean that we need to be relativists about aesthetic judgments. What it does mean is that attention to the works' perceivable features, and getting them right, as Sibley has argued, is of primary importance. This is in addition to interpreting the work relative to artistic intention, historical or cultural framework, religious belief, or how it relates to historical, contemporary or future works, subjective moods or emotions or even metaphysical or scientific explanation.

While the art-first proponent can give an explanation for why we can see nature as possessing aesthetic properties, by appealing to the 'as if', intentionalist argument, they are appealing to a category of objects that are not true to the phenomenology of experiencing nature as a different sort of entity, one that is not designed by man, even though it may seem to be. It is because nature exemplifies seemingly non-artistically intended aesthetic qualities that imaginative engagement with it, its aesthetic and expressive properties reminds us of the non-rule-governed freedom we have in aesthetically experiencing it as well as artworks, as we saw in Hutcheson's and Kant's aesthetic theories.

We will now turn to the point, also made by Wollheim, that, if art were derivative of nature, our responses to both art and nature would be confused and that we may not value art accordingly. Presumably, if many experiences are subsumed under the umbrella of aesthetic experience, people not only get confused between art and life or aesthetic and non-aesthetic, but art is not afforded the special value it undoubtedly has. The point refers to the aesthetic being primarily linked with art and brings to mind the idea of aesthetic and psychical distance.<sup>191</sup> Here, presumably, a lack of disinterest or

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<sup>191</sup> Edward Bullough, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology* 5, no. 2 (1912), George Dickie, "Psychical Distance: In a Fog at Sea," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 13, no. 1 (1973), ———, "Bullough and the

aesthetic distance as put forward by Stolnitz or Bullough, is what causes Wollheim's "yokel" to rush to Desdemona's assistance.

I will briefly characterise the aesthetic attitude or psychical distance theories presented by Stolnitz and Bullough since they are thought to build on the concept of disinterest that has been mentioned in previous chapters, because disinterest has, at times, been mischaracterised, and because Bullough's theory especially will help us resolve Wollheim's worry. Stolnitz thinks that having an aesthetic attitude toward something is "the disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone":

THE FIRST WORD, "disinterested," is a crucially important one. It means that we do not look at the object out of concern for any ulterior purpose which it may serve. We are not trying to use or manipulate the object. There is not purpose governing the experience other than the purpose of just *having* the experience. Our interest comes to rest upon the object alone, so that it is not taken as a sign of some future event, like the dinner bell, or as a cue to future activity, like the traffic light.<sup>192</sup>

The idea is that we attend to the object in a way that allows its features to constitute our experiences of them, how we perceive them, rather than our experience being guided by the fulfilment of our desires or everyday, practical behaviours as we saw earlier.

Bullough bases his psychical distance theory on the concept of disinterest without using the term 'disinterest' to get away from the implications it evokes for some people, for it implies a "lack of interest, or a denial of speculative importance" in the experience of art, implications it need not have as I have argued. The idea of psychical distance is similar to 'disinterest' as I have characterised it above for in its application it would "entail the cutting out of the practical side" of experience in order to allow for the "elaboration of experience on the basis created by the inhibit[ing] action of distance".

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Concept of Psychical Distance," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22, no. 2 (1961), Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude."

<sup>192</sup> Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1960). 35.

That inhibiting action relates to the “cutting out of the practical side of experience” that constitutes most of our experiences.<sup>193</sup> Bullough writes:

Thus, in the fog, the transformation by Distance is produced in the first instance by putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear with our practical, actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends - in short, by looking at it ‘objectively,’ as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasise the ‘objective’ features of experience, and by interpreting of even our ‘subjective’ affections not as modes of *our* being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.<sup>194</sup>

It is worth noting that Bullough uses ‘fog’, a natural phenomenon, as an example. This might serve as reminder that ‘disinterest’ was used in relation to natural objects, as we learned in chapters two and three. The ideas of disinterest and distance have also been discussed and applied to the theatre, which will have some bearing on Wollheim’s concern that we might confuse art and life, as might be said of the Greek audiences, to Plato’s lamentation. We might be reminded of Nehamas’ description of audience behaviour that took place, with members of the audience throwing rotting vegetables or fruit at characters they objected to, or the “atavistic” introduction of life into art, as in Kaprow’s famous Happenings. Another nice example in relation to this phenomenon is discussed in a paper by Lewis, and turns around the moment Peter Pan turns to the audience and says: “Do you believe in fairies?... If you believe, clap your hands!”<sup>195</sup>

The crux of this discussion rests on whether audience participation is incompatible with maintaining psychological distance. Lewis argues, not against Bullough, but against the idea that it should be assumed that Peter’s calling out to the audience, and the audiences’ response to him, really amounts to a lack of distance. On the contrary, distance, on Lewis’ and Bullough’s accounts, renders the characters fictitious and the aesthetic state contributes to our awareness of fictional characters. The children’s response, à la Walton, is an imagined ‘as if’ response, as if the characters are real.<sup>196</sup> I would also suggest that audience behaviour is, in these moments, a matter of convention. The

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<sup>193</sup> Bullough, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle." 87.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>195</sup> Peter Lewis, "A Note on Audience Participation and Psychological Distance," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 25, no. 3 (1985). 273.

<sup>196</sup> Kendall L. Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy* 75, no. 1978 (1978).



majority of the people in the audience will know that it is fine to be taken away by the aesthetic moment and to respond to Peter. This is particularly true of the peculiarly British phenomenon of pantomime, to cite an example of theatre that thrives, joyously and jubilantly, on audience participation, but not any less magically. Moreover, knowing how to behave at the theatre, or in a gallery, is merely a matter of convention or of normativity. It was acceptable for Greek audiences to behave in ways that were distasteful to Plato:

The plays were not produced in front of a well-behaved audience. The dense crowd was given to whistling (*syrinx*) and the theater resounded with its “uneducated noise” (*amousoi boai plethous*, *Lg.* 700c3). Plato expresses profound distaste for the tumult with which audiences, in the theater and elsewhere, voiced their approval or dissatisfaction (*Rep.* 492c). Their preferences were definitely pronounced if not often sophisticated. Since four plays were produced within a single day, the audience arrived at the theater with large quantities of food. Some of it they consumed themselves - hardly a silent activity in its own right, unlikely to produce the quasi-religious attention required of a fine-art audience today and more reminiscent of other sorts of mass entertainments. Some of their food was used to pelt those actors whom they did not like, and whom they often literally shouted off the stage. In particular, and though this may be difficult to imagine today, the drama was considered a realistic representation of the world: we are told, for example, that a number of women were frightened into having miscarriages or into giving premature birth by the entrance of the Furies in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*.<sup>197</sup>

Nehamas goes on to make a point about realism, transparency and mediation, and contrasts the Greek attic dramas with 1980s television. My reason for bringing that vivid description of Greek audiences is rather to show that each time period has its conventions, and it may be that these conventions change over time. Other examples could include responses to high Modernist music and dance, such as that of Schönberg and Stravinsky or Antheil that broke with traditional conventions, with audiences reacting argumentatively and riotously to what they heard and saw because they could

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<sup>197</sup> Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media." 223.

not relate to or possibly understand their difficult, dissonant, ‘avant-garde’ sound and jarring choreography.<sup>198</sup>

The idea of how we engage with an artwork, and conventions associated with it, became the focal point for artists who also resisted an understanding of the aesthetic, ‘disinterest’, ‘formalism’, as per Carroll’s characterisation of them discussed in chapter three. Nehamas, for example, mentioned Kaprow’s artistic explorations between art and life:

This is not art which represents, as art has always represented, disturbing reality. It is art which aims to disturb precisely by eradicating the distance between it and reality, by placing reality squarely within it.<sup>199</sup>

Other artists like Felix Gonzales-Torres played on the conventional behaviours in galleries with his ‘stack’ and ‘candy’ pieces. His stack pieces were “neat piles of unlimited-edition prints that viewers are encouraged to take, but are intermittently replaced, resulting in a constantly changing height of the sculpture”, the most poignant of which were linked with the AIDS epidemic, representing “the atrophy of AIDS victims’ bodies”. One piece was an installation of 175 pounds of multi-coloured candy, ‘Untitled’, from which people could take a candy, but the candy represented his AIDS-infected partner’s diminishing strength.<sup>200</sup>

As I have suggested with the theatre case, and although some artists, like Kaprow and Gonzales-Torres, are partly reacting to what I take to be a misconstrued notion of the ‘aesthetic’, ‘disinterest’, and ‘distance’, these examples put the spectator-participant in a

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<sup>198</sup> Leon Botstein, "One Music and the Critique of Culture: Arnold Schönberg, Heinrich Schenker, and the Emergence of Modernism in Fin De Siècle Vienna," in *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schönberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, ed. Juliane and Christopher Hailey Brand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Julia Schmidt-Pirro, "Between the European Avant-Garde and American Modernism: George Antheil's "Ballet Mécanique", " *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 89, no. 3/4 (2006).

<sup>199</sup> Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media.", Jeff Kelley, ed. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: University of California press,2003). 226. Danto, "Art and Disturbation." -Hermann Meyer, Eva, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosental, ed. *Art as Life* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute Publications Program,2008).

<sup>200</sup> Robert Storr, "Felix Gonzales-Torres: Être Un Espion," *ArtPress* January (1995).

different, interesting, albeit non-traditional relation to the artwork, one that plays on convention, how we are supposed to behave within artistic contexts. We may be a little confused about what we are supposed to do, what is conventionally acceptable to do, in encounters with Peter Pan, a Happening or whether we're allowed to sneak a candy. We might even heroically rush on stage to save Desdemona. We are not, however, confused about whether Peter Pan, the attic Greek performances are plays, the Happening or untitled works of Gonzales-Torres are artworks.

That these conventions exist, and are sometimes confusing, need not worry us, not even to the extent that if art is viewed as continuous with life it should lose its distinct value as a work of art. Disinterest and psychological distance are terms for a particular way we attend to aesthetic objects, particularly to their perceivable aesthetic features and an object's non-aesthetic features or a subject's imagination or knowledge may feed into that experience. The way we attend to and perceive objects aesthetically need not be understood in terms of how we define art, but it does involve attending to them in such a way that its objective features constitute the experience.

A concrete example of someone misunderstanding Bullough's views on distance, or the concept of disinterest, comes from Goldman. Goldman mischaracterises Bullough's view as one that does not accommodate the pain we feel when we "cry at a tragedy, the fear we feel when we jump at a horror movie, or lose ourselves in the plot of a complex novel".<sup>201</sup> Goldman writes that in these instances we are not detached from the experience, and detachment would require no reaction on the part of the spectator. This, however, as Shelley argues, misses the point that Bullough was making, which was that the feelings we have during theatrical performances are allowed, and are part of what the tragedy, horror movie or complex novel is about rather than disallowed or subjectively indulgent.<sup>202</sup> Again, we are not being asked by Bullough to distance ourselves from the emotions we feel when wrapped up in experiencing a performance, but that experience requires our being distanced from our practicalities and desires. This too, is important

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<sup>201</sup> Alan H. Goldman, "The Aesthetic," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys and Dominic McIver Lopes Gaut (London: Routledge, 2005). 265.

<sup>202</sup> Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic."

once we turn our attention to nature's propensity for being in tune with our moods and emotions, as we will discover in section three below.

Let me summarise how the above points let us respond to Wollheim's concern that we might become confused about or between art and life. One answer is that it is a matter of convention how we behave relative to an artwork. Wollheim's yokel has, first, been overly drawn into the story or perhaps he is just not used to going to the theatre. For most people (even children) watching Peter Pan, have learned or quickly learn how to respond appropriately. Although our emotions are powerful in responding to tragedy, horror or the complex plot of a novel, most of us know that Desdemona will not be saved from her theatrical fate - even if we did try to intervene. The children's imaginations will be taken to Neverland and be enchanted by fairies and pirates, without the children themselves physically participating in the adventure; as adults, we will participate in Desdemona's tragedy without ourselves experiencing her loss in the way the characters they act out they do. There is no danger of confusing art with life because we know that we are engaging in a special theatrical production and that in some cases, the audience may be asked to participate. Disinterest is not a matter of convention, but is what allows us to engage fully with an object's perceptual, aesthetic properties. Interestingly, what guides our experience of nature are not necessarily conventions similar to those required by artwork's limitations, or how it is best experienced, or even how nature might best be experienced. Restrictions to how we engage with nature are determined by the very limitations that nature itself imposes. What we can experience in nature is done usually through our traversing a landscape, often using most of our senses, uninhibited by the sorts of conventions required by most art.

Now we turn to Wollheim's further claim that, because Bullough and Kant do not give explicit priority to nature or art as a paradigm of the aesthetic, and because they contrast the aesthetic and practical domains, we should, according to them, be able to take either a practical or an aesthetic approach towards things.<sup>203</sup> For example, in any experience, the case of the yokel, Wollheim argues, we ought to be able to take both an aesthetic and a practical approach, but taking a practical approach would "surely be

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<sup>203</sup> See footnote 12.

absurd to demonstrate what it is to show, say, concern, by concentrating on the action of the yokel who rushed up on to the stage to save the life of Desdemona”, rather than the play itself.<sup>204</sup> The thrust of the argument is that by not providing a paradigm example of the aesthetic, an object that by its very nature requires an aesthetic attitude rather than a practical one, Wollheim suggests, we are led to the absurdity of trying to demonstrate what it would be to show a practical concern for the yokel, when what we should really be doing is attending to the play.<sup>205</sup>

According to Wollheim, because art is the paradigm of the aesthetic, we can easily demarcate how both art and the aesthetic are distinct from the ordinary practicalities of life. We can approach art aesthetically and non-art practically. However, according to Wollheim, if we accept, as Kant and Bullough do, that the aesthetic attitude applies to non-art (‘nature’ or ‘life’) as well as art, we are in the peculiar situation of having to accept that we can apply the aesthetic attitude both to art and to non-art (‘nature’ or ‘life’) and the non-aesthetic, or practical, attitude to art and non-art (‘nature’ or ‘life’). We would have to explain from a practical point of view why, according to Wollheim, the yokel jumps up on stage to save Desdemona, rather than attend to *Othello*. The play is where we should focus our faculties given that we’ve gone to the theatre to see it (and not a yokel rushing on stage). From the aesthetic point of view we can understand that the yokel is overly immersed in the play, to the extent that he decides to take action. We can’t explain the practical point of view because Desdemona is character in a play - we know that she cannot be saved.

Wollheim has attributed the disinterested aesthetic approach to art and the practical approach to non-art. The problem with this, as we pointed out was a problem for Hegel, is that the aesthetic experience of non-art is not accounted for. As Stolnitz, Bullough and Lewis in particular argue is that ‘disinterest’ and ‘psychical distance’ are not what they at first seem to be. In fact we saw this already in the discussion of disinterest in chapter two, and later in chapter three. They simply describe our being captured and immersed

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<sup>204</sup> Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*. 98.

<sup>205</sup> Actually, it would be an interesting study in psychology to learn why it the yokel has responded in that way, simply because it defies convention, but this is not to be pursued here.

in an experience that is constituted by aesthetic properties and, possibly, other features. The aesthetic, disinterest, or psychological distance do not obliterate the viewing subject's emotions or personality, but require that issues to do with practicalities and self-interest do not figure as part of our engagement with what we see on stage.

Another thought that is relevant to the idea that aesthetic experiences of non-art are possible is that it is puzzling why Hegel, Savile or Wollheim give us no explicit reason for arguing that the aesthetic does not map onto nature in meaningful ways. While the way the arguments presented above make it sound like they have independent, cohesive reasons for the idea that the aesthetic maps only onto art and only derivatively so onto nature, these are really minor points in their respective philosophical projects, in which they already have a vested and assumed interest in art. As Sibley writes, the onus is at least as much on those who prefer to direct discussions of the aesthetic to art not to make assumptions about the aesthetic priority of art versus nature as it is on those who prefer to adopt the perspective that the aesthetic primarily applies to nature.<sup>206</sup> In support of this claim, here is an objection, inspired by Brady, Budd, and Hepburn, to the idea that nature is only derivatively aesthetic, that it is by appealing to art that we aesthetically experience nature.

The question of how we view nature through art, and the relationship between landscape, mind, and art is important, as when we look at how artists have depicted landscapes in particular historical periods, for example. In this case, our experience is likely to be guided, directed, controlled, by the artist's thoughts, choices, and perspective. We learn about humankind's relationship with nature through the ages by looking at art. This however, is a different question from that of aesthetically appreciating nature for its own sake, as a distinct phenomenon from art, or an expressive object. Looking at nature as if were art is, as Budd writes, "untrue to the phenomenology

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<sup>206</sup> Frank Sibley, "Arts or the Aesthetic - Which Comes First?," in *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Betty Redfern John Benson, Jeremy Roxbee Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).136.

of aesthetically experiencing nature” because nature is not made by humans, but is the product of natural forces and processes.<sup>207</sup>

Artistic choices do not control the aesthetic experience of nature and nature should be viewed in terms of no particular artistic style, unlike Savile’s idea from the previous chapter that we can choose which artistic style we’re viewing nature in terms of. Despite this, nature offers possibilities for aesthetic experience that, for this very reason, can offer a positive effect, such as the extent to which a person might be immersed in and engaged by the natural aesthetic situation itself. The aesthetic situation is often immersive, with the spectator an active participant, but also recognising and being aware of her own sensual engagement with it. Not only is the spectator-participant aware of her natural surroundings, she is also aware of herself in those surroundings, and being in motion in those surroundings, which are unframed and probably seemingly boundless.<sup>208</sup> Brady’s ‘Integrated Aesthetic’ also emphasises the idea that the appreciator stands in relation to the environment, both spatially, but also subjectively, both in the sense that “aesthetic appreciation begins in perception”, which “includes all of the different types of our sensory contact with the world - seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, combined with thoughts, imagining and beliefs” and in the sense that aesthetic appreciation is disinterested, if disinterested is understood in its original conception as discussed in chapters two and three above.<sup>209</sup> It might be true, as per the art-first view, that we can experience nature as if it were art. The trouble with this view, as we will go onto consider, is that it isn’t true to the phenomenology of our aesthetic experiences of nature and to the immediacy of the experience or the kind of relation that exists between it and us.

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<sup>207</sup> Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. 119.

<sup>208</sup> It may seem obvious that this is true of both aesthetic artefacts and nature, but aesthetics was bound by the philosophy of art which conceived of aesthetic experiences occurring primarily in galleries, with the spectator’s attention first and foremost being towards painting, and therefore not requiring this more immersive approach, and by the lack of aesthetic attention that was paid to nature. Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty." 12-13.

<sup>209</sup> Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*. 123.

Our perceptual, multi-sensual, imaginative and other engagements with nature offer distinctive aesthetic experiences unmediated by artistic intention. This goes some way to explaining how we might conceive of nature's being as meaningful as art where aesthetics is concerned, but meaningful in a different way. The idea that we are immersed in nature, but can nevertheless reflect on our immediate encounters with its smells, perspectives, sights or our subjective, physical and internal relationship with it are a reminder that disinterest and psychological distance are at play in a similar way to when we are at the theatre, partaking in a Happening or taking a print from one of Gonzales-Torres' stacks.

Nature provides a depth of aesthetic experience because it relates to a claim about nature's existence, our own existence, and, as we will see below, a mirroring effect of nature's and our own expressive and mood properties. Furthermore, because we need not take the step of acknowledging or implementing the same kinds of conventions required of art, as we saw with the theatrical, psychological distance cases, we do not need a further concept, that of art, to experience it aesthetically. We can learn from the openness, immediacy, imagination, freedom and richness of our perceptual aesthetic experiences of nature, and apply them to art. This thought is particularly true of artworks that have gone beyond the frame or the plinth, that explore more than just the visual sense but many other senses. Budd's conclusion that nature is indeterminate is a positive consequence, one that opens us to the aesthetic, expressive and other possibilities that nature has to offer. Although Budd stops there, we have seen other philosophers, such as Hepburn and Brady in particular, as well as Berleant, who provide a more precise articulation of what it is to aesthetically experience nature that involves multi-sensuous engagement, reflection, the imagination, and multiple perspectives.

### **§ The Expressive Properties of Nature**

As discussed above, one of the reasons art is taken to be prior to nature, where aesthetics is concerned, is that it is expressive of concepts and ideas and therefore has a psychological, intellectual and intentional content that is not obvious in nature, unless



we believe in a higher or pantheistic power. This view is particularly attributable to Bell, for whom a sufficient condition for having an aesthetic experience involved ‘significant’ form, that is to say, emotion and meaning incorporated into an artwork by a human mind. Now that we have seen that nature provides us with meaningful aesthetic experiences of a different sort from art and, putting belief about god (pantheistic or otherwise) to one side, how can we account for nature’s seeming expressive properties? And if we can make sense of nature’s being expressive, can it also be expressive of aesthetic properties? It would be odd to suggest that the desolate Yorkshire moors, although they may seem lonely and depressing, are themselves lonely and depressed; or that lambs, gambolling in a Spring meadow have the concepts of friskiness and joy that we have when we experience their playfulness. This is because the expressive properties being applied are ordinarily thought of as expressive of human moods and feelings. They are purposefully attributed so that thinking the hills as being lonely, for example, is the only way of making sense of how they could be expressive of loneliness. How, then, do we accommodate the idea that we anthropomorphise natural objects in this way, that natural objects seem to express emotions or moods that correspond to emotions we feel? Or should we accept that nature exists in such a way that it is independent of human sentiment, emotion or mood?

The answer to that final question is yes, we should accept that nature has a mode of existence that we cannot access, and that the emotions we see expressed or that we project onto it are our own. This need not concede the art-first reason for thinking art the more meaningful or important paradigm when it comes to aesthetics, but it is revealing of the idea that in aesthetically experiencing nature, we are set in a different sort of relation to it, one that attends to its aesthetic properties as relating to nature and not art. For example, Brady writes that:

We should not assume that there will always be a correlation between human and natural qualities. Sometimes the correlation will be inexact or not exist at all. [...] While humans themselves are of course natural creatures, there are great differences between us and other animals, and between us and other natural things.

This fact is perhaps most dramatically shown in cases where we experience the wonder and the sublimity of nature.<sup>210</sup>

Brady is inspired by Hepburn's thought that we should acknowledge that nature has a mode of existing that is independent of human experience and that human experience does not always map onto it, that human qualities may not always map onto nature, that we might not be able to completely anthropomorphise nature, or experience nature in a way other species would. Hepburn also writes:

But instead of nature being humanized, the reverse may happen. Aesthetic experience of nature may be experience of a range of emotion that the human scene, by itself, untutored and unsupplemented, could not evoke".<sup>211</sup>

This suggests that by attending to nature, and allowing for its objective presence, we can learn about it and emotions can be evoked in us that we would not have in relation to a non-natural, particularly human, environment. This suggests that aesthetically experiencing nature can help us learn about nature as nature, allow it to guide us in our appreciation of it, scrutinise it, attend to it, as much as is possible, and for its own sake, rather than being guided by how we might or ought to conceptualise our experiences or structure our thoughts in relation to it.

I will attempt to address the issue of nature's expressive properties by arguing to the conclusion that there is a complex interaction between nature's objective non-aesthetic and non-expressive properties, and our complex projection of emotions, moods and metaphors. Even though nature is not intentional in the way art is, we experience mood and emotion in relation to its phenomenal features and thereby experience aesthetic properties in nature. For much of what I say below, I am inspired by the way Brady has brought the idea of nature's expressive properties to fruition and my aim is to show that although nature is not intentionally expressive, or not expressive of an artist or creator's intentions, and may have a mode of existence that we are not sensitive to, it is a rich source of "data", as Hepburn wrote, for our aesthetic responses and therefore

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 179.

<sup>211</sup> Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty." 20; quoted in Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*. 179.

legitimately an aesthetic object. One way to show that is by appealing to our emotive responses to nature.

Much of what has been written about nature's expressive properties has put down a fertile terrain for discussion. Howarth, in particular, provides an excellent account of how moods correspond to natural backdrops and atmospheres, but also how moods are a part of our natures, and that our natures themselves are a part of nature.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, recognising mood means making the aesthetic appreciation of nature a serious endeavour: appreciating nature's backdrops and atmospheres can help us appreciate our own moods and those of others. Whereas expressive theories of art focus not only on the work, but also on artistic intention, Howarth gives us an account of mood that corresponds to the phenomenological experience of nature as nature, that is to say, by attending to the atmospheres created by nature, as she argues Wordsworth does in the following extract:

The specific resemblances [Wordsworth appeals to] make the ascription of mood terms to nature more intelligible. Wordsworth does not just use the mood terms of nature and leave it there. He spells out a basis for, or an elaboration of, the claims. In 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', glee and jocundity are not ascribed to the daffodils out of nowhere: there is a lead up to it. They are dancing, tossing their heads, fluttering, in a crowd, in an appropriate setting, beside a lake, beneath the trees just as gleeful, jocund people might be. And Wordsworth's heart, like the daffodils, dances.<sup>213</sup>

In this extract we can see that we apply emotive terms to nature as we do to people. In the discussion below we will see how it is that the daffodils' non-aesthetic features and environmental context (such as the breeze or wind that is causing their carefree jocundity), for example, correspond to the emotive terms we use to describe them. That human beings are a part of that nature allows us to recognise nature's patterns and complexes, atmospheres and landscapes that correspond to our patterns and complexes, or moods that descend on us with no clear beginning or end. This means that nature might be an "appropriate backdrop that 'feeds' one's mood, helps to prolong it, whereas

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<sup>212</sup> Howarth, "Nature's Moods."

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 117.

a different backdrop, bright sunlight, blue skies, balmy breezes, might snap one out of it”<sup>214</sup>.

An appropriate backdrop for a mood of desolation would be a desolate landscape, and similarly for ‘gloomy’, ‘sombre’, ‘dismal’, ‘serene’, ‘tranquil’, ‘excited’, ‘tense’. All these terms apply to people, identifying, broadly speaking, moods, and to nature: to skies, hills, countryside, to lakes, rivers, forest glades. We might not have used the same words for the mood and the atmosphere. My claim is that, given the correlation between moods and atmospheres, the way that moods characteristically ‘spread’ to colour one’s environment, it is natural to use the same word for both.<sup>215</sup>

The idea is that by attending to nature’s moods, we can see how they resonate with our own. Perhaps no explanation can be given for them, but the fact that we can look both externally and internally for their manifestation, or that we can recognise moods in nature while at the same time not feeling it ourselves puts us in a much better position to argue for the relevance of nature to aesthetic experience. This is because nature instantiates features that we immediately pick up on, such as its having an affinity with our moods. This immediacy is, in any case, less mediated than our experiences of art, because we don’t need to appeal to artistic intention or representation, art history, or other contextual issues to make sense of our experience of nature. We see the sky’s murkiness, the expansive, rugged moorland in front of us and associate it with a depressive, internal bleakness. That we can associate our moods with atmospheres in nature is simply meant to illustrate that nature can complement human experience.

Carroll gives us an arousal model of nature appreciation that attends to emotions rather than moods, where emotions apply to particular states of mind such as joy, anger, love, hate or horror and moods are less specific and more diffuse.<sup>216</sup> We are emotionally moved by nature, and appropriately so when we attend to the nature’s own properties. Emotions, for Carroll are not simply subjective projections of human feelings on natural landscapes or objects: the subject, the object and the context in which the experience is

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 114.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. 114.

<sup>216</sup> Carroll, "On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History.", ———, "Emotion, Appreciation and Nature."

being had are all factor in the experience. Just as Howarth matches the concepts of moods with nature's atmospheres and backdrops, integrating human existence in the existence of nature, Carroll writes that emotion being felt should be appropriate to the object. This means that the attribution of expressive properties to natural objects depends upon their perceptual configuration, how they look, sound and, presumably, smell.

Furthermore, the way the objects are configured correspond to human behaviours and provide a solution for how it is that we can attribute mental states to inanimate objects:

A person with her head and shoulders drooped exhibits one of the characteristic appearances of sadness. She is sad-looking. When we say she is sad-looking, we are not speaking metaphorically, but literally. We are offering a literal description of the way in which she looks to us. Similarly, when we call the weeping willow tree sad (sad-looking), we are offering a literal description of its perceptible configuration. Somehow, probably by resemblance, the tree reminds us of the characteristic appearance of sad people. Thus, when we say the weeping willow tree is sad, we are saying that it is sad-looking.<sup>217</sup>

What is important about both Howarth's account of moods and Carroll's account of emotions as they relate to nature, if I may synthesise them, is that mood and affect reach beyond belief, and subjective feeling. The moods and emotions they associate with nature are outward looking, opening onto the way nature presents itself to us as well as how we feel as beings that are a part of nature. While it may be true that we may not fully comprehend nature's traits as independent from the mental frameworks we use to make sense of nature or its traits, we can be open to the possibility, following Brady and Hepburn above, that nature may be differently experienced by another species, and that we might learn from nature about our own moods and emotions, moods and emotions we may never have previously felt.

Another philosophical approach to making sense of nature's expressive properties was attempted by Wollheim, whose thoughts on the matter were critiqued by Budd. Unlike Howarth, Wollheim set the issue of moods to one side and explored the idea of emotive language as it applied to nature and to art. It could also be seen as a precursor to

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<sup>217</sup> Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). 100.

Carroll's view.<sup>218</sup> The precision with which Wollheim advances his thesis can help us get closer to, or open further onto nature's properties, and therefore construct an experience of nature that exemplifies rich, natural, perceptual content. He put forward a theory of projective properties to resist linguistic, or predicative approaches that denied the possibility for mental states being attributed to nature at all.

Wollheim did not want to deny this, for we rightly do say that nature looks like it has certain emotional states, or that a situation evokes a certain mood. The issue is that although nature does not have psychological properties, there is some property in nature to which we refer when we do attribute mental states to it. The idea, which fits nicely with Carroll's view above, is that nature's properties correspond to the perceptible manifestations of our mental states. These are projective properties that are, according to Wollheim, a class of secondary properties, that is, they are of the object and cause the experience.<sup>219</sup> Projective properties are, however, more complex than secondary properties in that they are 'triadic': they are perceptual, affective and refer back to previous experience, or experiential memory.

Wollheim draws a distinction between simple and complex projective properties: a simple projection is one whereby the mental state being attributed is one that that is of the subject, that might change her belief, and whereby the object in the environment has the same property as the subject; a simple projection is one that projects onto something that has no psychology, where there's a change in belief and a new attitude towards the natural object and where the property in the object is not the same as the property in the subject. When a complex projection occurs, there is an affinity between what the subject sees, her inner world and her external, natural world.

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<sup>218</sup> Malcolm Budd, "Wollheim on Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expressive Perception," in *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting: Art as Representation and Expression*, ed. Rob Van Gerwen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Richard Wollheim, "Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expression in the Arts," in *The Language of Art History*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>219</sup> Wollheim references McDowell here: John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J.L. Mackie*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

Budd raises three issues that are of import to the discussion here. The first is the claim that Wollheim's "monolithic project" of applying expressive projection to both nature and art is problematic; the second is that complex projection does not seem to be true to the phenomenology of the experience; and the third is to do with the corresponding projective property in the object, that the object's intimation has truth value. I am particularly interested in the third of these and will address that idea momentarily. Considering the right way to respond to Budd's objection to Wollheim helps us clarify how we should think about the expressive properties in nature.

The bifurcation thesis, the thesis that projective properties apply both to art and nature, that Budd is concerned with relates to the idea that the perception of nature's bearing affective properties is different from the perception of works of art as being expressive of emotion. Budd's thought is that works of art are products of the human mind, and can therefore accede onto what the artist hopes to express, whereas the expressive perception of nature requires the beholder to feel the emotion she sees nature as corresponding to.<sup>220</sup>

This kind of idea has led some philosophers to be drawn to formalist theories of nature (and of art), as we will see in chapter five. Budd, however, thinks that it is because nature is not the result of human creation or endeavour that we have freedom to appreciate it in whatever capacity, from whatever perspective we choose. Because Budd thinks that nature should be appreciated as nature, rather than appealing to some mode of experience (including formalism), nature is appropriate for a different kind of aesthetic appreciation than art. Budd's further point is that the subject would have to actually feel the melancholy or happiness required of the landscape in every case in order for Wollheim's triadic model to work. This is because the complex projection itself requires nature to actually instantiate the emotion.

The second criticism that Budd levels against Wollheim is that complex projection does not seem true to the phenomenology of the experience of expressive perception, that we do not require intimation or complex projection in order to experience the

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<sup>220</sup> Budd, "Wollheim on Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expressive Perception." 250.

expressive properties of things. This criticism strikes at the heart of Wollheim's argument, for Wollheim is trying to reject the predication view that, for metaphysical reasons, does not think emotive predicates can be applied to nature. He therefore wants to capture something of the perceptual experience of objects that don't themselves feel the emotions they project, but match them in some important respect.

Budd's thought that Wollheim's projective properties thesis is not true to the phenomenology of our experiences of projective properties in nature. I don't think Wollheim requires the beholder to feel the emotion of cheeriness when she notices that a babbling brook is cheery. If the beholder has had the experience of a cheery, babbling, brook before, the intimation that the brook is cheery would be enough for her to perceive that cheeriness is instantiated in this case, without feeling it in that moment. The experience requires the brook to intimate cheeriness, because it is that intimation that grounds the judgment that the brook is cheery. As Carroll stated above, the weeping willow tree's looking sad offers a literal description of its perceptible configuration. What is the truth-value for the intimation that the willow tree looks sad? I would submit, à la Carroll above, that it pertains to its non-aesthetic perceptual properties, the fact that the branches droop and look wilted. That this is how they look is what intimates the emotion of sadness. In addition to the intimation, comes the subject's inner mental state and historical experience of willow trees. The truth value, then, of the intimation arises from our looking at the tree itself.

This section has appealed to the idea that expressive properties apply to nature. That they apply to nature is indicative that nature can provide meaningful data when it comes to our aesthetic appreciation of it. Nature's mode of existence may be different from how we do, or may ever, conceive of it, a reason for which attending to it, scrutinising it as a rich source of natural phenomena is integral to appreciating it aesthetically. We have seen that there is an internal and external manifestation of expressive and aesthetic properties as they relate to nature, and that mood and affect reach beyond belief and subjective feeling for the exemplification of expressive, aesthetic, rich, natural, content.



## § Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to show that nature is a rich resource for aesthetic experience that both enhances our understanding of it and our understanding of ourselves. I laid out the reasons for denying why nature is an important resource for aesthetic appreciation, which at very least seem to be based on Hegel's disallowing of nature into the aesthetic realm. I resisted those arguments by showing that in having aesthetic experiences, we are not necessarily involved with acceding to the mind of an artist, or we need not worry about confusing life with art, as Wollheim argued, but we attend to the object of that aesthetic experience.

I introduced the idea of nature's expressive properties both in order to show our affinity with it, but also to provide additional support for the thought that nature is a proper object of aesthetic attention, experience and appreciation. Just because the intentionality behind nature's appearance is unknown, that it appears to have a teleology that we can't explain except perhaps by appealing to God, does not preclude it from being an important aesthetic object, to which we sometimes respond profoundly and emotively. Nature's objects provide us with the opportunity to experience them aesthetically without requiring mediation or understanding of the intentionality behind it. We apply expressive properties to it with immediacy, which gives us a purity of experience that need not require justification in the same way artworks might and often do require. Nature's expressive properties can be observed and described in terms of how a natural object might resemble the property being ascribed to it. The babbling frivolity we might feel from the movement of the brook depends on the movement of the water through stones and pebbles. How we think about and respond to the brook can easily be shared with others. This might be thought of as cognitive insofar as commonsense beliefs are joined with perceived qualities, but not in the sense that it hinges on scientific understanding or knowledge.<sup>221</sup> The expressive qualities of nature, therefore, contribute to the overall dialectic presented here by first of all showing that our experiences of nature can be simply or profoundly moving, but in a way that need

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<sup>221</sup>Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*. 172-174.

not engage representational props for art (although it might) but that does engage our emotions and moods. We apply these emotions and moods to nature without need for fiction-making, but for identifying how we might and do relate to nature.

In our desire to understand how it is that expressive properties function in our interactions with nature, we are one step closer to understanding our relationship to it, and ourselves, especially if we recognise that we are a part of nature. I will proceed by arguing, in chapter five, against austere accounts of formalism that seek to pare our aesthetic experiences of nature down to the very minimum just as I will argue against the scientific, cognitivist, approach to the aesthetics of nature. The overall conclusion I am arguing towards is that our aesthetic experiences of nature are perceptually rich, involving not just formal properties, but a unified set of integrated properties that often relate to our emotions, imaginations and the knowledge (scientific or otherwise) that we bring to nature as subjects. The advantage of an integrated account along the lines of Brady's position is threefold. It emphasises the core of what it is to have an aesthetic experience by articulating why and how perceptual experience matters to overall experience. By emphasising the important role perception plays in the idea of aesthetic experience we can also explain the perceptual core of aesthetic experience, that it is what enables the unified appearance of an object according to how we *really* experience it aesthetically. A subject learns what it is that moves them aesthetically, rather than, for example, appealing to a list of criteria to justify that experience. It will come to support the whole-formalist view of aesthetic experience, according to which the object perceptually manifests itself, displaying order, unity, harmony of parts to form a whole. Thirdly, it can explain a broad range of judgments and experiences according to what the subject genuinely knows, rather than requiring overly constraining cognitive machinery to justify how one ought to experience an object aesthetically.

## **Chapter Five: Formalism, Cognitivism and Aesthetic Perception**

### **§ Introduction**

In chapter four I argued that nature is at least as significant as art where aesthetic experience is concerned. One may still, however, insist that it is art that offers us meaningful experiences, not nature, because of the distinctly human intentionality behind it. Nature does not offer the kind of intentionality that is immediately and in many cases intuitively graspable by us in the same way that art does to the extent that it is the product of someone or something's intentional activity. We have experiences of nature, and the intentionality behind it, if such intentionality were to exist, is either unknown or non-existent, which can make it seem like nature is best be aesthetically appreciated either in terms of an austere formalism or in terms of an intellectualist approach that relies on scientific knowledge. Despite the last chapter's conclusions about nature's expressive properties, we might have residual worries that the lack of intentionality behind nature means that it should be regarded as of secondary importance to art when considering aesthetic experience or that the lack of intentionality entails that the only way we can explain our experience of it in terms of formalism. This is because formalism is often (if wrongly) defined negatively, or in terms of the experience being exclusionary of content, context, expression. If nature is thought of as non-intentional, it is a prime candidate for being experienced in terms of formalism. Yet accounts of formalism do not seem to do justice to our experiences of nature, which are nevertheless rich in non-formal perceptual and emotive features that are linked to its, and our own, very existence. One understanding of such a narrow account of formalism is overly reductive in the sense that it appeals only to shapes, colours and lines that the object manifests.

Setting the exclusionary aspects of formalism to one side, a subtle distinction might be articulated between austere and non-austere formalisms. The former is one that lists particular spatial, temporal, properties and how they relate to each other; the latter takes it that the formalism is the presentation of sensibly qualities in an ordered, unified

diversity and variety, or harmonious way to form a whole. The former definition might make sense in a certain set of circumstances, where an artwork's properties are arranged such that they elicit the type of response that is concerned only with the relation between spatial and temporal properties, such as line and shape. Modern art would be a good example of this. This, however, seems overly constraining when we want to try to include aesthetic objects that are not predisposed to that sort of response.

The latter definition, although subtly different from the former, is more precise and relates the object to its sensible qualities, to actual, sensible, experience, rather than to particular qualities the aesthetic object should or should not instantiate. It speaks to the idea that what the senses perceive integrate to form a whole, taking into account a variety of qualities that are presented by diverse senses and that are unified into the presentation of a whole object. While this richer, perceptual, account of formalism does not take into account mental, emotional, expressive, historical, institutional or social content or context, this does not mean, as we shall see, that these factors are excluded from the wider experience.

It differs from another kind of formalism that is more complete, that takes account of more detailed perceivable features the object manifests. In 'whole' formalism<sup>222</sup>, the object's features are appreciated together to form a whole that displays a manifold of different non-aesthetic and aesthetic features that are interrelated and interdependent. On the other hand, the intellectualist account does not do justice to our experiences of nature because it relies too heavily on knowledge at the expense of the richness of perceptual, phenomenological, experience.

Both austere formalism and intellectualist approaches are prescriptive with regard to what can or can not be included in aesthetic experience: the former denies the importance of non-formal properties in aesthetic experience and the latter denies the importance nature's perceptual, aesthetic properties. These positions, if entrenched, beg the question of each other, each laying claim to a principle that denies the obvious

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<sup>222</sup> In chapter six we will look more closely at the idea of 'whole' formalism, which has been identified by Zuckert as a better way of making sense of Kant's formalism, which is often characterised as being more austere than Zuckert, or I, think is appropriate. Zuckert, "The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism."

advantage of the seemingly opposing claim. I give an account of both approaches, in what follows, which will set up the framework from which a perceptual account of aesthetic properties will emerge, which will more fully be articulated in chapter six. This account of the nature of aesthetic experience will not entail a whole-hearted rejection of formalism, particularly if formalism is afforded a much richer, perceptual definition. Nor does it entail that non-perceptual properties, such as scientific knowledge, are completely irrelevant to aesthetic experience.

### § Austere Formalism

Formalism, which I introduced in chapter two and discussed further in chapter three is often evoked as the best concept with which to make sense of our aesthetic experiences of nature because it denies the importance, and in some cases the relevance, of non-formal, non-perceptual properties, to aesthetic experience. Nature is indeterminate in the sense that we don't know what lies behind its essence or its appearance; it might have a mode of existence that is inaccessible to us. This is the thought that motivates reasons to deny its importance as an aesthetic object, if not to deny it completely as an aesthetic object, for example in the writings of Hegel, Bell and Wollheim to some degree as we have seen in chapters chapter three. It also motivates some to consider that attempting to explain our aesthetic experiences of nature a "chimerical quest", as we saw with Budd, also in chapter three. To think through the problem of aesthetic indeterminacy as it relates to nature, we can begin with Zuckert's definition of a generic understanding of formalism that is often evoked in the literature:

Broadly speaking, "formalism" is the view that, in the aesthetic appreciation of an object (usually a work of art), we do and ought to pay attention not to the object's representational content, emotional expressiveness, historical, institutional, or social context (whether conditions for the production of the objects or its effects), but only its form. Formalism is characterized in some sense, then, by what it excludes, viz. considerations taken to be external to the object. But it does specify positively (if vaguely) that the form of an object is what makes it beautiful.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 600. This definition is generic, and Zuckert does not argue for it as such, but for a refined version of 'whole formalism' that is "diametrically opposed" to it. As we will

Zuckert does not endorse this definition of formalism, especially when it is related to Kant's thought on formalism. However, the definition captures the idea of formalism as it has been advocated by Bell in relation to art, Hanslick in relation to music, and Zangwill in relation to both art and nature.<sup>224</sup> It is also the definition of formalism as it has commonly come to be understood as short-hand by many who wish to argue against it, including those who argue for an 'intellectualist' approach to the aesthetics of nature, as Carlson and Parsons have done.<sup>225</sup>

That definition of formalism seems to accommodate our aesthetic experiences of nature because nature has no obvious artist or author in the way works of art do, and therefore, as some would have it, no inherent meaning or expression. This is because that sort of definition of formalism excludes content, emotional expressiveness, historical, institutional or social context, elements that do not obviously figure in our experiences of nature as they do in our experiences of art.

Formalism along these lines is also often cited as the logical result of disinterest, in the mistaken sense used by many aestheticians, that is to say, those who think that disinterest means 'lack of interest' or the 'suppression of subjective feeling, knowledge or interest' as we saw in chapter two. Carroll, for example, thinks that Bell's formalism is linked with Kant's insofar as indeterminacy is linked to significant form that allows for "rapturous" aesthetic experience divorced from practical life and interests.<sup>226</sup> Carroll

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see, whole formalism is distinct from 'property formalism' (of which Bell and Zangwill's formalism are an example) and 'kind formalism' (which will not be discussed).

<sup>224</sup> Clive Bell, *Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schoenen* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1891), Nick Zangwill, "Feasible Aesthetic Formalism," *Noûs* 33, no. 4 (1999), ———, "In Defense of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 50, no. 201 (2000), ———, "Defusing Anti-Formalist Arguments," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, no. 3 (2000), ———, "Formal Natural Beauty," in *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), ———, "In Defense of Extreme Formalism About Inorganic Nature: Reply to Parsons," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>225</sup> Glenn Parsons, *Aesthetics and Nature*, ed. Derek Matravers, Continuum Aesthetics (London and New York: Continuum, 2008). Chapter three.

<sup>226</sup> Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory." 32.

not only mischaracterises formalism, he misattributes it to Kant and Hutcheson, in the same way he did the concept of ‘disinterest’ as we saw in chapter three above.<sup>227</sup> In any case, according to Carroll’s view at least, ‘disinterest’ and ‘formalism’ lead to an aesthetic experience that has no non-formal or non-perceptual content.

It is worthwhile pausing momentarily in order to make sense of how formalism and the correct account of disinterest that we arrived at in chapter two are linked. We saw that the origins of ‘disinterest’ do not equate it to the complete denial of subjective reflection or thought in our encounters with aesthetic objects. The idea was that self-interest, such as the use of the aesthetic to advance political and religious doctrines, was rejected in order to value the object of aesthetic interest for its own sake, account for its intrinsic value as an object in itself that has certain properties that are aesthetic. We are, as Hutcheson put it, “fitted” to experience the beauty or deformity of objects in a sense that is appropriate to the object’s features alone, rather than for our own self-interested purposes. Kant linked disinterest to the judgment of taste, which was grounded in subjective response and perceptual appearance rather than fully fledged theoretical knowledge. We later saw, contra Carroll, that disinterest is not in tension with a view of aesthetic experience that takes account both of perceptual aesthetic features that do link up with cognitive and emotive features, but neither are they reducible to them.

The perceptual features of the experience are of import, hence an appeal to the object’s formal and perceptual features in addition to its expressive properties, the emotions and the imagination, as long as they pertain both to the subject and the object of the experience. I wish to focus on the austere account of formalism, such as that put forward by Bell in particular, and partly by Zangwill, and the reasons it is often evoked to characterise our experiences of nature, before going into those complexities. My aim is to resist creating too rigid a distinction between austere (or even moderate) formalism and cognitivism and to steer the course between them, bringing out those aspects of

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<sup>227</sup> Noël Carroll, "Clive Bell's Aesthetic Hypothesis," in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Richard Sclafani George Dickie, Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory.", Noël Carroll, "Formalism," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Dominic Lopes Berys Gaut (London, New York: Routledge, 2005).

both approaches to give a genuine account of aesthetic experience that avoids their unfortunate consequences.

While it is likely that Kant influenced Bell, as Carroll suggests, his account of formalism does not explicitly mention Kant (or Hutcheson, for that matter). Bell's formalism or theory of 'significant form' was that lines, colours, forms and relations of forms "stir our aesthetic emotions" and that "[t]o appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space", especially where art was concerned.<sup>228</sup> The aesthetic value that Bell attributed to art was one that originated in the kind of non-representational art that he was interested in, where pictorial, meticulous, representation was of no import according to his art critical practice or his vested interest in non-representational art. He then extended the idea of formalism to all art.

It is telling that both Bell's and Fry's writings, were paving the way for the aesthetic commitments of early twentieth century Modernism. Bell assisted Fry with the latter's second post-Impressionist exhibitions in 1912.<sup>229</sup> As critics of art, they were both explicitly enthusiastic about bringing French modern painting to London, and not without controversy. The issue at stake for Fry was defending the status of paintings (by Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Manet) by way of his formalist denial of the aesthetic relevance of what a picture depicts:

We may, then, dispense once and for all with the idea of [a painting's] likeness to Nature, or correctness or incorrectness as a test, and consider only whether the emotional elements inherent in natural form are adequately discovered, unless, indeed, the emotional idea depends at any point upon likeness, or completeness of representation.<sup>230</sup>

This idea of likeness in representation ties in with Bell's conception of 'significant form' insofar as both Bell and Fry were concerned with getting away from mimetic representation in art. They wanted to defend non-representational painting with the aim of converting a sceptical British public to new forms of painting. Their thoughts on

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<sup>228</sup> Bell, *Art*. 8, 27.

<sup>229</sup> Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). 75, 107.

<sup>230</sup> Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics." 82.



formalism were determined by the paintings they admired rather than aesthetic experience or aesthetic response as such. While it may be true that meticulous, pictorial representation need not determine distinctly aesthetic value, it may, as Budd points out, be relevant to artistic value.<sup>231</sup> There is a range of art that is representational that nevertheless has aesthetic value.

Despite this, we could insist that on Bell's account, some representational art does not have aesthetic value as we need not have awareness of what the pictorial representation is in order for the emotion of significant form to arise. Austere formalists therefore deny representationally and perceptually relevant properties of the work itself the possibility of constituting part of the experience that is deemed to be aesthetic.

Budd writes, therefore, that according to this kind of formalism, "attention should be limited to the two dimensional design of the picture surface, considered in abstraction from what is depicted".<sup>232</sup> We see the picture not as a picture, but as an abstraction and it is the abstraction that is of import to Bell. Just because a property is not necessary and sufficient such as non-formal properties, or other properties related to contextual issues, for the kind of theory that Bell wished to put forward does not mean that it is not relevant either to the representational work or to the experience. The difficulty is that Bell made a distinction between the scene depicted, the depiction and the way each ought to be experienced. The way it should be experienced is as an object that has significant form - lines, colours, spatial organisation that don't relate to the artwork's properties.

A similar issue arises where nature is concerned. How would Bell's significant form apply to nature? Bell thought nature a non-aesthetic object: "Why these [natural] beautiful things do not move us as works of art move us is another, and not an aesthetic, question".<sup>233</sup> Still, as we will see below, contemporary 'new formalists' appeal to Bell's version of formalism to make sense of formalism as it could apply to nature. Whether or not Bell thought nature could move us as works of art do, he still described nature and

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<sup>231</sup> Malcolm Budd, "Formalism," in *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry and Music*, ed. Malcolm Budd (London: Penguin Books, 1995). 51.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

<sup>233</sup> Bell, *Art*. 13.

its contents as beautiful. Significant form could apply to an agricultural landscape such that instead of seeing it as fields and cottages, we should see it as the “pure formal combination of lines and colours”. As we saw in chapter four, Bell holds the view that because nature is indeterminate, that is to say the product of intentional action, it is not the product of intentional human action; it does not hold the kind of significance we would otherwise attribute to art.

Be that as it may, the thought here is that what applied to art above also applies to nature, except there is no artist to interpret the scene or act as intermediary. The artist herself may want to interpret it according to the definition of significant form, bringing with her nothing but a sense of line, colour and an understanding of three-dimensional shape for the painting that a subject would later experience as a painting. The formal elements that she brings into her painting may afford it aesthetic value, but her experience, or anyone’s experience who has viewed the scene according to formal properties, would not necessarily be attending to its phenomenological detail or richness, but to the colours, lines and shapes it displays. This is because nature is not just a collection of formal properties, but a collection of properties that are relevant to being experienced aesthetically in a way that is more widely conceived than attending to those that are relevant for Bell’s significant form. The difficulty here is that Bell only thinks that certain specific properties are formal properties, that is to say lines, shapes and colours, to the exclusion of other perceptual properties and non-perceptual properties. His account of formalism is impoverished in relation to an object that has more than the formal properties he specifies, because he disallows much of what intuitively and importantly influences, contributes to, or thickens, our aesthetic perceptions.

Despite the question of whether we can access all or some of the properties that nature displays in-itself, we can attend to the features that we perceive and that are relevant to aesthetic experience without being selective about the properties that are supposed to figure in aesthetic experience conceived of according to significant form. Indeed, many aesthetic properties that nature displays relate to perspective, how we are oriented in relation towards it or parts of it, as well as our aural experience and our sense of smell of touch. Again, it is an indication that Bell’s formalism is impoverished that he

so narrowly wants to define formalism as applying only to visual aspects of experience, such as shape, line and colour and that other features relevant to the experience are excluded. Approaching nature with the framework of significant form denies the potentially broad range of nature's aesthetic properties in our experience of nature, but contrasts with many aesthetic experiences of traditional forms of art, which are often neatly delineated and two-dimensional.

Parsons and Carlson have identified a group of philosophers they call the 'new formalists'; contemporary philosophers who have invoked this kind of austere formalism to underpin or drive their accounts of our aesthetic experiences of nature.<sup>234</sup> Zangwill is the main proponent and writes, for example:

MODERATE formalism lies between two extremes. On one extreme is extreme formalism, according to which the aesthetic value of something is entirely 'internal' to it, in the sense that it does not at all depend on its *history* or *context*.<sup>\*</sup> On the other extreme is anti-formalism, according to which, the aesthetic value of a thing always (or mostly) depends on its history or context. The extreme formalist position was advanced (for visual art) by Clive Bell and Roger Fry at the beginning of the twentieth century, and (for music) by Eduard Hanslick in the middle of the nineteenth century,<sup>\*\*</sup> but it has not been very popular since then. Anti-formalism dominates contemporary aesthetics, particularly in the United States. (Examples would be Arthur Danto and Kendall Walton.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>) The right view, I think, falls between these extremes. According to moderate formalism, many aesthetic judgements make essential reference to history or context, and many do not. <sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

Moderate formalism joins forces with extreme formalism in complaining vociferously that anti-formalism misses out on an important part of our aesthetic lives, in which our aesthetic thought and experience is independent of our knowledge of a thing's history or context.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, "New Formalism and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>235</sup> Zangwill, "In Defense of Extreme Formalism About Inorganic Nature: Reply to Parsons." 185-186. <sup>\*</sup> "By a thing's history, I shall mean its origins, or how it came into existence, rather than its history, while it has existed. For simplicity, I shall ignore the fact that the microphysical nature of a thing is also aesthetically irrelevant for a formalist." <sup>\*\*</sup> References to Bell, Fry and Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful*. <sup>\*\*\*</sup> References to Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1981) and Walton's 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review*, (1970). <sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> "I develop moderate formalism in chapters 4-8 of *The Metaphysics of Beauty*

We can see that Zangwill frames his approach to aesthetics by setting up a strong dichotomy between formalism and anti-formalism, and placing his own view somewhere in the middle where art and biological kinds are concerned. Even where these are concerned, he grounds his account in a strong formalist framework. His framework is stark and dichotomous, falsely attributing anti-formalism to philosophers, Walton for example, who provide a richer account of aesthetic experience than austere formalism allows by appealing to a wider range of properties to contribute to the experience, including its perceptual properties. Where Zangwill's account of nature is concerned, the dichotomy is so strong that it goes as far as to apply "extreme" formalism to what he calls 'inorganic nature'.<sup>236</sup> Zangwill disagrees with the intellectualist approach we will consider in more detail below in which our aesthetic judgments of nature are dependent on categories of scientific knowledge that help us understand nature, as argued by Carlson and Parsons, but also with Budd's view that nature should be seen and experienced 'as nature'. This is because, on Zangwill's view, nature has purposeless beauty, which we will look at below, and inorganic nature has aesthetic properties that are only formal properties.<sup>237</sup>

Carlson and Parsons, themselves in the intellectualist camp, define 'classical extreme formalism' as the idea, attributable to Bell, that formal properties somehow exhaust our aesthetic experience: the idea that classical formal properties are both necessary and sufficient for aesthetic experience, and include such properties as 'harmonious', 'unified' and 'balanced'. According to Parsons and Carlson, new formalism explicitly explores how formalism as a concept may be applied both to nature and to art, and

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(Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P. 2001).” Nick Zangwill, "Clouds of Illusion in the Aesthetics of Nature," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 63, no. 252 (2013).

<sup>236</sup> Zangwill does allow for more moderate formalism in relation to organic nature, but his overall agenda is one that errs on the side of pared down accounts of aesthetic experience that conform to more austere accounts of formalism. Zangwill, "Formal Natural Beauty.", ———, "In Defense of Extreme Formalism About Inorganic Nature: Reply to Parsons.", ———, "Clouds of Illusion in the Aesthetics of Nature."

<sup>237</sup> Zangwill, "In Defense of Extreme Formalism About Inorganic Nature: Reply to Parsons." ———, "Formal Natural Beauty." In another paper, Zangwill defends a view of thin view of supervenience, which supports his version of formalism.

widens the category of formal properties to the idea that such properties are “metaphysically dependent only on what is often called the “sensory surface” of an object” and that “[t]hus, for the new formalists, an aesthetic property is formal so long as it is dependent only on nonaesthetic properties that are directly presented in perception, such as shape, color, and so forth”.<sup>238</sup> Finally, new formalists do not take formal properties to be both necessary and sufficient for a moderately formal account of aesthetic experience, although they are necessary and sufficient for extreme formalism.

One clarification I wish to make before delving deeper into the issue of formalism relates to the second point, the point about metaphysical dependence. The definition of new formalism provided rests on the idea that the wider category of formal properties offered are based on such properties being metaphysically dependent on non-aesthetic properties. Parsons and Carlson cite Zangwill, for whom “formal properties are not thought to be restricted to those aesthetic properties that are determined solely by sensory properties” and Zangwill seems himself to be underpinning his formalism by appealing to supervenience, according to which aesthetic properties depend on non-aesthetic properties and supervene on natural properties.<sup>239</sup> One aspect of this relates to the main argument of this thesis about how aesthetic experience relates to this metaphysical, supervenience claim, which I will turn to in chapter six, where I use supervenience to support a phenomenologically rich perceptual account of formalism that I will call whole formalism, as per Zuckert’s characterisation.<sup>240</sup>

I am here restricting myself to the idea that however we want to make sense of the metaphysical claim, it does not entail or result in the narrow formalism that Parsons and Carlson identify and criticise and that Zangwill espouses, unless the object is itself constituted by non-aesthetic properties that can only give rise to formal aesthetic properties, such as the Modern paintings that Bell was particularly interested in or the

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<sup>238</sup> Parsons and Carlson, “New Formalism and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature.” 364.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 374. Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*. 56. Nick Zangwill, “Aesthetic Supervenience Defended,” in *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, ed. Nick Zangwill (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>240</sup> Zuckert, “The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant’s Aesthetic Formalism.”

inorganic nature that Zangwill wants to attribute his version of extreme formalism to.<sup>241</sup> Even though such an account of formalism may be applicable to experience of typically formal artworks and objects, including natural ones, it is insufficiently broad if it doesn't allow for relevant, non-formal perceptual properties or non-perceptual properties. I will vindicate this assertion in chapter six, where I will argue for a kind of formalism that is more holistic, and that is not taken in isolation from relevant contextual features to which it non-causally relates. In both of these cases the object displays features, or the object is experienced as displaying features, or is abstracted from in such a way, that is especially conducive to formalism.

This does not mean, however, that supervenience, according to which aesthetic properties depend on non-aesthetic properties and supervene on natural properties, entails experiences to be of a narrowly formalist kind. Nor does it mean that the concepts we use to pick out such experiences belong to the category of 'formal'. Sibley proposed about aesthetic concepts, and Levinson proposed about aesthetic properties, that they belong to the wider category of the 'aesthetic', as we will see in chapter six.<sup>242</sup> For it to be the case that supervenience equates to formalism, most of our aesthetic experiences would have to be of the formalist kind, restricted to the imposition of a mode of experience, or perceptual abstraction, that isn't quite or necessarily true of the object itself, as we argued above. We will return to issues related to attention, supervenience and perception in chapter six. I mention it here because I don't think the supervenience base need be as narrow as Zangwill implies.

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<sup>241</sup> Zangwill, "Formal Natural Beauty.", ———, "In Defense of Extreme Formalism About Inorganic Nature: Reply to Parsons."

<sup>242</sup> While Sibley resisted making metaphysical claims, but wrote of aesthetic concepts and terms, so did Levinson explore the idea of supervenience and aesthetic properties. Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts.", Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility.", ———, "What Are Aesthetic Properties?.", Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 22 (1984), ———, "Being Realistic About Aesthetic Properties," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 3 (1994).

Bearing the above in mind, we can make sense of the formalism/anti-formalism debate as follows. Because of their commitment to perceptual formal properties, formalists argue that you don't need to bring knowledge or contextual information to bear on aesthetic experience, because it is formal, perceptual experience and not knowledge that is important to aesthetics. We saw this in Bell, in Zuckert's initial definition of formalism, in Zangwill's claims above, and in the way Parsons and Carlson have glossed Bell and Zangwill.<sup>243</sup> As Zuckert's definition states above, formalism is marked by what the experience leaves out rather than what it includes: considerations external to the object, representational content, emotional expressiveness, historical, institutional, social context, for example. 'Anti-formalists', on the other hand argue that more is required to account for the depth and richness of an aesthetic experience, but also in order to make correct judgments, which would take account of those considerations.<sup>244</sup>

Let us look more closely at Zangwill's claims about formalism and nature, so that we can set-up the reasons for revising his austere formalism for a more holistic account of formalism that can relate to relevant contextual knowledge, the argument presented in chapter six. Zangwill's austere formalism not only relies on a narrow account of supervenience, but on the distinction between free and dependent beauty: natural beauty

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<sup>243</sup> Bell, *Art*, Roger Fry, *Transformations* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schoenen*.

<sup>244</sup> As I suggested earlier, Zangwill refers to them as anti-formalists, but it unclear that they can be categorised in this way, which distorts the debate into one pitting irreconcilable views against each other. The issue should really be about how best to characterise our aesthetic experiences of nature. Walton and Hepburn do not make claims about being formalists or anti-formalists, Danto attempted to make sense of how an aesthetic theory could account for art that no longer seemed to be about the aesthetic, or about making aesthetic objects. Parsons and Carlson want to bring science to bear on the experience not just in terms of ensuring correctness of judgment, but in order to bring an ethical, problem-solving, dimension into the aesthetics and ethics of nature. Zangwill cites the following publications: Walton, "Categories of Art.", Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty.", Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*, Glenn Parsons, "Natural Functions and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Inorganic Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44, no. 1 (2004), Danto, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace."

is either free (or formal), or it is dependent; nature has purposeless beauty and is therefore suited to a free (or formalist) account of aesthetic experience so that inorganic beauty can only have properties that are formal. Inorganic beauty, presumably, is particularly suited to extreme formalism because it looks to have purposeless beauty, in the same way that Modernist painting is suited to formalism in the artistic context, although the considerations about nature's expressive properties discussed in chapter four undermine the thought that nature looks suited to extreme formalism. That is to say, it might be described as having easily definable shapes, such as the triangular shape of a mountain, lines such as geological features that show sedimentary layers in the earth or fault-lines and large patches and swathes of colour.

Zangwill thinks that Kant's judgment of free beauty necessarily gives rise to a formal experience of nature characterised in a narrow formalist sense, and that a dependent judgment of beauty, a judgment of beauty dependent on what the subject knows, on such concepts the formalist would rather exclude from a formalist account of aesthetic experience, gives rise to a formal experience. According to Zangwill, an organic thing should be appreciated as the particular thing it appears to be, although it can also have purposeless beauty. Inorganic nature, on the other hand, can only have aesthetic properties that are formal. Zangwill uses the following as an example of a natural entity having both free and dependent beauty:

Consider the elegant and somewhat dainty beauty of a polar bear swimming underwater. Surely, we need not consider its beauty as the specific type of animal that it is. [...] Need one consider the underwater-swimming polar bear as a beautiful *living* thing or a beautiful *natural* thing or just a beautiful *thing*? I think the last will do. It is a formally extraordinary *phenomenon*. It might even turn out to be an artfully choreographed swimmer dressed in a polar bear suit. No matter. It is still a beautiful *spectacle*. It has free, formal beauty.<sup>245</sup>

Zangwill accepts that, due to its teleological nature, the polar bear can be beautiful in relation to the biological thing it is, as Carlson and Parsons would argue. He is also pleasantly surprised by the free experience of beauty that attaches to the polar bear, its surprising 'incongruous' beauty that, despite its size, the polar bear is both dainty and

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<sup>245</sup> Zangwill, "Formal Natural Beauty." 116.



elegant while traversing the water. But because there is a distinction between the two types of experience, and ‘anti-formalists’ such as Carlson and Parsons take it that all beauty is dependent (on biology or science in their case), Zangwill takes it that they cannot account for the other, free, non-rule driven kind of beauty. However, although Zangwill himself allows for the distinction, and despite his description of a free experience of beauty, Carlson and Parsons need not be compelled to deny their own dependent account. The formalist should require of the intellectualist that she acknowledges the importance of the perceptual aspect of formal aesthetic properties and the intellectualist would require of the formalist that she acknowledge the importance of an intellectual, cognitive, basis for aesthetic judgments. In either case we have impoverished theories for the very exclusive nature of their accounts of aesthetic experience.

One might first ask of Zangwill’s characterisation what it is about the experience he’s characterising that is both free and formal according to a narrow account of formalism. We will see below that purposelessness as written about by Kant, means ‘not rule driven’ in the sense that nature provides us with opportunities to experience it, not according to human-made or designed rules, nor according to divine rules, as we have already seen. While Zangwill links this aspect of Kant’s aesthetic thought to freedom as Kant himself does, he provides no evidence that freedom equates to the narrow kind of formalism he espouses. He just assumes there’s a link between that kind of formalism and freedom, according to which the form of an object requires a set of specific spatial or temporal properties that characterise the relations that hold among different parts of the object, which is why one might think he is begging the question. This is puzzling because austere formalism is rule driven in the sense that it actively prescribes the inclusion of what are thought to be formal properties and the exclusion of contextual factors.

According to Zuckert, and as we will explore more fully in chapter six, Kant was not a austere formalist, but a whole formalist, according to whom an object is beautiful if it is ordered or unified, or if its parts harmonise to form a whole. Where austere formalism (what Zuckert calls property formalism) implies a list of criteria the object needs to have

in order to be considered aesthetically, the latter requires consideration of the object itself, and how its properties come together to form a whole. As we will see, this idea is not prescriptive in the same way, but takes account of the object as it appears as a unified structure regardless of what properties seemingly constitute it. While they may include classical formal properties, they may also include others. Furthermore, as Zuckert argues, Kant's whole formalism is nestled within the threefold disjunctive argument that Kant presents, which brings together the object's form, our sensual experience of it which brings us into contact with the object thereby providing our experience of it, and our concepts which may also come into play. Just because such concepts are neither necessary nor sufficient for our distinctly perceptual aesthetic experience of an object's form does not mean that they are not relevant to the experience.

This brings me to a point where Kant's own thoughts about free and dependent beauty can be appealed to in order to show that the distinction isn't as straightforward as Zangwill makes out. It is worth doing this to remind ourselves of the richness of Kant's account that Kant's accounts of free and dependent beauty range over many objects and sometimes overlap, as we saw in chapter two. Furthermore, Kant does not favour free over dependent beauty. According to Kant:

There are two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) or merely adherent beauty (*pulchritudo adherens*). The first presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be; the second does presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance with it. The first are called (self-subsisting) beauties of this or that thing; the latter, as adhering to a concept (conditioned beauty), are ascribed to objects that stand under the concepts of a particular end.<sup>246</sup>

Kant later provides examples of free natural beauties that are free "according to mere form" which include flowers, many birds, crustaceans.<sup>247</sup> These engage the imagination in such a way that it contemplates the object's appearance without appealing to a definitive concept. Such objects do not require the presupposition, or the concept of

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<sup>246</sup> Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. §16, 5:229, 114.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. §16, 5: 230, 114. We might contrast these with what he calls free artificial beauties: designs à la grèque, foliage on borders or wallpaper, purely instrumental music.

what the object's purpose is. In contrast, Kant includes the beauty of human beings, horses, or buildings as dependent natural beauties. Objects of dependent beauty can be judged according to their function, or purpose, and can be based on the concept of the object's perfection. While it may seem, according to Kant, that we can't judge flowers, many birds and crustaceans according to their purpose, what he is really saying is that we can have two types of experience, free and dependent, that range and overlap across many objects, judging by the range and variety of examples he cites.

The faculty of taste is required for free beauties because we are free to make a judgment of beauty independent of concepts (relating to the agreeable or the good, for example):

In the judging of a free beauty (according to mere form) the judgment of taste is pure. No concept of any end for which the manifold should serve the given object and thus which the latter should represent is presupposed, by which the imagination, which is as it were at play in the observation of the shape, would merely be restricted.<sup>248</sup>

On the other hand, where dependent beauty is concerned, the faculty of taste is not required because we have some notion according to which the object is being or should be judged:

Now the satisfaction in the manifold in a thing in relation to the internal purpose that determines its possibility is a satisfaction grounded on a concept; the satisfaction in beauty, however, is one that presupposes no concept, but is immediately combined with the representation through which the object is given (not through which it is thought). Now if the judgment of taste in regard to the latter is made dependent on the purpose in the former, as a judgment of reason, and is thereby restricted, then it is no longer a free and pure judgment of taste.<sup>249</sup>

[...]

A judgment of taste in regard to an object with a determinate internal end would thus be pure only if the person making the judgment either had no concept of this end or abstracted from it in his judgment. But in that case, although this person would have made a correct judgment of taste, in that he would have judged the object as a free beauty, he would nevertheless be criticized and accused of a false taste by someone else, who considered beauty in the object only as an adherent

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid. §16, 5:230, 114.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. §16, 5:230, 115.

property (who looked to the end of the object), even though both judge correctly in their way: the one on the basis of what he has before his sense, the other on the basis of what he has in his thoughts. By means of this distinction one can settle many disputes about beauty between judges of taste, by showing them that the one is concerned with free beauty, the other with adherent beauty, the first making a pure, the second an applied judgment of taste.<sup>250</sup>

From these extracts we can note that whether our judgment is free or dependent is related to the subject's response rather than to the object concerned, and that these are different approaches that can help explain different ways we experience nature. Zangwill's distinction, however, is unclear in the sense that, on the one hand, he accepts that certain objects can be seen as both free and dependent (organic nature, such as the polar bear) while other objects can only be seen as free (inorganic nature). It is difficult to make sense of the examples that Kant gives for free and dependent beauty. Because the examples for one category, such as free beauty, seem to fit into the category of adherent beauty, we are led to thinking that both free and dependent beauty can apply to most objects.

It may be that a mountain range can less easily be brought under the category of dependent beauty because there are fewer mountain ranges, than, for example, subcategories for types of horses or butterflies. We nevertheless experience the horse or butterfly as free from whatever category we might otherwise want to put it in. On the other hand, we might want to compare our experience of the Alps with the Himalayas, the Appalachians, the Andes, the Atlas, and even the Highlands of Scotland. We can have both free and dependent experiences of many objects of both art and nature. We are not, according to Kant, restricted to one or the other as long as we attend to the object perceptually and are aware of different possible approaches.

Zangwill's own preference is for judging the polar bear as a free, formal beauty which again makes it look like he is clinging to theoretical principles that could mean ignoring relevant features that one might otherwise intuitively include. While it may seem the preferred option according to Kant that a pure judgment of taste is better than an adherent judgment of taste, neither one nor the other is correct, as can be read in the

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid. §16, 5: 231, 115-116.

third extract: they are just different approaches we can take to judging an object aesthetically.

Let us now consider the second claim that I attributed to Zangwill above, that according to him nature has purposeless beauty and is therefore suited to a formalist account of aesthetic experience. For Zangwill, because inorganic nature is free from pre-determining concepts, it is purposeless, has no function, and instantiates properties that are formal. He therefore has difficulties accommodating Hepburn's analysis of an experience of walking on a beach:

Suppose I am walking over a wide expanse of sand and mud. The quality of the scene is perhaps that of wild, glad emptiness. But suppose I bring to bear upon the scene my knowledge that this is a tidal basin, the tide being out. The realization is not aesthetically irrelevant. I see myself now as walking on what is for half the day sea-bed. The wild, glad emptiness may be tempered by a disturbing weirdness.<sup>251</sup>

Zangwill considers both of the responses, that of "wild, glad emptiness" and that of "a disturbing weirdness" as part of a wider whole, concluding that the initial judgment need not be replaced by the second. They can co-exist and this co-existence issues in a weirdness not dissimilar from the way that "a brief jolly passage sounds strange in a funeral march" or "a delicate ornament can be out of place in a triumphal arch".<sup>252</sup>

Hepburn is not making claims about formalism or free and dependent beauty, he is describing what he would have called a movement of the mind that begins in the experience of wild, glad emptiness and through reflection and imagination ends in considering the beach's existence as the sea-bed of a tidal basin and how it changes according to the tide. This is in keeping with the idea that although nature is purposeless or indeterminate, we experience it perceptually and bring to it knowledge or imaginative processes that have not been prescribed, but that nevertheless "feed into" that perceptual experience, as Brady writes.

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<sup>251</sup> Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty." 19.  
Zangwill, "Formal Natural Beauty." 118.

<sup>252</sup> Zangwill, "Formal Natural Beauty." 118-119.

This does not entail the kind of dissonance Zangwill assumes between two different experiences occurring at once, such as those of the funeral march or triumphal arch above, but the sudden recognition that the object perceived has a dimension not previously considered, in this case an imagined underwater scene. The imagined properties are of the tidal basin complement the actual experience of walking on the muddy beach that currently displays wild, glad, emptiness. The imagination brings in features rich in meaning about nature itself, and how we relate to it. Our experiences of nature occasion “a delight in the fact that the forms of the natural world *offer scope* for the exercise of the imagination, that leaf pattern chimes with vein pattern, cloud form with mountain form and mountain form with human form”.<sup>253</sup>

Where this example is concerned, I’ve just considered an intuitive response of a whole-formalist kind, which will be discussed below, but which makes a perceptual account of aesthetic experience central to aesthetic experience. I will now consider another, similar, kind of response that does not appeal to scientific knowledge. For example, Stecker gives compelling reasons for why we should not be compelled into thinking that our aesthetic experiences of nature can be inappropriate or illegitimate if they are not based on scientific knowledge as Carlson argues (as we will see below), and without making claims related to the debate about formalism and anti-formalism. Specifically with reference to the tidal basin example provided by Hepburn, he writes the following:

The shore of a tidal basin is sometimes above water and is then (part of) a beach, and is sometimes below water and is then (part of) a sea-bed. Here are (initially) three ways one can appreciate this bit of land: as beach, as sea-bed, as sometimes beach-sometimes sea-bed. None of these ways is malfounded.<sup>254</sup>

According to Stecker, knowledge can supplement our aesthetic experiences of nature, and there are many and infinite amounts and varieties of knowledge that can be brought to bear on them. However, other examples he uses indicate that he does not simply take a formal view of our experiences of nature. For example, he writes about a “cluster of

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<sup>253</sup> Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty." 16.

<sup>254</sup> Robert Stecker, "The Correct and the Appropriate in the Appreciation of Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 37, no. 4 (1997). 398.

lady's slippers" and "their unusual, bulbous shape, their brilliant yellow". He also writes that "[o]ne can enjoy a flower simply for its surface qualities, but can 'thicken this enjoyment by knowing that it indicates a certain stage of the spring when one can find other things one likes, and one now knows to look for them, or that it indicates things to come, as blossoms indicate fruit, or that it stand (sic.) in some intricate relation to other things in the environment".<sup>255</sup> Here, Stecker refers to the surface quality of things, which are perceptual features. The idea of the surface quality, or 'sensuous surface' of objects is important because these are the very features of the object that we perceive that need not be equated in terms of formal properties.<sup>256</sup> This does not require appealing to a formalist account of aesthetic experience it requires the identification of certain, formal, properties that would entail the imposition of a formalist structure on the object in question. The idea is that many forms of knowledge can come to bear on genuine perceptual experience by attending to an object's surface qualities without being restricted to formal properties.

As we have already seen from my discussion on disinterest, nature's expressive properties, and material considered from Brady, Hepburn and Stecker, that nature is purposeless does not entail that we experience it formally in the narrow sense Zangwill, Bell or property-formalism hold. That nature is purposeless means that there is no "artist" whose thought processes we must appeal to, no divine entity that we must appeal to or whose rules we must appeal to in order to make sense of the qualities we see in nature. However, austere formalism (which I have also referred to as narrow formalism, and will be referred to as property formalism in chapter six) according to Bell and Zangwill entail the prescription of rules that leave out some perceptual and non-perceptual features that are nevertheless relevant, such as the imagination or knowledge

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid. 393, 400.

<sup>256</sup> Yuriko Saito, "Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms," (1998). Saito writes, for example, that it requires sensitivity to "discern what story [nature] may be telling with its specific sensuous surface", that "our attempt somehow to make sense of natural objects and phenomena guide our sensuous experience of nature toward appropriately appreciating it [...]". 135.

(where knowledge is not stipulative for aesthetic experience) or other non-formal features.

Zangwill's attempt to extend Bell's formalism to account for our experiences of nature is regrettable not only because formalism has difficulties accounting for the phenomenology of our experiences of nature, by imposing a structure on those experiences rather than attending to the objects of those experiences, but because it disallows, or minimises the importance of, other features that are highly relevant to the experience. This does not mean that the formal perceptual features of the experience do not matter, as long as they are correctly attributed, but that our experiences would necessarily be distorted by a formalist account, unless the object is predisposed to a formalist experience, which is rather unlikely, especially where the aesthetics of nature is concerned. We can look both to an object's surface qualities or appearance qualities and to whatever knowledge we have in the moment of experience to fully characterise it.

### **§ Scientific Cognitivism and the Rejection of Formalism**

A narrow, austere, formalist account is one way of experiencing nature aesthetically that does not entirely seem to capture many aspects of aesthetic experience that are often relevant. Unlike austere formalism, cognitivism focuses on how knowledge can appropriately justify our aesthetic experiences of nature, rather than focusing on a perceptual account of aesthetic experience that primarily allows for detailed attention to the object itself, our perceptual response to it, and other, secondary (but not irrelevant) imaginative and cognitive features, that come to bear on the perceptual experience. This is because the cognitivist thinks that in order for our interaction with nature to be appropriate, our judgment also needs to be. The cognitivist thus brings in an ethical dimension that applies to nature in a distinct way from that in which it applies to art because we interact with nature, use it as a resource and change it for our own



purposes.<sup>257</sup> In what follows I will provide an account of Carlson's view that will show that his appeal to scientific cognitivism for justifying our aesthetic experiences and judgments of nature necessarily entails denying many valid features of such experiences and judgments. I do this by briefly exploring the disparate approaches that he explicitly rejects. His view therefore leads to the similar kind of narrow aesthetic experience that austere formalism does, only it relies on science rather than formal properties.

Carlson is the main advocate for a cognitive approach to the aesthetics of nature.<sup>258</sup> He rejects Kantian approaches to the aesthetics of nature, including the idea that nature has purpose without purpose, free beauty, or seems designed according to a narrowly formalist account. He rejects many other models of nature appreciation, favouring a natural environmental model that he claims essentially connects the aesthetics of nature with scientific knowledge. That idea is analogous to the one presented by Walton, who argues that our judgments of art are dependent on and essentially connected with, correctly categorising art.<sup>259</sup> The aesthetic appreciation of nature according to Carlson involves scientific knowledge of different environments and ecological systems within them, just as the aesthetic appreciation of art requires knowledge of artistic traditions and styles. Nature is thus to be appreciated as it is, both as being natural and in light of our scientific knowledge of what it is. Furthermore, because nature sustains itself and because its aesthetic appearance is not down to human intentionality, there is no need for us to be critical of it in the same way that we are critical of art, which is a product of human intentionality. This gives us reason for thinking that nature's aesthetics is essentially positive, that a negative experience of nature is never warranted, that we have no basis on which to be critical of it. This scientific, epistemic, approach to aesthetic experience gives it the substantive underpinnings that austere formalism does not allow.

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<sup>257</sup> While the ethical dimension of cognitive, 'positive' aesthetics, is important to the theory itself, I will restrict myself to the cognitivism versus non-cognitivism in this chapter.

<sup>258</sup> Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*.

<sup>259</sup> Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 79, no. 3 (1970).

This approach also gives us guidance on how we should experience nature and what an aesthetic judgment of nature entails.

For the scientific cognitivist, the concept of formalism is taken to be a direct descendent from eighteenth century aesthetic theories and supervenience, but I have already argued that this is a misattribution and that formalism was not intended to entail the definition of property formalism, or narrow formalism it has been glossed with. In the previous section, we saw that Zangwill provides a staunch defence of what I have called austere formalism (or ‘property formalism’, as per Zuckert’s characterisation) that “vociferously” contests the kind of anti-formalism that Carlson and Walton offer. However, just as Zangwill mischaracterizes Walton’s position as anti-formalist, I will argue that Carlson, explicitly claiming an anti-formalist position, places too much emphasis on using categories of knowledge to ensure the appropriateness of aesthetic judgments as they relate to nature.

Walton does not position his view as being anti-formalist as such. Rather, Walton does acknowledge a work’s distinctly aesthetic features and makes sense of their application relative to various standards or frameworks. These standards and frameworks are otherwise understood as being non-aesthetic (and therefore non-formalist according to Zangwill) in the sense that they are dependent on categories of art that include “media, genre, styles, forms” etcetera. It is just that, according to Walton, the aesthetic properties an artwork appears to have relate to the categories under which we subsume it during the experience. On the other hand, the aesthetic properties an artwork actually does have are determined by the category to which it belongs.<sup>260</sup> Walton does allow for perceivable aesthetic properties because he draws the distinction between aesthetic properties (those perceptual properties that are an aesthetic Gestalt, based on non-aesthetic perceptual properties) and non-aesthetic properties (perceptual properties that are not aesthetic), and does not speak of formal properties as such.

Carlson, on the other hand, does explicitly argue against formalism. He identifies formalism, as Zangwill himself does, with the austere, Bellian, kind of formalism that

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid. 339.

we have also termed austere formalism.<sup>261</sup> Here, he attributes the concept to Bell, relates it with the development of art and landscape art and the “cult of nature”, which according to him has permeated discourse in geography and forestry management, where the overall impression of landscape should be one of “form, line, color and texture”.<sup>262</sup>

Again, this kind of formalism is not true to Kant’s whole formalism, as we will see in further detail below, in whose thought the austere account is supposed to have originated. In any case, Carlson does not articulate how an object is constituted in perception and our subjective, perceptual experience of it. There is a way of understanding formalism more holistically, a way that takes account of the object’s perceivable and perceptual form, rather than having a specific set of formal properties to focus on or impose on an object (as in the case of property formalism). This does not entail that we bring no other relevant, or possibly relevant features to bear on it, but that we do account for the object as it appears in its objectivity. I will return to this idea in chapter six.

Another relevant issue that is not as straightforward as Carlson presents it is the automatic link he makes between narrow accounts of formalism and the development of landscape painting. For if we accept that formalism can be traced back to Kant and that Kant was primarily concerned with nature rather than art, as I proposed in section two of chapter three, there is no reason to assume that formalism (again, I would say ‘whole’ rather than austere formalism) did not previously apply to nature as nature. For example, in the context of his discussion on austere formalism, Carlson mentions the use of the ‘Claude-glass’, “a small, tinted, convex mirror named after the artist” that was used by tourists in order to view the landscape in such a way that its formal properties (of “color” and “perspective”) are emphasised.

However, just because the Claude-glass was an instrument with which people observed the landscape, and that such properties as colour and perspective were

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<sup>261</sup> Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*. Chapter three: Formal Qualities in the Natural Environment”.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. 29.

emphasised by eighteenth century travel writers, this does not mean that that this was the only way of appreciating the landscape, or that it was appreciated under the rubric of formalism. Formalism, particularly whole formalism, is a concept that is distinct both from nature and from art and applicable to both. There is no doubt that nature viewing and landscape viewing are, and have always been, important in mutually significant ways, but formalism did not really become important in painting until an argument was required to justify certain kinds of art in the early twentieth century, as we saw earlier in this chapter. Bell's version of formalism was significant because he was interested in justifying and promoting non-representational paintings as distinct from nature's presentation. Furthermore, we can interpret Kant's formalism in a way that does allow for perceptually rich, aesthetic accounts of nature as perceptually presented to us. Unlike the challenges of non-representational twentieth century art, the eighteenth century "cult of nature" is likely to have had less to do with landscape painting than it did with a genuine interest in nature, seeing the world and being genuinely astonished by conquered mountains and awe-inspiring vistas.

Carlson's approach is necessarily a dependent account of aesthetic appreciation, appealing to Kant's distinction, as we saw above, according to which an object is dependent on its natural kind. Such judgments exist, and compare the object's de facto appearance with the ideal of its kind. This kind of judgment brings in the kind of categorical approach to aesthetic appreciation that Carlson advocates, whereby knowledge is a stipulative requirement, necessary for judgment. The difficulty with such dependent judgments is an emphasis on how we *ought* to aesthetically experience something rather than how we often do experience it as free from such dependence.

Yet Carlson ignores, or thinks irrelevant that other, non-dependent, forms of judgment also exist, such as free accounts of beauty, for which there are no stipulative rules or criteria for the content of aesthetic experience, but for which a kind of attention to the object best brings out its aesthetic features. We have already considered the kind of attention required, it is of the kind that is disinterested, or non-self interested, and completely focused on the object's perceptual features and our sensual response to it.

This ties into the idea that we are fit for phenomenally experiencing aesthetic qualities that both relate to the object and the perceptual effects of those qualities.

This kind of account can bring out a multitude of possible aesthetic experiences because we not only carefully attend to the features of the experience itself, but to the infinite multitude of ways we might respond to and conceptualise them. Because Carlson's account focuses so narrowly on how we should experience nature, reducing such experiences to scientific knowledge, however that might further be specified, he denies the very possibility for the freedom of aesthetic response, which is rooted in a subject perceptually engaged by, sensually responding to, and freely trying to conceptualise the experience. It detracts from Carlson's theory that it does not allow for the seriousness and importance of non-scientific accounts of aesthetic response.

Carlson rejects various aesthetic models that have been applied to environmental aesthetics: the object model, the landscape model, the engagement model<sup>263</sup>, the arousal model<sup>264</sup> that we've already discussed in chapter four, the mystery model<sup>265</sup>, the

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<sup>263</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*. Carlson writes that the engagement model, a theory that characterises aesthetic experience as completely immersive. According to Carlson, because the subject is completely immersed in a multi-sensory experience of nature, and lacks the kind of distance that is provided by objective reason, the engagement model cannot account for a distinction to be made between superficial and serious accounts of our aesthetic experiences of nature. Although Carlson rejects accounts of Kantian disinterest, which he links with formalism, he seems to think that a scientific form of distance, or disinterest, can provide objective truths about the environment, for science is what provides knowledge and understanding about the world. A serious form of aesthetic response would entail a cognitively rich account whose content is provided by science. Without scientific distance, we would not know how to distinguish between overly subjective aesthetic experience that is trivial, and implicitly less desirable, than serious, objective, cognitive aesthetic experience.

<sup>264</sup> Carroll, "On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History." The arousal model brings to the fore commonplace, everyday experiences of being emotionally moved by nature. It is premised on the idea that Carlson's cognitive account does not take into account certain emotional responses to nature that don't draw on scientific knowledge but are just as legitimate. According to Carlson, however, the exclusion of scientific knowledge and understanding, make our experiences of nature less cognitively rich and are therefore, presumably, of less value. Like the engagement model, the arousal model is criticized as less serious because it is overly focused on subjective experience rather than the object of that experience.

postmodern model<sup>266</sup>, the pluralist model<sup>267</sup> and the metaphysical imagination model<sup>268</sup>. I will begin with Carlson's rejection of models that I do not have space to defend here, but that are noteworthy for their richness. All of these models fail in one way or another (but not all of them completely), according to Carlson, because they are overly subjective and/or do not engage intellectually with the object in a way that allows for properly understanding it and therefore having its aesthetic properties revealed. One does not accommodate a distance theory and absorbs the object into subjective experience, another because it is overly visceral, another because it takes nature to be essentially unknowable because of its indeterminacy and others because they do not provide the kind of content for experience that is necessarily and appropriately experienced aesthetically. The rejection of all of these models relies on the fact that none of them can reveal what nature, in fact, is. Knowing what nature is according to science and appreciating and responding to it aesthetically are different endeavours. Moreover, one might think of science in its various forms as itself subjective to human experience in the sense that it can only tell us about nature what makes sense to us or what is

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<sup>265</sup> Carlson cites: Stan Godlovitch, "Icebreakers: Environmentalism and Natural Aesthetics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 11 (1994). The mystery model is a model where our experience of nature is appropriate only when it is accompanied by a sense of incomprehension, where nature is unknowable to us and beyond our capability to understand it, which seems to have or might justify, religious dimension.

<sup>266</sup> Carlson cites: George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (New York: Collier, 1961). The postmodern model is a constructivist model, one that constructs our experiences of nature through our musings and writings about it. It compares nature to a text, where an author may be attributed to its appearance. According to Carlson, no one such attribution is more valuable than another, and all dimensions of art literature, folklore, religion and myth are acceptable dimensions of the appreciation of nature.

<sup>267</sup> Carlson cites: Yrjo Sepanmaa, *The Beauty of Environment* (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1993). Similarly to the postmodern model, the pluralist model accepts cultural diversity and richness, but only a small part of those Carlson assumes are postmodern are relevant to the serious appropriate appreciation of nature.

<sup>268</sup> Carlson cites: Ronald Hepburn, "Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination," *Environmental Values* 5 (1996). The metaphysical imagination model interprets nature as revealing metaphysical insights about experience, the meaning of life, the human condition. According to this account, formally appreciating nature would require resolving metaphysical issues and how we humans fit into that.

meaningful to us. There are possibly aspects about nature that science cannot reach and that we therefore cannot know.

Another issue of relevance is that Carlson's identification of some of the models he presents is ambiguous and somewhat vague. This is perhaps not so much the case with the engagement, arousal, mystery or metaphysical models, each of which he seems to dismiss as trivial accounts of nature appreciation, as we saw above.<sup>269</sup> It is not clear what the origins of the postmodern and pluralist models are supposed to be. For example, in support of the postmodern model, Carlson cites an excerpt from Santayana in which the latter takes a particularly poetic approach to appreciating a landscape, and constructing it in the imagination. Santayana did not explicitly or implicitly develop a postmodern theory of nature appreciation, but pursued a naturalistic approach to beauty, making it central to his aesthetics. There may be postmodern approaches to nature appreciation in cultural and literary theory, but Carlson does not cite them.

Carlson rejects two other models that merit attention: the object model and the landscape model. The object model is a model according to which nature is a collection of objects of which we have discrete experiences. Our experience of nature according to this model is characterised mainly by the enjoyment we take from an individual object's sensuous properties as we traverse a landscape. According to Carlson, we have historically been encouraged to traverse natural landscapes as though traversing a gallery or museum, attending to objects as distinct from their contextual environments, as if they were sculptural, autonomous objects. He suggests that seeing the object as, or removing it from, its environment distorts its meaning, since it should be seen as part of the environmental context to which it belongs or as belonging to a scientific category.

The object model resembles the idea that when we experience art aesthetically, we tend to focus on a discrete object, as Carlson seems to have it, one that is placed on a plinth as if it were in a gallery. This is carried over to our experience of nature and we aesthetically experience an object without considering its corresponding cognitive content, or the context to which it concretely belongs. However, our aesthetic

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<sup>269</sup> Although each of these presents its own mode of nature appreciation and experience that have not been dislodged by Carlson's argument, but trivialised.

experiences of nature are, according to Carlson, typically of wider environments, landscapes, or objects that are inter-connected.

Carlson similarly sees the landscape model as distorting our view of the natural world because of its basis in using our experiences of representational landscape painting to make sense of our experiences of the natural landscape as it is presented to us. According to him, the landscape model flattens the presentational, natural, landscape, and focuses attention on a distanced, visual account of nature appreciation such as might be found in a landscape painting. Because of this, the landscape model neglects how we ordinarily experience or understand nature, and we do not attend to features that reveal to us what nature is, just as the models discussed above don't. According to Carlson, these models neglect the normal experience or understanding of nature.

Are Carlson's objections to the object and landscape models valid? Carlson makes the point that nature is frameless and that nature's objects belong to environments and are interdependent. That interdependence entails that nature is not just a collection of objects and should therefore encourage an appreciation of nature that takes account of the complex biological processes that make it up and make up its environment. This means that we should experience whole environments, in "larger chunks", as "interrelated objects, vistas, environments", as Stecker characterises the object view.<sup>270</sup> Yet we are not forced to look at a discrete object as if it were artificial, without links to its environment. We often do appreciate single, discrete objects in nature as nature, rather than as artificial, sculptural or artistic objects. Attending to its objective features does not distort understanding of it or how it is related to its environment. By attending to its individual features, we can come to appreciate the object for what it is, a natural object in itself.

We can also come to understand how it relates to other elements in its environment. Take a chestnut, for example. In autumn, we can pick up a shiny new chestnut, appreciate its sleek, shiny surface, its size, compare it with an acorn or a hazelnut. Upon investigating it further, we can also see how its shiny sleek surface fitted into the husk, spiky on the outside and soft and protective on the inside, that it has since separated

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<sup>270</sup> Stecker, "The Correct and the Appropriate in the Appreciation of Nature." 395.



from, and that was lying next to it on the ground underneath the chestnut tree. In fact, we also notice that the leaves have begun to fall from the trees, have turned rusty and have begun to smell musty and, well, autumnal. We have gone from having noticed, attended to, and appreciated a discrete object in itself to appreciating the environment from which it came. Our traversing nature's landscape is not like a walk through the gallery, where we attend to one object and then the next. Rather, we attend to our aesthetic experiences of nature as nature, through all or some of our senses, from the perspective of sitting on a mountaintop to being embedded in a forest. Our aesthetic experience might incorporate a mountain vista or focus on a fluttering hummingbird, darting around the crimson hibiscus.

The landscape model is slightly more complex, in that it also refers to the picturesque movement that occurred in the eighteenth century. The landscape model refers to appreciating nature as though it were a landscape painting. This is not an unusual occurrence, such as when my neighbour referred to the wintry scene of the Meadows park, viewed from her first floor window, as a beautiful Breughel. This, in itself, is not really problematic, for the view before her reminded her of a Breughel scene and does not impact the scene itself. What is potentially problematic is the imposition on the natural landscape that it should, or ought to be picturesque, in the sense that our mode of attention to the natural world should be altered to look like a painting, rather than look as it does naturally. This too, is a moot point, for we sometimes need or want to design natural landscapes such that they fit in with our perceived needs and goals, and in such cases we take account of the ethical dimensions of such aspects.

Carlson brings into question the notion that viewing a natural landscape as an 'artificial' landscape means that our immediate experience of the natural landscape is treated as though it were artificial, or a flat, two-dimensional painting, hung on a wall, in a gallery. However, Carlson's approach negates the potential importance that looking at landscape painting can have on looking at nature. Our experiences of landscape painting can sometimes characterise our experiences of nature, allow us to see or interpret landscapes as artists have either historically (which can tell us something about their interests) or contemporarily. This does not make such experiences trivial or mean that

we need to have aesthetic experiences of landscape paintings before having aesthetic experiences of nature, it just means that our previous experiences of landscape paintings can contribute to or thicken our own experiences of nature in significant ways. Examples of this include being able to see a landscape through the artist's own perceptual experience.

As Stecker writes, "Carlson's rejection of the landscape model is that it nullifies the extremely fruitful interaction (for the appreciation of both nature and art) between seeing views in which certain visible features become salient and seeing paintings of (usually different) views that make some visible features salient which one can then bring to bear on views (different ones) that one sees". One is thereby enabled to see the surrounding environment through a different set of eyes.<sup>271</sup>

Carlson's account of landscape painting is also reductive, denying the importance of the imagination and its engagement both with painting, on the one hand and with nature, on the other. The imagination can help us immerse ourselves in paintings, help us create a framework for imaginative, three-dimensional exploration of the space depicted. This might be illustrated by the moment that Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke jump into the latter's pastel paintings on a sidewalk in *Mary Poppins*, and become immersed in a highly idealised natural world of horse-racing. Conversely, the Arboretum Walk on the Applecross Estate in the North of Scotland offers many opportunities for children and adults alike to learn about trees. This particular walk is partly made of a tunnel formed of the trees' root system, that are both covered in both moss and flowers at the right time of year. This offers children in particular the opportunity to mythologise their surroundings by thinking the root system a home to a community of fairies, for example. Through that process of mythological imagination that engages with the space's perceivable features, they might also learn to value that environment as a habitable space.

A more formidable approach would show how examples of landscape painting in the Western tradition, or botanical drawings, can bring us closer to learning about nature, the history of natural sciences or aesthetically appreciating nature through time. This

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid. 396.

does not mean that the landscape, or indeed the object, models are the only ways that we can aesthetically appreciate the environment, or that scientific approaches, such as an understanding of evolution, don't sometimes contribute to our aesthetic appreciation of nature and its landscapes. Central to this is the thought that the aesthetic is located in perceptually experiencing both natural, and non-natural, objects.

As already suggested, Carlson rejects each of these models in preference for the natural environmental model according to which nature is to be appreciated as what it is, in light of knowledge provided by the natural sciences: it is both natural and provides an environment with which we can have cognitive engagement. For Carlson, this model provides an objective starting point due to its reliance on a scientific view of nature that is not overly dependent on subjective flight of fancy and that can account for the correctness of nature appreciation. Not only that, it assumes a positive view of aesthetics, the view that the natural world is essentially beautiful and aesthetically good, that the correct appreciation of the natural world is positive.

There is some question as to whether the idea of categories can really be transferred from art to nature. Carlson rejects the models listed at the beginning of the section, but he also rejects the idea of Kant's free beauty that we saw above, as well as formalist arguments that emphasise the importance of the perceptual features of experience, but also many non-scientific aspects that are often contributory elements to the types of experiences we have of nature. This is because an appropriate response to nature is dependent on scientific knowledge, according to him.

Aesthetic experience is not reducible to scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge may be relevant, or play an important role in aesthetic experience, just as historical knowledge or mythical knowledge might, but it cannot determine whether the experience will be aesthetic. Alternatively, we can think of scientific theories as elegant, or beautiful, according to an 'internal sense', but this is not the same as experiencing a natural object, or the landscape, as beautiful, to which a scientific theory is applied.

What is necessary to aesthetically experiencing an object is experiencing it perceptually, being acquainted with it, not how much we know about it.<sup>272</sup>

One idea that undergirds each of the models Carlson rejects, as well as his own natural-environmental model, but that does not play an explicit role in them (except for Berleant's engagement model), is that aesthetically experiencing nature requires a perceptual engagement with the object to which other features, though not necessary for a distinctly aesthetic experience, are often nevertheless relevant to it. The perceptual engagement is thus of the object, to which we pay careful attention, our sensual experience of it and the concepts that may apply.

One might think that the natural environmental model's ethical basis and its positive aesthetic dimension speak powerfully to how we should treat the natural environment, despite Carlson's rejection of many aspects of aesthetic experience that one might think of as desirable, as we saw above. According to Carlson, science provides a plausible justification for a positively valenced account of aesthetics in the sense that it can enable the preservation of species and wild lands because it provides knowledge about nature and the role it plays in nature appreciation. That knowledge is of what aesthetic qualities and values nature has. These qualities and values, according to Carlson, can be identified and organised according to different viewing categories, this classification being analogous to those developed in Walton's "Categories of Art": correctly appreciating a cubist painting means viewing it as a cubist painting. Accordingly, in nature, there are different ways of perceiving natural objects and landscapes. They can be seen as different categories where some categories are correct and others are not. For example, a whale might be perceived as a fish or a mammal. If perceived as a fish, it may look differently than if we perceive it as a mammal. The account of an appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature rests on the idea that the aesthetic qualities of natural objects and landscapes depend on how they are perceived and on knowledge according to which their aesthetic properties are to be categorised.

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<sup>272</sup> See Budd and Hopkins on the 'acquaintance principle'. My arguments here do not require me to take a stand on aesthetic testimony; whether we can 'transmit' our aesthetic experiences is another matter.

Carlson takes up Walton's idea that correct aesthetic appreciation is derived from perceiving an object in its correct category. For Walton, a correct judgment about art requires knowledge of art criticism and art history. For Carlson, the aesthetic appreciation of nature is analogous to the aesthetic appreciation of art, but is distinct simply in virtue of the kind of knowledge they appeal to. Where nature is concerned, certain facts about natural objects, landscapes and their origins determine the correct category for them. Scientific knowledge is essential to the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature and suggests a means by which to justify positive aesthetics. Unlike Zangwill, Carlson relies heavily on categories of knowledge that constrain aesthetic judgments when those judgments are correct.

One question to ask is whether the categories model transfers easily from the art case to the nature case. According to Carlson, it does: whether we classify a humpback whale as a fish or a mammal seems to matter for the application of a correct aesthetic term to it. For if it is classified as a fish, the whale may seem oafish and overgrown but if classified as a whale, it is sleek and hydrodynamic. However, an immediately observable difference between art and nature is that perceptual art is often intentional and representational whereas nature is presentational. That is to say, art is often created according to human rules, guidelines or conventions whereas nature is just created. We may therefore be better able to categorise objects that have been created by humans, whereas nature's indeterminacy would require the conceptual tools of science, according to Carlson, to correctly categorise our appreciation of nature.

However, even though we are able to use scientific tools to access particular aspects of nature, these scientific theoretical and experimental tools are themselves essentially human constructs. We are only guaranteed knowledge about nature in itself relative to what we are interested in and the extent to which our theoretical and experimental tools can reveal data or information we can understand. It does not guarantee access to nature independent of those constructs, nature in-itself, or what Kant calls the noumenal realm. Furthermore, there are a multitude of scientific categories to which we might appeal in order to ascertain correctness of judgment. It is unclear which is the correct scientific model, for it could be the biologist's, the physicist's or the chemist's, all of which fall

under the remit of ‘science’ but have divergent theoretical approaches to nature. This does not seem to be an issue where art is concerned, for we can in many cases look to authorial intention, cultural, political and other contexts that have been or are relevant to an artwork, although these by no means necessarily exhaust the artwork’s aesthetic offerings.

Not only that, we have no measure or definitional criteria according to which correct scientific categories for the appreciation of nature can be established, as Budd has argued.<sup>273</sup> Which concepts, he asks, does the natural item have to fall under for it to be perceived from the ‘aesthetic point of view’, where the “perception under those concepts discloses the real aesthetic properties it possesses and allows for a proper assessment of value?”<sup>274</sup> Nature’s indeterminacy is exactly what resists the kind of analysis that Carlson puts forward, for in the art case, we have some recourse to authorial, artistic, cultural and political context and these are essentially human constructs that apply to objects created by humans.

Scientific ontology differs from art historical or cultural ontology in that many of its objects are not human made and therefore cannot be guided by corresponding criteria held by the equivalent of an artist, the artworld, or history books. However, even in the case of art, it could be argued that correctness of aesthetic judgment is secondary to the having of the experience, to focusing on the object’s perceptual features rather than being overly concerned about correctly categorising or judging it. We can regard art as though it belonged to its appropriate style, but nothing prevents us from bringing it under other concepts or styles. We can similarly look at nature as though it belongs to certain scientific categories, but that does not mean that we should always be compelled to or that we are wrong when we bring it under some scientific or non-scientific concept that may be thought to be inappropriate in that instance. We can thicken the perceptual, aesthetic experience in ways other than those offered by scientific practice. This brings us back to the Kantian distinction between free and dependent beauty that we saw above.

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<sup>273</sup> Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. 122-124.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.* 124.

Dependent beauty would seem to require that our judgment be based on concepts and kinds whereas free beauty is based on the free play between what we perceive and the concepts that potentially apply. Carlson's is a dependent account because aesthetically experiencing nature is dependent on knowledge, so he makes no allowance for the value of free, immediate, perceptual occurrence of beautiful scenes or objects in nature that have not had knowledge brought to bear on them. This does not mean that we should therefore defend the kind of formalism or extreme formalism that Zangwill applies to nature, or that knowledge is irrelevant. My considerations of Carlson and Zangwill have been leading up to the thought that attending to the natural scene's perceivable features is what matters in an experience deemed to be distinctly aesthetic.

There are other issues related to Carlson's account of scientific knowledge that are of import. For example, Stecker points out, as I already have above, that while knowledge often serves a function in our aesthetic experiences, Carlson's scientific categories are unclear about what kind of knowledge is required.<sup>275</sup> Even Carlson's stipulation of three kinds of knowledge - common sense, scientific and the naturalist's knowledge - does not provide guidance that is specific enough to tell us which judgments of nature are the correct ones to hold. What kind of knowledge would apply and how do we delineate the amount of knowledge required? It does not seem to matter as long as it is *scientific knowledge* that follows ordered, scientific appreciation.<sup>276</sup> Even if we were able to list a set of epistemic criteria, it is optimistic to think that there is a way of approaching an object that will reveal all of its aesthetic properties whole and undistorted.<sup>277</sup>

Conversely, not everything that can be known about an object is relevant to appreciating it. For example, I do not need to know how many people owned the Edinburgh Crystal champagne flutes I bought at the second hand shop to find them aesthetically pleasing. That knowledge is irrelevant to my aesthetic appreciation of the flutes in a way that knowing that they are Scottish might be. Furthermore, the range of

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<sup>275</sup> Stecker, "The Correct and the Appropriate in the Appreciation of Nature."

<sup>276</sup> Allen Carlson, "Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Salim and Simon Gaskell Kemal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 217-223.

<sup>277</sup> Stecker, "The Correct and the Appropriate in the Appreciation of Nature." 395.

possible knowledge is infinitely large and can provide justification for many sorts of aesthetic appreciation. This is not to say that knowledge can't be helpful in preventing malfounded appreciation, as Stecker writes, or that it can enhance or thicken our aesthetic appreciation both of art and of nature. It is likewise true that we can acquire different species of knowledge from nature. The principal type of knowledge is that which is distinctly aesthetic and appreciated for its aesthetic appearance and through the various senses. Other, non-perceptual, knowledge is often relevant, but it is not thereby necessary. Finally, it is not clear that scientific knowledge about nature is itself untinged by the aesthetic, for many scientific theories look for elegant and balanced solutions to scientific problems.

## **§ Conclusion**

Hinging the debate on the kind of formalism advanced by Bell or Zangwill is a red herring, for it gets us no closer to characterising our aesthetic experiences of nature. The problem with the formalism/anti-formalism debate is that it seeks the truth of the matter either at the expense of formal or perceptual properties or at the expense of non-perceptual features that are relevant to experiencing objects aesthetically. The framework the debate is based on itself obfuscates the importance of the desirable elements that both formalism and cognitivism or contextualism bring to aesthetic experience. On the one hand, we are being told by the formalist that it is only formal properties that matter fundamentally; on the other hand we are being told by the scientific cognitivist that only science can justify our aesthetic experiences and judgments of nature. Both seem to obfuscate the possible richness of perceptual experience as well as how that relates to a wide variety of non-perceptual or non-scientific features, such as expressive properties or non-scientific knowledge about the object. We will see in chapter six how the perceptual, aesthetic features of an object - natural or artificial - can function within a wider framework that incorporates cognitive, contextual and emotive elements without reducing aesthetic experience either to formal properties or to non-perceptual properties.



## Chapter Six: Perceiving Aesthetically

### § Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to carve out the logical space for a distinctly perceptual account of aesthetic experience that is not reductive to form or scientific knowledge, which can ground subjective and inter-subjective response according to the object's perceivable, aesthetic features. The idea is to not reduce the richness of aesthetic experience to the physical, or natural, but to show that the physical is central to the richness of aesthetic experience. One might think that at the heart of aesthetics, when considered a distinctly philosophical discipline, lies the question of whether or not, and to what extent, potential situations, experiences, experiences that involve reflection or the imagination, concrete objects, art objects, natural objects, conceptual objects, literary objects, colours, can have aesthetic properties. One might also think that our daily experiences are not and should probably not be conceived, at every moment, as being *aesthetic* in a rapturous sense, involving us being taken to the heights of aesthetic fulfilment, as evidenced in the writings of Schopenhauer, for example, or Bell's writings.<sup>278</sup> In what follows, I touch on a few aspects of what it could mean to perceive aesthetically, and therefore evaluatively, what the conditions might be for a perceptual experience to be characterised as aesthetic and how evaluation fits into the idea of aesthetic perception.

These aspects include what kind of attention would be required for a distinctly aesthetic experience, the ideas of privacy and the communicability of such experiences, and the issue of whether or how non-aesthetic and aesthetic properties constitute or structure perceptual experience. I will unpack the perceptual issue as far as it will go, but I hope that the issues that I don't fully explore, and also take to be important to the argument, will be addressed in sufficient detail to be able to bring out the idea of aesthetic properties being perceptual properties, discernible and communicable by us. I will take the view that this kind of discernment may be of nature, certain everyday

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<sup>278</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Bell, *Art*.

objects and situations. This kind of discernment need not be the expression of fully-fledged, rapturous, aesthetic experiences. By 'aesthetic', I will mean a perceptual property to which aesthetic concepts apply, properties that are describable in aesthetic terms and properties which relate to cognitive and emotive properties. By experience, I mean phenomenal experience as articulated by Siegel: "It is definitional of experience, that it has a phenomenal character, some phenomenology. The phenomenology of the experience is what it is like for a subject to have it."<sup>279</sup>

What's at stake here is what we mean by aesthetic experience: is it perceptual, or does it depend on what we know, the assumption being that perceptual experience does not depend on what we know?<sup>280</sup> In the previous chapter we saw that some aestheticians take an approach that grounds aesthetic experience in perception and, where formalism is assumed the logical upshot of disinterest and the best way to account for a distinctly perceptual theory of aesthetic experience.<sup>281</sup> On the other hand, other aestheticians rely principally on knowledge; that it is categories of knowledge that dictate aesthetic experience.<sup>282</sup> As we also saw in the above chapter, the former is unconvincing because it is overly reductive, while the latter is unconvincing because it fails to emphasise sufficiently the very appearance of the object in question, which should be at the heart of experiences thought to be distinctly aesthetic, or at least does not emphasise it enough. The difficulty is in finding the logical space in which description, in particular, aesthetic description, can anchor our aesthetic attributions, which we might otherwise think of as evaluative concepts. This framework will allow me to position an account relative to a particular view of aesthetic, evaluative, perception. This is where work by Sibley and

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<sup>279</sup> Susanna Siegel, "The Contents of Perception," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 edition)* (2013).

<sup>280</sup> Some philosophers of perception have worked on the idea of cognitive penetration, how it is that perception, assumed to be impenetrable, may be affected by mental states and beliefs. See, e.g. Fiona MacPherson, "Cognitive Penetration of Colour Experience: Rethinking the Issue in Light of an Indirect Mechanism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>281</sup> Bell, *Art*, Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schoenen*, Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*.

<sup>282</sup> Walton, "Categories of Art.", Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*.

Levinson can help, as we will see below, in addition to the Kantian thought of ‘intermingling’ between the objects of perception and thought. I will, however, begin with the importance of attention in an account of aesthetic perception, because this is where aesthetic perception really begins. I’ve thus illustrated that my view sits between austere formalism and scientific cognitivism, whereby the account of disinterest I have provided captures the idea that when we aesthetically experience an object, we are immediately captivated by it, how it appears to us either as a natural object or as an art object. Although these objects may provide experiences of different kinds, those experiences are first and foremost perceptual and engage our moods, emotions knowledge. This chapter will elaborate on how this works by appealing to the idea of whole formalism, which captures the idea that our perceptual, aesthetic experiences often have rich perceptual content. That rich perceptual content is non-causally, I argue, is non-causally related to the intellectual content it might occasion.

### § Aesthetic Attention

On one view of attention, the singling out of an object in perception, how we attend to things is key to how we experience them perceptually, for example:

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 objects or trains of thought.<sup>283</sup>

Following on from the idea that attention helps mark out an object perceptually, I want to suggest here that there’s a distinctive mode of attention that makes the object of experience an aesthetic object. This will bring us back to the idea of disinterest as the distinguishing experiential feature, as will follow below. The idea is that the mode of attention I identify with disinterest enables us to perceive objects aesthetically, that is to say, by being open to the object and its constitutive non-aesthetic and aesthetic features. In line with my criticisms of austere formalism above, this need not entail disallowing or

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<sup>283</sup> Christopher Mole, "Attention," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition) (2012). William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1890). 405.

ignoring other contextual elements. Consciousness of the aesthetic in the experience of objects requires attention, for without that attention there can be no awareness of the aesthetic in experiencing an object, nor of the perceptual object of which it is representative. This is because in order for the aesthetic to be manifest, occasioned, or to emerge in an experience fixed by our attention, some amount of discernment is required. It would be odd to think that we can discern anything about an object without attending to it in some way.<sup>284</sup> An at least thin notion of attention is required to explain how we end up fixating our attention on an object and it is preferable to account for attention as having been drawn to an object for reasons to do with how it appears to us, as opposed, for example, to those situations where another person has pointed it out.

My eye may be drawn across the station to the man whose scarf is scarlet red. I might be struck by the sight of Durham Cathedral as the train pulls into the station and therefore attend to it for its dramatic grace and majesty. These things have caught my attention perhaps because I have a previously stored memory of them, for some evolutionary reason (where the red is concerned) or for reasons to do with their striking features - scarlet redness on the one hand, the impression left by sheer magnitude of physical presence on the other. And that attention may intensify as I choose to dwell on the object or it may not. That dwelling on the object may result in attending to its objective features, or to its objective features mixed in with the emotive or cognitive stock that I bring to it. For example, I might know that the man in the red scarf is the philosophy professor who spoke at the workshop I attended, or that the cathedral brings with it memories, knowledge of its history, comparisons with York Minster or any number of thoughts related to it. Central to the experience if I want to call it an aesthetic

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<sup>284</sup> It may possible to have private aesthetic experiences, but they can only become salient through concept application and descriptions that are distinctly aesthetic. The discernment that I think of is not necessarily of highly cognitive or higher orders such as requiring the use of fully-fledged theories of a mathematical, scientific or narrative sort so that I think it is possible for children to have aesthetic experiences, who learn by having features, aesthetic, non-aesthetic or otherwise pointed out to them. Indeed the wider view of attention that I want to endorse is one in which through attention we are open to sense impressions, learning about those sense impressions and notice and attend to things we remember.

experience, however, is not the cognitive or emotive stock I might bring to it, but that I apply distinctly aesthetic concepts to its objective features, or describe it in aesthetic terms.

I am getting ahead of myself here, and will return to the issue of discernment momentarily, in the next section, where I bring in linguistic and metaphysical elements to further back up my claims. The issue of perceptual attention is important to aesthetics, especially because ‘disinterest’, the term used to make sense of distinctly aesthetic attention, has been controversial in the discipline, as we have seen. Even the richer conception of formalism that we will turn to in the final section is not reducible to disinterest. This is because ‘disinterest’ is a term that relates to how the subject attends to the object aesthetically and ‘formalism’ relates to the object’s perceivable properties. My account of the link between formalism and disinterest is influenced by the traditional view, and is one in which the subject is engaged by the object’s perceptual and formal features without self-interest or practical aims. This does not entail that the subject empty any thought in her head that relates to the object (such as contextual features), or suppress any emotion as it relates to the object, it just means that her focus is primarily on the object and its features, her sensual experience of them, and the possibility that concepts will be applied to those features and experiences.

This is what allows a wider, non-judgmental, aesthetic experience of the object’s form and may anchor concepts that may be applicable to the object. A rich account of formalism thus the direct result of disinterest. If formalism is conceived of in the right way, that is to say according to a richer account than that of austere formalism, which takes into consideration the perceptual properties that form the object in experience, such as we will see in the final section of the chapter, it may well be the logical consequence of disinterest, bringing it to aesthetic fruition.

I have already addressed why the negative connotations associated with disinterest have led to arguments against it, arguments that see it either as a hindrance to rich, thick accounts of aesthetic experience<sup>285</sup> or see it as equating to the suppression of subjective elements, such as a person’s cognitive or emotive stock, where the subject gawks, not a

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<sup>285</sup> Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory.", ———, "Formalism."

thought in her head. We saw that there is a way of interpreting disinterest that bypasses the negative connotation the term has. In its historical- philosophical context<sup>286</sup>, the term meant something like the opposite: a description of the kind of attention that enables one to focus on the object's features, in order that its phenomenal, objective, beauty is experienced. This would not entail the suppression of subjectivity, for the experience would at least require sensual engagement with the object, if not more. Nor does it deny cognitive or emotive stock. Rather, attention is focused, however intensely, on the object of aesthetic interest. One might add to this the more recent developments that have expanded the category of aesthetic concepts beyond 'beauty', 'ugliness', 'sublimity'.<sup>287</sup> Following Sibley's interest in expanding our aesthetic vocabulary, we need not restrict ourselves to eighteenth century aesthetic concepts, even though we are influenced by eighteenth century ideas. This mode of aesthetic attention enables a phenomenology of the experience, the 'what it is like' for a subject to have it.

So, attention is important in aesthetic perception and is of the same kind of disinterested contemplation that I gave in earlier chapters. It is important to perceptual, aesthetic, experience that we attend to the object in question such that its aesthetic features become salient in the moment of experience. Now that we have established this condition, I will turn to what might be the accuracy conditions for a perceptual experience deemed to be aesthetic, to avoid idiosyncrasy on the one hand, and relativism in aesthetic judgment on the other. That we can attend to, and discuss, the features of experience that I think can be explained by appealing to Zuckert's Kantian definition of whole formalism, can help ensure that we accurately describe the object of such experience.

As we will see later in this chapter, Zuckert gives an account of Kant's formalism that makes it more palatable as a description of aesthetic experience than it has often come to be understood. This is because her account of what she calls whole formalism allows for our judgments to be based on the integrated perceptual properties of the object in

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<sup>286</sup> Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic.", ———, "Aesthetics and the World at Large."

<sup>287</sup> Frank Sibley, *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

question, once disinterested attention, as laid out above, has taken hold. These integrated properties are at the core of what perceptual, aesthetic, experience is. We will see how some of these properties are

### **§ Privacy, Communicability and Realism about Secondary Aesthetic and Colour Qualities**

Now that we have established the need for a distinctly aesthetic form of attention, how can we seek objectivity in aesthetic experience? This question is relevant, and significant, because it is important to be clear on what it is we are referring to when we use aesthetic terms. This is because aesthetic terms and concepts often have multiple applications, and because we might think of aesthetic terms and concepts picking out aesthetic properties, themselves secondary properties, akin to colour properties. I will consider how we should think about aesthetic properties by comparison with colour properties. How might aesthetic properties differ from colour properties if they are viewed in this way? This strategy can hopefully bring us closer to objectivity about aesthetically experiencing objects and the features that constitute them in experience, both by attending to those features and ascertaining their public discernibility.

One way of seeking objectivity is through intersubjective agreement, as I argue below. I mentioned that concept application and aesthetic description are required for the discernment of an object or situation to be an aesthetic experience. The reasons for this are numerous, but first and foremost that we need to be able to distinguish between what is aesthetic and what is non-aesthetic. One way to do this is explicitly is by analysing which concepts or terms apply and whether these can be thought of as aesthetic or non-aesthetic. In either case the concept or term used is likely to be descriptive in some way. This, of course, does not mean that children do not have experiences that are aesthetic. One hopes that children learn from their context, parents, community, as they experience objects and have their qualities, aesthetic or otherwise, pointed out to them, acquiring concepts and terminology along the way. This is true for both those aesthetic properties

that are culturally determined, universal aesthetic properties, such as symmetry and proportion, as well as those applied by others that we might come to disagree with.

It is difficult to get traction on the idea of private aesthetic experience, because however much we might want to answer the question of whether the qualitative content of a concept is the same for everyone, this question is unlikely to be resolved in a meaningful way. The very process of trying to get traction on private aesthetic experience would require conceptualisation or the application of at least descriptive terms.<sup>288</sup> Being able to conceptualise such experiences and describe them would require that the objects of experiences are not private, but public, potentially accessible by everyone. There is an ambiguity between the aesthetic concept or term and the content or sensation to which the term applies. We could think of aesthetic experience as being private in the sense that Locke thought colour properties were, where 'blue' may mean something different to different people in the application of the concept, or the term. On this kind of view, so long as we have a distinguishing factor, it doesn't matter whether the experience behind people's sensation reports differ systematically. However, despite the possibility, or likelihood, that our organs differ in the way they produce different reports of colour, what matters is the correlation between the quality, concept and term, or the conditions for the concept or term to be veridical when applied, which would entail that the sensation of 'blue' should be characterised in terms of intentional content - the object to which it directs the subject - which in turn entails attention to and phenomenological engagement with, an object. We may have private experiences that we can't conceptualise (which is not fruitful for discussion), or put into words and we may have experiences that we can conceptualise and put into words. While there might be variation in the phenomenology behind conceptualisation and the application of terms, we can only begin to be clear on these through shared language and intersubjective discourse.

One might speculate that this is particularly true in the case of aesthetic concepts or terms for them to be veridical. While it might not matter to discourse a person

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<sup>288</sup> Michael Ayers, "Private Language and Secondary Qualities," in *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, ed. Michael Ayers (London: Routledge, 1991).



systematically phenomenally experiences red as green or green as red, this would seem problematic for aesthetic properties that are culturally determined, because these are particular experiences (but which would unlikely be the case for more universal properties like ‘symmetry’ as these are seemingly a priori). What I mean by this is that colour properties are simple compared with many aesthetic properties that involve more than the application of formal properties. While there are aesthetic objects and aesthetic experiences to which formal properties are apt, there are many aesthetic experiences of objects that incorporate other features into the experience including mood, emotion, thought, and knowledge. We will see how this works in the following section below, but we can begin to see that aesthetic experiences differ from colour experiences.

Culturally determined aesthetic properties would have had to be learned and would require a different kind of discriminatory capacity. Not having the ‘correct content’ would entail making a mistake vis à vis that experience for a culture. So, a concept or term is often applied according to a community of judgment. That community of judgment has by and large agreed on both universal and cultural properties, which are central to it. This, however, is a tendency, and does not mean that we are necessarily wrong in applying a concept or term when they are not in keeping with the community. We will see in a moment that Sibley’s account allows for an amount of slippage, that although certain types of content may tend to have certain concepts and terms applied to them, we should be prepared for the same content to have other concepts or terms applied to them or for the same concepts or terms to have different content.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Hopkins and Matravers both discuss the idea that (quasi-) realist models of aesthetic properties do not allow for the autonomy of aesthetic judgment. The argument goes that, although it is reasonable to change one’s mind in relation to colour attributions in the face of a group of people who think that the colour identified is different, this is not the case for aesthetic attributions. I might reconsider the view that the film was good if my friends think it wasn’t, but that, in itself, is no justification for me to change my mind about it. The realist, according to Matravers, would be forced to change her mind because she cannot accommodate the intuition that her original judgment is the correct one when faced by a majority, inter-subjective judgment to the contrary. She would have to change her mind about the film, because it does not coincide with what appears to be a universal judgment. Robert Hopkins, "Kant, Quasi-Realism and the Autonomy of Aesthetic Judgement," *The European Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (2001). Derek

The problem with aesthetic properties, like moral properties, is that one might think them to be essentially evaluative and mind-dependent<sup>290</sup>, so that a Lockean position seems to be more tenable in that an aesthetic predicate would be less suggestive of a veridical visual experience than of personal, subjective response. McDowell for example, is one philosopher who has taken an intellectualist, rather than sensualist approach to value properties, because sensual, or perceptual approaches lack representation. For something to be red just is to see it as red (rather than represent it as red). This kind of view of aesthetic properties is essentially evaluative, mind-dependent. This is because agreement is thought of in terms of common taste or in terms of common sensibility. Disagreement is accounted for too, because disagreement amongst experts making aesthetic judgments is accounted for in terms of irreconcilable differences in their evaluative sensibilities between variously and heterogeneously informed expert critics. "Aesthetic properties simply are certain ways that objects appear to perceivers with different aesthetic sensibilities," as parenthetically remarked by one anti-realist.<sup>291</sup>

This view is compelling because it speaks to the uncomfortable and unhappy, but seemingly intractable issue of disagreement, when such disagreement arises. It also speaks to the thought that when we experience an object aesthetically, we each bring different cognitive and emotive stock, which according to some philosophers seems to override the actual perceptual element of aesthetic experience.<sup>292</sup> However, there is another way to account for aesthetic properties that has been well discussed and that can

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Matravers and Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (2005).

<sup>290</sup> J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977).

McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities.", Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism.", Peter Railton, "Aesthetic Value, Moral Value and the Ambitions of Naturalism," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>291</sup> Alan H. Goldman, "Realism About Aesthetic Properties," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (1993). 31.

<sup>292</sup> Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*, Glenn Parsons, "Nature Appreciation, Science and Positive Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42 (2002), Parsons, *Aesthetics and Nature*.

help with the issue of disagreement. We will turn to this account now, before dealing with the seeming difficulty of accommodating non-artistic objects.

What should be taken from this view is the thought that aesthetic properties are like colour properties in the sense that they are perceptual. They differ because they are more complex *gestalts* that involve more than colour. Aesthetic properties are also public in the sense that they can be picked out by concepts and terms that we use in intersubjective discourse about aesthetic objects.

The question is, though, what would primary qualities have to be for an account of aesthetic properties to be non-reductive, emergentist? Rather than assume, as anti-realists do, that disagreement is the norm in aesthetic discourse, we will turn to the compelling reasons for thinking that agreement is. We will proceed as follows. First, we will begin by briefly considering the historical, traditional conception of aesthetic properties, or properties more generally, so that we can see how the historical framework set out in the early chapters illuminate the current debate, the clarity of which is set out in Levinson's realist and Matravers' anti-realist accounts of aesthetic properties. Realism about aesthetic properties has it that aesthetic properties belong to, or are a part of, a mind-independent world; that aesthetic properties belong to the objects that we appreciate aesthetically. Anti-realism about aesthetic properties has it that aesthetic properties belong to, or are essentially of the human mind, the conceptual framework it uses to make sense of and value the world.

In contrast to these positions, mine is one that takes it that some aesthetic properties are at least representative of external objects in a way that they are presented to the mind and in a way that does not rely on fictionalism or make-believe or does not rely on non-perceptual content. That is to say, not in a way that they are used as props for human artifice or purpose, but in a way that genuinely and uncomplicatedly relates to the objects concerned. If the objects concerned are not themselves a result of fictional make-believe, the possibility then arises for genuine, non-fictional, perceptual access, at least in those cases. The object I have in mind is the object of nature that does not have the same intentionality or cognitive constraints that art does. Its very perceptual and

aesthetic simplicity invites agreement among aesthetic observers in a way art seems not to. The properties that we ascribe to the natural object, that at least in part tell us something about how the object seems to us, structure the distinctly perceptual and aesthetic part of the experience.

Historical precedence on the matter, at least historical precedence set by the Ancient Greeks, assumed a realist ontology. This was originally formulated by Plato, whose account, as we have seen, held that beauty, in its fullest and truest manifestation, was an abstract universal form outside the realm of real, concrete, physical objects. Objects instantiating beauty shared beauty with other beautiful objects and with beauty as an abstract, universal form. Ordinary, real, concrete, physical objects could not display beauty in its fullest, abstract, universal, perfect sense. They were imperfect instances thereof.

We found another kind of universalism in Aristotle's approach to metaphysics, which set itself against Platonic metaphysics, and which inspires my view of aesthetic properties, is the existence of object *qua* their physical manifestation. According to Aristotle, the idea was to try to identify the structure of what there is, identify and characterise the categories under which things fall as well as their specific properties or features. The Aristotelian approach allowed for concrete, physical objects to share attributes, such as beauty, but unlike Plato, Aristotle did not take them to be derived from abstract universals but from real universals.

With Locke we have a discussion according to which colour, as we have seen, is of particular interest because it pertains to the senses. According to Locke, our ideas come from sense experience and reflection thereon, that the mind combines these simple based in sense-experience to form new, complex ideas. The ontology of sense experience, experiences such as colour and odour, which he thought of as secondary qualities were part of the subject, rather than the object, but an object's extension, form, solidity were of the object, its primary qualities. He argued against innate ideas and the thought that the universal agreement of mankind regarding certain principles showed that these ideas were innate to the human mind. As a child develops and grows she gains insight into the objects of the world, according to how we experience objects via the senses. External

objects that are conveyed through the senses, are simple and provide the building blocks for more complex ideas that we reflect on. Secondary qualities, such as colour, are caused by a perceived object's primary qualities. Primary qualities are those physically present in the object and secondary qualities are perceived sensations and without perceivers, aesthetic qualities would not exist.

Returning to the question above, and bearing these historical arguments in mind, how can an understanding of aesthetic qualities being like secondary qualities, based on primary qualities, be non-reductive or emergentist? Many, but not all, aesthetic qualities are like colour properties in that they are at least partially descriptive, are intended as property attributions, that pertain to how an object appears to a subject. The idea is that the object appears as a whole, unified, object, to which we often can and do apply aesthetic qualities that do not pertain to what we know about the object, but to the object itself. At the core of aesthetic experience lies our perceiving of an object, how we sense its presence. What would the primary qualities have to be in order for this account to make sense? As we will now see, they are those qualities that physically constitute the object.

Levinson's criteria for aesthetic properties are threefold, and present a quasi-realist approach to aesthetic properties: 1. Aesthetic properties are a description of how things appear, 2. They are intended as property attributions, 3. Their attribution depends on how things are with the object.<sup>293</sup> The attribution of aesthetic properties, which have substantial descriptive content, is based on appearances, the 'look', 'impression' of aesthetic phenomena, and describes them. How we attribute aesthetic properties is dependent not only on how things are with the object, but how things are with the subject, how well informed the subject is about aesthetic properties and their application.

If this kind of realism about aesthetic properties implies correctness conditions, as Levinson espouses, it also implies that an object may or not have a particular aesthetic property. Therefore, a judgment to the effect that an object has or lacks an aesthetic property will be correct or incorrect according to how things are with the object. On this

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<sup>293</sup> Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties.", ———, "Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility.", ———, "What Are Aesthetic Properties?."

account, aesthetic properties of the object exist independently of the mind, If they exist independently of the mind, they provide the independent content for a judgment for the correct property attribution. If they instantiate an aesthetic property and provide the content for a judgment, the attribution being made in the judgment is either correct or incorrect. The realist, therefore, thinks it possible to correctly describe an object's aesthetic properties.

What's problematic for the realist, however, is that it is unclear that we can make sense of the correctness conditions as they relate to aesthetic properties. If we can't make sense of the correctness of aesthetic judgments, then realism is false. It might be, for example, that correctness conditions imply universal judgment: if the object and its aesthetic properties exist independently of mind, everyone should perceive the same property without disagreement or controversy with the tendency being for convergence. Furthermore, if an object instantiates an aesthetic property, an attribution being applied to it will either be true, false, or somewhere in between. If the attribution is true, it is knowable universally, if it is false, it is contingent, dependent on some non-objective feature, where 'objective' means of the object (rather than inter-subjective agreement for example). Aesthetic evaluations would also be universal to the extent that everyone should be able to appeal to the same property to justify both their aesthetic judgment and, pro tanto, the aesthetic evaluation based on that judgment.

This, anti-realists like Matravers argue, is simply not true: people disagree about aesthetic attributions and judgments, and the Humean criteria deployed for the correctness of judgments as articulated by Levinson, Miller, Railton and many others do not provide an explicit argument for the mind-independent existence of aesthetic properties as we will see below. Aesthetic judgments vary not only across people and cultures, but within a lifetime. If there is variation in judgment, either many mistakes in property attributions are made or people can disagree without being wrong. The latter suggests that realism about aesthetic properties fails. However, let's look at this claim more closely.

If many mistakes are being made, some might be better at discerning than others, and therefore more apt at applying attributions. We might explain this by the accuracy and

functioning of perceptual systems, or lack thereof (e.g. colour blindness, or inexperience). It may additionally be explained on the Humean model, that having the appropriate contextual knowledge related to the object, and how the object is to be categorised, can provide criteria for the correctness of property application. Or that the sophistication of the conceptual framework used to judge and attribute properties is more refined.

For his part, Levinson gives Humean, contextualist, arguments for the correctness conditions where aesthetic properties are concerned. The true critic, or ideal judge, who knows how to view an artwork correctly and is best placed to “properly situate a work with respect to its context of origin” is the arbiter of aesthetic objectivity. Levinson supports that view by appealing to arguments presented in papers by Miller and Railton, who provide lengthy discussions about the nature of aesthetic judgment.<sup>294</sup> Miller provides an account of judgment (whether aesthetic, moral or scientific) that is objective but avoids the pitfall of aesthetic and moral judgment resembling scientific judgment. Aesthetic judgment is objective in the sense that we can judge objects and attribute properties to them, but aesthetic judgments do not achieve universality as in scientific judgment, because some inevitably have blindspots (they might not have the right cultural or contextual reference points, for example). Railton, for his part, argues that if an object has the right configuration of features, it will correspond in the right way to the senses and cognitive capacities for an experience of it to be considered aesthetic. As Matravers points out, however, though these papers by Miller and Railton refer to the features an object has, what Railton calls “beauty -making” characteristics, that may be tracked by human cognitive and sensory structures, or that may occasion aesthetic appreciation, neither Miller nor Railton explicitly provide arguments for the existence of aesthetic properties. They provide arguments for the normativity of aesthetic judgments. This Humean aspect of Levinson’s argument does not get us where we want to be,

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<sup>294</sup> Richard W. Miller, "Three Versions of Objectivity: Aesthetic, Moral and Scientific," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Railton, "Aesthetic Value, Moral Value and the Ambitions of Naturalism."

which is whether it may be possible to think of aesthetic properties, or a group of aesthetic properties, as belonging or pertaining to a physical object.

The realist, however, need not appeal to universalism of the scientific sort, as argued by Miller, nor need she appeal to content, context or inter-subjective agreement. If universalism entails that attributions refer to abstract entities, anyone should be able to experience them, and provide a straightforward analysis or definition of the attribution that applies to it. On the other hand, if we accept that people have perceptual systems that differ, say in the colour-blindness case, or with varying degrees of sensitivity and sophistications, we might also argue that varying attributions might correctly be applied according to those sensitivities. This allows for differing aesthetic property attributions, perhaps not as extreme as is the case with colour blindness, or colour experiences in which red is identified rather than green or vice versa. The subject in this case experiences that colour, red, irrespective of what might be tracked by someone who does not confuse colours in a purely objective sense. Difference in perception need not entail difference in properties. Or, put more precisely, difference in a subject sensually feeling, representing, or coming into contact with an object's property need not entail difference in that property. If we look to historical precedence, this is a point made by Locke. How a person experiences a property, or represents it, is irrelevant to how she then applies an concept to it in the sense that whatever it is the attribute picks out, she alone experiences the corresponding as being as it is.

Before moving onto a discussion of aesthetic ontology and perception, there is another argument against realism put forward by Matravers: that the realist model does not allow for autonomy of aesthetic judgment as put forward by Robert Hopkins. The argument goes that, although it is reasonable to change one's mind in relation to colour attributions in the face of a group of people who think that the colour identified is different, this is not the case for aesthetic attributions. I might reconsider the view that the film was good if my friends think it wasn't, but that, in itself, is no justification for me to change my mind about it. The realist, according to Matravers, would be forced to change her mind because she cannot accommodate the intuition that her original judgment is the correct one when faced by a majority, inter-subjective judgment to the



contrary. She would have to change her mind about the film, because it does not coincide with what appears to be a universal judgment.

This is *prima facie* plausible, but there's no reason to think that a group of similarly sensible people have got it right and she, the realist, has it wrong. The majority of people within a sensibility group have made a judgment, and are in agreement about that judgment, but we have no reason to therefore conclude that they have made the correct, objective one, if we understand objectivity in terms of being derived from the object (rather than objectivity through inter-subjective agreement)? You might think, for example, that a group of like-minded people would look at a four-sided shape and conclude that it is a square, but another may judge it to be a diamond. Or one might conceive of a group of colour blind people with the same colour-vision deficiency, who mistaken red for green and green for red, all making the same judgment that the clown's costume is green when it is red, without thereby being inclined, if you have no such colour-vision deficiency, to change your judgment that the clown's costume is in fact red. Although there seems to be a difference between a colour judgment and aesthetic judgment, on this score, there need not be. The realist would no more be tempted to change her mind about the film than she would about colour, based on the argument from autonomy, than she would in the reverse case.

We might, at this stage, introduce the distinction between an aesthetic judgment and an aesthetic evaluation, according to which a judgment entails judging an object to have such or such a property and an evaluation entails engaging with normativity and evaluation. Many, such as Goldman, do not endorse such a distinction, but instead think of aesthetic properties as essentially evaluative, mind-dependent.<sup>295</sup> I will, as follows, explore how aesthetic judgment might be possible irrespective of aesthetic evaluation.

I will argue, following Levinson, that there is a class of aesthetic properties, to my mind akin to colour properties, in that they are immediately perceivable and are grounded in the object. That discussion will focus on the ontology of aesthetic properties

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<sup>295</sup> Goldman, "Realism About Aesthetic Properties.", Alan H. Goldman, "Reply to Gould and Levinson on Aesthetic Realism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 3 (1994), ———, "Aesthetic Qualities and Aesthetic Value," *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 1 (1990).

and the perceptual, experiential dimension of those properties that need not require expertise and sophistication where aesthetic judgment is concerned. I am arguing for a *sui generis*, basic, class of aesthetic properties that is both immediately perceivable, and as I will further argue (probably in chapter nine), that this is particularly applicable to nature.

Let us remind ourselves of what Levinson argues. He argues that an aesthetic attribution is intended as a property attribution; that the attribution is based on reports of certain looks, feels, appearances; that the subject matter, how things are with the object, allows us to distinguish between correct and incorrect attributions. I will proceed by assessing how it might be that aesthetic concepts map onto aesthetic properties, which, despite the differences that might hold between aesthetic and colour properties, might be conceived of as analogous with colour properties. The differences between aesthetic and colour properties have been mentioned by Matravers. One of those, as seen, and rejected, in the discussion on aesthetic autonomy above, is that one might change one's mind more easily about colour properties than aesthetic properties when faced an apparently universal judgment. Other differences between aesthetic and colour properties, as Matravers enumerates, are that aesthetic properties are often thought of as evaluative and colour properties are not, and that aesthetic properties are often said to depend on non-aesthetic properties, which may include colour properties.

While it is true that aesthetic properties are often properties that demarcate preference, dislike or revulsion (in the latter cases accepting that there are such things as negative aesthetic properties), we also ordinarily speak of colour preferences and dislikes (although colour-revulsion may take things a bit far). My daughter's current enthusiasm for blue or my partner's disdain for pastel colours are both obvious in their attribution of them to objects. Blue and pastel pink are attributed 'evaluatively' in those cases. It was also thought that avocado green was nausea-inducing, before it came into vogue in the 1970s. When avocado green bathroom suites came into vogue in the 1970s, no ensuing nausea epidemic has been recorded in the history books, suggesting that we do, although in this case wrongly sometimes associate value with colour. This is not an argument for aesthetic and colour properties to be considered irreducibly evaluative or

normative, but points out why we might think of aesthetic properties and colour properties as more similar than one might want to assume. Our affective responses to aesthetic properties are not essential to them being the properties they are. It is also at least plausible that aesthetic attributions describe the objects they apply to, rather than evaluation of their goodness or badness according to subjective preference or inter-subjective agreement. It would seem rather odd for a person to refer to describe either of the two Ming vases housed at the Museum of Scotland as “unwieldy”, the suggestion being that “delicate” describes it more appropriately - quite apart from any evaluation we might make of it.

In what follows, I want to assume that both colour and aesthetic attributes are non-evaluative, and to see whether aesthetic properties are more like colour properties than we might think and to potentially ground them in an object-oriented, rather than subjective or inter-subjective, objectivity. The idea is to appeal to the philosophy of colour to see if there are insights to be gained from the philosophy of colour. While it is true that there’s no settled ontology of colour properties, and that this unsettledness would therefore likely extend to aesthetic properties, it may help us ground some aesthetic attributes in their correlative aesthetic properties. We are here trying to make sense of the relation between how things are with the object and the correct attribution of a property. The competing theories here include eliminativism, physicalism, dispositionalism and primitivism about colour, which I will turn to after summarising Levinson’s theory of aesthetic emergence.

These competing theories, and Levinson’s own theory of aesthetic emergence, attempt to answer the question about whether or not physical objects are coloured, or, in the aesthetic case, if such categories are to be used in the aesthetic case, whether physical objects are themselves aesthetic. Can we make sense of colour realism or aesthetic realism? I begin with Levinson’s analysis, as this is the one at stake, the one I wish, ultimately, to defend and build on, although I have some concerns about his contextualism.

Levinson illuminates how, exactly, “the aesthetic face is erected upon the structural skeleton which supports it”, and what the logical connection between the two is. To do

this, he marries supervenience with emergentism. By supervenience, Levinson means that aesthetic properties are dependent on both an object's structural, non-aesthetic properties and on its substructural, microphysical, material ones. If two aesthetic objects differ aesthetically, they necessarily differ structurally, if not substructurally. If two aesthetic objects are contextually, structurally and substructurally identical, they cannot differ aesthetically. Emergentism here is the view that an aesthetic property arises from its simpler, non-aesthetic constituents, but is not reducible to them. So the experience of an aesthetic property is the phenomenal result of a sensible quality or perceptible property, and the combination of non-aesthetic properties that cause it. The view might be related to non-reductive physicalism, according to which psychological or phenomenal qualities are distinct from material, biological processes, but this is not Levinson's point. Aesthetic properties are the way things appear and the way things appear, although constituted by their underlying structure, are irreducible to them. So in a short discussion on colour, Levinson writes: "For example, it is readily imaginable that reflecting wavelengths of *alpha* microns would have sufficed to make an object yellow, even holding our physiologies and neurochemistries fixed, and that reflecting wavelengths of *ypsilon* microns would not have sufficed to make an object visible at all. And this is because the *attribute* of yellowness is essentially tied to the *appearance* yellow, while the latter is only contingently related to any conditions physically specifiable."<sup>296</sup>

Let us look at physicalism a little more closely, in particular, colour physicalism, which holds a competing, but similar, view to Levinson's supervenient emergentism. Colour physicalism is the view that colour properties are identical with physical properties. Jackson and Pargetter write, for instance, that colours are non-dispositional (crudely, non-subjective) properties of objects as 'primary' in their nature as shape and motion. "Indeed, in the case of opaque objects, they are probably complexes of such

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<sup>296</sup> Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience." 102.

properties of the object's surface and immediate surroundings [...].<sup>297</sup> Colours in this case are disjunctions of microphysical properties and there are many ways for microphysical properties to appear the same colour.

Levinson distinguishes his emergentism from the sort of physicalism defined above, or disjunctivism, denying that attributes can be reduced to, made identifiable with, the nature of the corresponding, primary property: “[...] that coolness is just equivalent to the disjunctive attribute: deep-blueness or dark-greenness or ..., and airiness to the disjunctive attribute: light-greyness or light-blueness or hazy-yellowness [...].<sup>298</sup> The physicalist, or disjunctivist, cannot give an account of which colour property either coolness or airiness amount to. It seems arbitrary to him which attribute should correspond to which property. What seems for Levinson is the sensual aspect, the sensible quality or perceptible property that allows for the object to appear in a certain way. Levinson writes that the most compelling explanation, or inference to the best explanation is the “simple admission of distinct, emergent, higher-order perceptual features”.<sup>299</sup> (105-6)

Matravers goes some way to agreeing with Levinson's assessment of reductivism and disjunctivism. However, he probes the issue of what the relationship is between the primary, physical, non-aesthetic property, and its emergent, phenomenal characteristic. What is it, he wonders, that causes the appearance property? So, in the case of the above example, what is it that causes phenomenal ‘airiness’ or phenomenal ‘coolness’ (although Matravers uses the example of phenomenal ‘grace’ as related to a dancer)? Is Levinson's emergence thesis a form of dispositionalism? Let us remind ourselves of what colour dispositionalism is: a colour property is the disposition to cause in perceivers visual experiences of a certain kind under particular circumstances. Carried over to the aesthetic case: an aesthetic property is the disposition to cause in perceivers

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<sup>297</sup> Frank Jackson and Robert Pargetter, "An Objectivist's Guide to Subjectivism About Colour," in *Readings on Color, the Philosophy of Color*, ed. Alex and David R. Hilbert Byrne (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997). 67.

<sup>298</sup> Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience." 105.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.* 105-106.

perceptual (if we accept that perceptual, aesthetic experiences can be non-visual) experiences of a certain kind under particular circumstances. So, in the case of Levinson's example, airiness is an aesthetic property that is the disposition to cause in perceivers the perceptual experience of airiness under particular circumstances. Or, using Matravers' example, "grace is whatever property is that makes the following conditional true: if qualified observer Q views O in circumstances C, then Q will experience P as graceful." Matravers goes on to suggest that "[t]he property that makes that conditional true will be whatever conjunction of non-aesthetic properties that cause phenomenal grace in the particular case."<sup>300</sup> Or, deep-blueness or deep-greenness are the non-aesthetic properties that cause phenomenal coolness in the particular case; light-blueness or hazy-yellowness are the non-aesthetic properties that cause phenomenal airiness.

At this point Matravers argues that if Levinson's proposal is supposed to resemble a dispositionalist approach to aesthetic properties, it is not altogether clear how it differs from the physicalist, or disjunctive, approach. Matravers' claim seems to be that since non-aesthetic properties do not always entail the emergence of aesthetic properties such as grace, coolness and airiness, or that grace, coolness or airiness do not necessarily entail the same non-aesthetic properties in each of their instantiations, we are no further forward. We might just as well claim that phenomenal grace is reducible to whatever the conjunction of non-aesthetic properties is or that coolness is either deep-blue or deep-green (one would presumably have to choose) or that airiness is either light-blueness or hazy-yellowness.

Levinson's argument for the emergence thesis is an inference to the best explanation. Because no connection between emerged aesthetic properties and the non-aesthetic properties that constitute them is articulated, he gets into trouble. And yet, he insists that aesthetic properties are manifest properties that we directly perceive, rather than dispositions, arguing that dispositions are not perceivable, but aesthetic properties are. Levinson is just not worried about the disjunctive rejection of the common kind claim, as is entailed by disjunctivism, that the nature of illusory properties is different from

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<sup>300</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Aesthetic Properties." 204.

veridical ones. Directly perceiving aesthetic properties need not entail awareness of the non-aesthetic properties that constitute it, although it may.

This is, as Levinson argues, and Matravers points out, not altogether different for colour primitivism, in which colours are taken to be like primary qualities, such as shapes. The idea is that colours are not reducible to abstract properties, just like the veridical experience of a shape is not reducible to an abstract shape. A triangle just appears as a triangle and our experiences of them are likely to be veridical. Here, despite the lack of explanation due to the logical hiatus between non-aesthetic properties and emergent aesthetic properties, Matravers accepts the possibility of a supervenient connection between aesthetic property and non-aesthetic property, and points to the very difficulty I will go onto argue below: how such properties are correctly contextualized and relativised to ‘sensitivity groups’.

In any case, assuming that Levinson’s theory of aesthetic supervenience and aesthetic emergence is true, how might aesthetic properties be relativised to sensitivity groups? For Levinson seems to be arguing for an object-oriented approach. If his is an object-oriented approach, how could relativising to sensitivity groups help his case? There’s the issue, as Matravers points out, that *sui generis* aesthetic properties, according to Levinson, are determined by the experiencing subject. What is the link between the objective property and the phenomenal property experienced by the subject? How can the *sui generis*, phenomenal, property be explained by the object’s own non-aesthetic properties? How can *sui generis* phenomenal properties experienced by subjects in different sensitivity groups be applied to the same object? The answer to these questions, Levinson writes, is that he provides an ordinary causal explanation, that aesthetic properties are ways that objects appear to us. The onus, therefore, is on the anti-realist to provide an explanation for the specific nature of aesthetic properties.

To bring things back to the original question, primary qualities would have to be those properties that we can describe and to which we may apply certain aesthetic properties. Discussions about aesthetic properties most often appeal to examples of art. There are many good reasons why this should be the case: our experiences of art are to be valued, just as the artworks themselves are to be valued, art is most likely best

understood according to the *Zeitgeist* it was created in, and this requires perceiving and contextualising it correctly, as Levinson, Walton and many other philosophers argue.

It is unclear that this is true of nature, or natural objects, for these do elicit universal and immediate responses for which contextual knowledge or intentionality is of less import. Furthermore, as the appeal to colour shows, we can make sense of aesthetic properties as being part of natural objects that our ordinary, everyday experience. We experience colour as such, and we experience nature's aesthetics as such. We don't intuitively need refer to complex biographical narratives about the mind behind its creation, nor do we need to appeal to complex economic or historical events to appreciate the majesty of the highlands, the grace of the gazelle, or awe at the Milky Way.

### § Aesthetic Perception

The idea I wish to convey in this section is that we ought to consider the idea of unmediated aesthetic perception to be significant, despite the correlative importance of cognitive processes and substantive cultural meaning. While it is likely to be true that such processes and meaning enrich our aesthetic experiences, contribute to them in meaningful ways, we also have the capacity to be open to the object for guidance on how best to characterize it aesthetically, attend to it such that we allow its features to guide our attention, so that we may discern its features, both its non-aesthetic and its aesthetic features, as Sibley argued. Sibley put forward an argument for a *sui generis* class of aesthetic concepts.<sup>301</sup> This seems right, for if we say that an object is aesthetic, we are saying that it has a property or properties that is or are distinct from other properties, such as epistemic or moral or economic properties.<sup>302</sup> What was important was the having of aesthetic experiences, that is to say, perceptual experiences, and how those could be distinguished from non-aesthetic experiences. It is worth remembering

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<sup>301</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic.", ———, "Aesthetic Concepts."

<sup>302</sup> J.O. Urmson, "What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume, no. XXXI (1957).79.



that Sibley was interested in accounting for the aesthetic experiences of non-art as well as art, which makes his claims all the more necessary and salient.

Of course, the deployment of concepts can itself involve a cognitive process of some order lower than the deployment of an epistemically intricate or grand theoretical framework. Sibley's category of descriptive-aesthetic concepts and terms is interesting for my purposes, because I take him to mean that the origins of aesthetic discernment begin with the ability to make the experience intelligible, at least by describing those qualities we take to be aesthetic or non-aesthetic, as the case may be.<sup>303</sup> Crucial to his argument was precisely the idea that experiencing aesthetic objects perceptually is pivotal; it is what aesthetics is about. This is true not in the sense that the object's non-aesthetic features will provide conditions for the application of an aesthetic concept, but in the sense that through perceptual attention and discernment they provide the aesthetic qualities that give their correlating concepts structure and terms their meaning. Rather than projecting aesthetic constructs onto the objects of aesthetic interest, the thought was that we attend to the object's features, scrutinize them.

While Sibley steered clear of metaphysical language, I will not. I take Sibley's thought to be that there is something to which we refer when we judge an object aesthetically, discern its features, that something being an 'appearance property' as notably argued by Levinson.<sup>304</sup> To perceive aesthetically, according to Sibley, is to perceive the richness of aesthetic features that are (probably) afforded by the manifold properties of the object. There's no mysterious leap from the non-aesthetic to the aesthetic, you either see the object's aesthetic features or you don't. This seems to appeal to realism. Whatever cultural difference there might be in how we discern those properties is borne out in the importance Sibley places on aesthetic discourse, normativity, the community who participate in aesthetic discourse. Aesthetic discourse can help us see and understand differences in how aesthetic properties are attributed and why. It may even help lay to rest disagreement about aesthetic attributions.

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<sup>303</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts.", F. N. Sibley, "Seeking, Scrutinizing and Seeing," *Mind* 64, no. 256 (1955), Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic."

<sup>304</sup> Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility.", ———, "What Are Aesthetic Properties?."

The cultural, epistemic, moral, economic properties and considerations, or cognitive stock, that we bring to aesthetic situations may be thought of as tendencies towards experiencing certain aesthetic objects in ways that have been familiar to us, in ways that we have been taught, such that those ways of perceiving have become tendencies. For example, one might have learned to associate, or have repeatedly experienced, the ‘slowness of tempo’ in music with ‘sadness’. This seems relatively uncontroversial and was a thought, and example, put forward by Beardsley. Sibley’s thought about this was that, while it seems plausible to generalise in this way, one could only do so with care, because ‘slowness of tempo’ in music might apply to other concepts, such as ‘majestic’ or ‘solemn’. In other words, while we may each bring different cognitive stock to an aesthetic concept that we have discerned from the object, there may be other, multiple, ways of ‘filling in’ the concept; or there may be multiple aesthetic concepts applicable to the same aesthetic content. The seeking out of objectivity through aesthetic discourse, through ‘public language’, through characterising an object’s features as precisely as possible, whilst being open to, mindful of, the possibility that the same concept may apply to different content or different content may apply to the same concept, encouraged openness of discussion without doing away with perceptual acuteness.

Of what could Sibley be saying we are having perceptually acute experiences? Again, Levinson’s appeal to what I think of as quasi-realism about aesthetic properties can help us here. For him, criteria for aesthetic properties are threefold: (1) Aesthetic properties are a description of how things appear (2) they are intended as property attributions and (3) their attribution depends on how things are with the object. The attribution of aesthetic properties is based on appearances, the ‘look’, ‘impression’ of aesthetic phenomena, and describes them. How we attribute aesthetic properties is dependent not only on how things are with the object in terms of how we might describe them, but how things are with the subject, how they are experienced. To make sense of how things are with the subject, Levinson relies on Humean, contextualist, arguments, that having the appropriate contextual knowledge related to the object’s appearance and how it is to be categorized can provide criteria for the correctness of attribute application. Or that the sophistication of the conceptual framework used to judge and attribute properties is

more refined. But, as Matravers points out, although ‘beauty-making’ characteristics may be ranked by human cognitive and sensory structures, occasioning aesthetic appreciation, they do not provide arguments for the existence of mind-independent aesthetic properties.<sup>305</sup>

Despite this, however, we can argue that the attribution is intended as a property attribution and describes how things are with the object. Since we have no better way of accounting for the experience of an aesthetic property than to articulate it, it would seem that the best explanation is to think of aesthetic concepts or terms as corresponding to aesthetic, perceptual properties in a meaningful way. As Levinson seems to suggest, many aesthetic properties are of the object and describable as such and most evaluative aesthetic attributions are based on aesthetic phenomena and have a “substantial descriptive content”.

The problem is that it is unclear that we can make sense of the conditions under which aesthetic properties can be real. People tend to converge on properties that are thought to be objective and correctness conditions imply universal judgment. If an attribution is accurate, it is knowable universally, if it is inaccurate, it is contingent, dependent on some non-objective, distinctly subjective, feature. Aesthetic evaluations would also be universal to the extent that everyone should be able to appeal to the same property to justify both their aesthetic judgment and, pro tanto, the aesthetic evaluation based on that judgment. It is argued that this is simply not true, that people disagree about aesthetic attributions and judgments and, furthermore, that people can disagree without being wrong.

Still, universalism of the sort presented by scientific practice need not be the solution for, as we have seen ‘slowness of tempo’ in music may correspond to ‘majestic’, ‘solemn’ or ‘funereal’. On the other hand ‘majestic’, ‘solemn’ or ‘funereal’ may refer to some other content. Difference in perception need not entail difference in properties. Or, put more precisely, difference in a subject sensually feeling, representing, or coming into

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<sup>305</sup>Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties.", Miller, "Three Versions of Objectivity: Aesthetic, Moral and Scientific.", Railton, "Aesthetic Value, Moral Value and the Ambitions of Naturalism."

contact with an object's property need not entail difference in that property. This is why aesthetic discourse is so important: the requirement to be clear about to what it is we are referring when we are making statements like 'the music is majestic' or 'solemn' or 'funereal', just like a four-sided shape might be thought to be a diamond or a square.

This, you might think, gets us no further into discovering whether our aesthetic perceptions are of objective properties. How a person conceptualizes or describes her experience of a property may simply be how she alone would do so, but we have already seen that we have difficulty getting traction on the idea of private experience, and that language at least provides means by which inter-subjective agreement can be achieved. If disagreement were warranted in every case, it would mean we would disagree about how we conceptualise and describe such experiences than we in fact observe. Disagreement with regard to aesthetic properties might be more true of human-made objects, which are culturally determined, but we find wide-ranging consensus even here. Natural objects, which don't have the same kind of cultural determinacy, likely occasion more agreement. Be that as it may, there are reasons for thinking that aesthetic properties may be like colour properties, and may form a class of their own. As Levinson writes, property attribution is based on reports of looks, feels and appearances and the subject matter, how things are with the object, and allow us to distinguish between correctness and incorrectness when they are applied. There's less disagreement than we might think.

How then is the "aesthetic fact erected upon the structural skeleton which supports it"?<sup>306</sup> To answer this question, Levinson brings together the ideas of supervenience and emergentism. We saw earlier that by supervenience, Levinson means that aesthetic properties are dependent on an object's structural, non-aesthetic properties and on its substructural, microphysical, material ones. If two aesthetic objects differ aesthetically, they necessarily differ structurally, if not substructurally. This just means that the way the object presents itself to experience will differ if the experience of it differs. If two aesthetic objects are contextually, structurally and substructurally identical, they cannot differ aesthetically. Emergentism here is the view that an aesthetic property arises from

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<sup>306</sup> Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience." 94.

its simpler, non-aesthetic constituents, but is not reducible to them. So the experience of an aesthetic property is the phenomenal result of a sensible quality or perceptible property, and the combination of non-aesthetic properties that cause it.

Aesthetic properties are the way things appear and, although constituted by their underlying structure, are irreducible to them. So in a short discussion on colour, Levinson writes: "For example, it is readily imaginable that reflecting wavelengths of *alpha* microns would have sufficed to make an object yellow, even holding our physiologies and neurochemistries fixed, and that reflecting wavelengths of *zeta* microns would not have sufficed to make an object visible at all. And this is because the *attribute* of yellowness is essentially tied to the *appearance* yellow, while the latter is only contingently related to any conditions physically specifiable."<sup>307</sup> Levinson does not mean that aesthetic properties are like colour properties in the sense that they are identical to physical properties.<sup>308</sup> Levinson denies that attributes can be reduced to, made identifiable with, the nature of the corresponding, primary property: "[...] that coolness is just equivalent to the disjunctive attribute: deep-blueness or dark-greenness or ..., and airiness to the disjunctive attribute: light-greyness or light-blueness or hazy-yellowness [...]."<sup>309</sup>

This is because it is arbitrary which colour should correspond to 'airiness' or 'haziness', and it looks like an evaluative dimension here is resisting a physicalist analysis. For Levinson, the sensual aspect, the sensible quality or perceptible property allows for the object to appear in a certain way. Levinson writes that the most compelling explanation for these phenomena is the "simple admission of distinct, emergent, higher-order perceptual features".<sup>310</sup> However, because no connection between emerged aesthetic properties and the non-aesthetic properties that constitute them is articulated, he gets into trouble. Matravers, for example, tries to show that Levinson's is a dispositionalist view about aesthetic properties, according to which an

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>308</sup> For example, like the kind of physicalism defined by Jackson and Pargetter. Pargetter, "An Objectivist's Guide to Subjectivism About Colour."67.

<sup>309</sup> Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience." 105.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. 105-6.

aesthetic property is the disposition to cause in perceiver's visual experiences of a certain kind under particular circumstances.<sup>311</sup> Levinson nevertheless insists that aesthetic properties are manifest properties that we directly perceive, rather than dispositions, arguing that dispositions are not perceivable, but aesthetic properties are. Directly perceiving aesthetic properties need not entail awareness of the non-aesthetic properties that constitute it, although it may. For Levinson, what he provides is an ordinary causal explanation that aesthetic properties are ways that objects appear to us. The onus, therefore, is on the anti-realist to provide an explanation for the specific nature of aesthetic properties.

This discussion on aesthetic perception, which has a rich supervenience base, and to which rich aesthetic terminology can be applied, delves deep into the origins of the aesthetic as an unmediated enterprise. Aesthetic experience is the result of being attentive to the object's features and the terms that we apply to them, and being guided by them. That there is a *sui generis* class of aesthetic properties that are dependent on non-aesthetic properties (which include non-perceptual properties) underpins and gives gravitas to the idea of whole formalism, the idea that we've touched on before. An instance of whole formalism is Zuckert's analysis of Kant's account of aesthetic experience, according to which 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

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<sup>311</sup> Matravers probes the issue of what the relationship is between the primary, physical, non-aesthetic property, and its emergent, phenomenal characteristic. He suggests that what it is that causes the appearance property, according to Levinson is a form of dispositionalism. Matravers' claim seems to be that since non-aesthetic properties do not always entail the emergence of aesthetic properties such grace, coolness and airiness, or that grace, coolness or airiness do not necessarily entail the same non-aesthetic properties in each of their instantiations, we are no further forward. We might just as well claim that phenomenal grace is reducible to whatever the conjunction of non-aesthetic properties is or that coolness is either deep-blue or deep-green (one would presumably have to choose) or that airiness is either light-blueness or hazy-yellowness. ———, "Aesthetic Properties.", Mark Johnston, "How to Speak of the Colours," in *Readings on Color, the Philosophy of Color*, ed. Alex Byrne and David R. Hilbert (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

appreciate what has been called an object's 'individual form'".<sup>312</sup> It is to this concept of whole formalism, and its role in my account of aesthetic perception, that we now turn.

## § Whole Formalism

We can see from what I have argued that, to be described as aesthetic, an experience requires attention to an object. In order for it to be both intelligible to the subject, and made intelligible to a wider community, it also requires discernment, that is to say, looking and seeking to correctly characterise how the experience is structured. No better solution has been provided than the kind of inference to the best explanation that Sibley and Levinson have both offered, one on the linguistic plane, the other on the metaphysical plane: where aesthetic terminology was central to Sibley's philosophical framework, aesthetic properties are to Levinson's. Levinson's metaphysical argument for the supervenience of aesthetic properties on non-aesthetic properties that was articulated in the previous section can be seen as an explanatory framework for the formal unity of the aesthetic object that is presented in Zuckert's characterisation of whole formalism. This provides a rich understanding of aesthetic experience as it is of a unified object, rather than one that displays austere formal properties.

Though this is problematic for some, it seems a virtue of this approach to broach the issue that aesthetic contents are not always fixed by the same aesthetic concepts and terms. On the one hand, the difficulty lies with being too constraining in our approach, or being too lax with it. This kind of explanatory framework can at least get us closer to an understanding of the aesthetic that puts perception at the heart of the issue, but can be explanatory of both non-art and art.

Before moving onto the issue of what sorts of objects can be aesthetic objects, which I will address in the final section of the chapter, let us pause in order to give an account of aesthetic experience that speaks both to the perceptual experience and those non-perceptual features that in many cases contribute to it. In the above discussion, we

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<sup>312</sup> Zuckert, "The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism." 599-600.

arrived at the idea that if aesthetic experience is anything at all, it is at least perceptual and descriptive. The contents of perceptual experience structure the concepts and terms that we apply to them. The question is, does such an account have to be formalist in the sense derived from Bell, Hanslick and Zangwill and resembling what Zuckert defines as austere formalism? Austere formalism was the idea that specific properties are held to be responsible for the object's aesthetic appearance at the expense of its representational content, emotional expressiveness, and historical, institutional or social context.<sup>313</sup> The specific properties I have in mind are lines, shapes and colour.

These, however, seem *prima facie* to be non-aesthetic properties: just because an object has lines, shapes and colour does not thereby mean we will experience it aesthetically. Rather, the sense in which Zuckert defines whole formalism is more fruitful, where, as we saw in chapter five, whole formalism captures the ideas of order, unity, harmony, diversity that integrate to form a whole object that is experienced. In the eighteenth century, this may have equated to an experience of beauty, but there is no reason to think that how an object integrates such features (or leaves some of them out) might not also constitute other aesthetic concepts or terms. Such an account takes the object's features to be integrated and thereby constituting an object's perceivable features. That is to say, they form a *Gestalt*, an organised whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts. This kind of perceptual, formalist account thus appeals to more than an object's shape, line(s) or colour(s). It appeals to how these (and in some cases other) features come together to structure the concepts and terms that we come to apply to them.

Attending to and perceptually experiencing the object allows for its manifold features to become salient such that we can apply concepts and terms. The distinction between its features being non-aesthetic or aesthetic is one related to the disinterested mode of attention, where non-aesthetic features, although describable, only give rise to aesthetic experience when the *Gestalt* is formed in perceptual experience and distinctly aesthetic concepts and terms are applied to it. Aesthetic properties thus emerge, as Levinson argued, from non-aesthetic properties, and legitimate the aesthetic concepts and terms

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid.



we use to identify them. Whereas austere formalism relies on the identification of specific properties, whole formalism tells us that the object manifests itself perceptually as an integrated whole, rich in features both aesthetic and non-aesthetic.

I will momentarily turn to Kant, and Zuckert's interpretation of him because we can interpret Kant's aesthetics, and in particular his formalism, without reducing his account to the kind of austere formalism that is often attributed to him, or that defines the subsequent philosophical theories based on austere formalism. This provides historical precedence for the idea of whole formalism, but it also helps to synthesise the seemingly intractable issue that separates the formalists from the anti-formalists (in Zangwill's language) or the cognitivists from the non-cognitivists. Furthermore, whole formalism, as a perceptual account, combines disjunctively with thought in the sense that there's no necessary causal link between the perceived Gestalt and deeper knowledge, which isn't to say that theoretical and/or other contextual elements might not also feed into the perceptual experience in important and meaningful ways.

Formalism is said to have originated in Kant's third *Critique* and grew out of the idea of 'purposiveness without purpose'. This idea was developed in Kant's *Critique of the Power Judgment*. We briefly touched on it in chapter three, where we saw how Savile uses it as a reason for supporting the 'art-first' view, suggesting that the best way to experience nature would be by experiencing it 'as if' it were designed or created by an artist. While we may not be certain about the origins of nature's aesthetic appearance, our subjective experience of it need not entail a pared-down, property formalist account of what is perceived, or negate the importance of features we take to be important to aesthetic experience, such as emotion, historical, institutional, cultural context, or other forms of knowledge. The object's purposive appearance may be woven into, or integrated with, these other elements, which can help explain the importance we attach to the aesthetic experience of nature. Zuckert writes that purposiveness, for Kant, involves intention: "A purpose is an agent's aim (described by a concept) or an object created by such an agent, in accord with the agent's intention". The agent's intentions are purposeful in the sense that she produces an object that accords with her

intentions.<sup>314</sup> This makes sense in relation to the creative endeavours behind the production of art, and can justify reasons for discovering the artist's intentions behind an artwork's appearance if one is so inclined. There are, however, other ways one might come to look to other reasons for an object's appearance: how its appearance compares with artworks that came before and after; how its appearance relates to the social and political issues of the time; how it relates to the subject's own experience, or to the subject's community's own experience. There are a myriad of possibilities.

As we also saw briefly earlier, 'purposiveness without purpose' is, according to Kant, what accounts for beautiful form. Where a thing is purposive because we can conceive of it and explain it in terms of its having been created according to rules and with a particular end in mind, purposiveness without end can exist such that the explanation for how an object's form has come to be can only be intelligible to and explainable by us if it is attributed to a creative force (a will) and can be experienced without necessarily appealing to reason<sup>315</sup>.

Purposiveness can thus exist without an end, insofar as we not place the causes of this form in a will, but can still make the explanation of its possibility conceivable to ourselves only by deriving it from a will. Now we do not always necessarily need to have insight through reason (concerning its possibility) into what we observe. Thus we can at least observe a purposiveness concerning form, even without basing it in an end (as the matter of the *nexus finalis*), and notice it in objects, although in no other way than by reflection.<sup>316</sup>

Kant is saying that whatever the reasons are for an object's appearing a certain way, or however it compares with what it may have been intended to be, we experience it aesthetically when we attend to its form (rather than whether is comprised of only formal properties).

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid. 605.

<sup>315</sup> The idea that we need not necessarily appeal to reason is important because Kant is saying that what is special about an object's form seems to be grounded in intention (when in fact it may not have been) and because it may not be grounded in intentions (or rules for creation), reason (which itself presupposes rules) is not necessary for appreciating an object's form. Here we have a precursor for the view that science does not underpin our aesthetic judgments of nature.

<sup>316</sup> Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. §10, 5:220, 105.

Kant is not ruling out certain elements that might feature in aesthetic experience, as Zuckert's more general definition of formalism holds. As we saw in chapter five, Zangwill explicitly situates himself as a formalist and thinks that non-formal features ought not to be taken account of in certain aesthetic situations (such as his account of the application of extreme formalism to inorganic nature). In other situations, he steers clear of epistemic justifications for aesthetic experience. Carlson is in even more peril according to Kant for although Kant does not rule out the possibility for reason to have a role in judging the form of an object, it is the lack of purpose behind an object's purposeful-looking appearance that grants freedom from the application of rules in our appreciation of the object, and thus makes it an object of aesthetic experience. So, whatever results science presents us with, it may present one way of experiencing nature, but it cannot be the only way. This is because the way the object appears is not necessarily related to what we know about it, but to the way it appears to us.

Furthermore, as I also suggest above, a cognitivist, scientific approach would require a complex deployment of concepts that is not necessarily required for a distinctly aesthetic experience. This is why turning to the analysis of concepts and terms rather than a grand scientific theory, and identifying whether they are indicative of the aesthetic, rather than whether they accord with some scientific theory or other, is a more fruitful endeavour. The object's appearance is important for a distinctly aesthetic experience of it, the reason for which Kant draws attention to features such as colour and tone, which he thinks "already concern form".<sup>317</sup> Colour and tone help structure the object's form, but can only contribute to the overall beauty of the form if they are not merely experienced as a preference by the subject, but as purely representing the object in experience. If the subject's attention is on the application of a scientific theory, rather than a feature of the object, her attention is being drawn away from the object. Kant then further states that if the object's aesthetic features are also experienced relating to the good, as the scientific cognitivist wishes, subjective attention is drawn away from the object's representation and towards another end, that of a "determinate end". This is

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid. §14, 5:224, 109.

problematic because, again, attention is drawn away from the object as such, and judged in terms of some external, moral, purpose.

Let us return to the issue of formalism. Zuckert shows that Kant's aesthetics provide a "richer, more plausible, description of our aesthetic engagement with an object, as less narrowly subjectivist than frequently believed".<sup>318</sup> When we attend to the object disinterestedly, our experience of it gives the object "individual form", which comprises of "its sensible properties as inextricably interrelated or unified to make the object what it is".<sup>319</sup> According to Zuckert, there are three types of formalism: 'property formalism', according to which "the form of an object is described as a set of specific or temporal properties that characterise the relations that hold among different parts of the object and that these are responsible for the object"; 'kind formalism', "which identifies the form of an object as that which makes it a good example of its kind"; and 'whole formalism', where an "object is beautiful if it is ordered or unified, if its parts harmonize to form a whole-or more specifically, that beauty is a unity of diversity or of variety".<sup>320</sup> Zuckert argues that Kant is often taken to be a property formalist, in the sense that specific properties are held to be responsible for the object's aesthetic appearance - the idea that colour, lines and shapes are responsible for the object's appearance. Bell's formalism is a kind of property formalism, because his definition of 'significant form' is the inter-relationship between lines, shapes, and colour. These properties are prerequisites for how we should experience objects aesthetically.

Kant's take on formalism is best understood in terms of 'whole formalism' in that the object as a whole figured in experience rather than a list of properties we take to be formal properties, for his exposition of form requires that there be a difference between form or representation and sensation on the one hand (which is a matter of experience) and concepts on the other hand (which are a matter of the intellect and, therefore, judgment). Kant's formalism is, as Zuckert writes, a "disjunctive argument" for a three-

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<sup>318</sup> Zuckert, "The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism." 600.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. 600.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. 600-601.

fold distinction between types of representation: sensation, form and concepts.<sup>321</sup> We experience an object's form sensually and apply appropriate concepts. This process may take concepts related to the object, our sensual experience and concepts related to what we know, as long as the object is made central to the experience (rather than subjective preference or the good). One possible result of experiencing the object might be an experience of an austere formalist kind, but this need not constrain our experiences to austere formalism for an object may be beautiful as a result of order, diversity, variety, harmony of the object's constitutive properties, that is to say, a wider range of properties than narrow formalism allows. While the experience is focused on the object's perceivable features, it need not ignore or negate its non-formal perceptual or non-perceptual features, as narrow formalism requires.

We can bring in the idea, implied in the above, that our aesthetic experience of objects is not governed by reason or by rules. That there are no rules for beauty entails purposiveness without purpose whether in relation to nature or art because if the judgment of beauty is based on purpose it would be judged according to its having fulfilled that purpose. Purposiveness characterises the form of beautiful objects as both describing the object and as occasioning subjective response, leading to the claim that objects are beautiful not in terms of which properties they instantiate, but "in virtue of everything about them", including how they relate to one another and in virtue of their overall design.<sup>322</sup> Kant's engagement with the object therefore not only requires we take it as an object for its own sake, but that we attend to its form, however many kinds of properties are instantiated.

As we have seen above and in previous chapters, disinterest is the concept that enables judging an object for its own sake and does not denote lack of interest in the sense that we are not interested in the aesthetic object, the obliteration of thought or feeling or the denial of the existence of certain non-formal, perceptual properties that help constitute an object's form, and formalism does not merely pertain to "lines and forms combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms". Nor do we

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid. 604.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. 612.

need to “bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space”, as Bell argued.<sup>323</sup> Disinterest is the locus for attending to the object in such a way that its individuality as an object is of import rather than our individual self-interest, and the object is constituted by an indeterminate amount of properties, not just shape, line or colour properties, that enable us to experience it as an aesthetic object in the first place.

In the next section, I consider the issue of formalism, representation and mimesis as they have been taken to be applied to art and nature for a deeper analysis of why Bell’s account would not function either in relation to art or nature. Zuckert’s initial definition of formalism is that it entails looking only at the object’s form at the expense of representational content, emotional expressiveness, historical, institutional or social context.<sup>324</sup> For Zuckert, Kant’s formalism is not what characterises property formalism, defined in terms of the set of spatial or temporal properties and their relations that are responsible for the object. Instead she characterises Kant’s formalism as whole formalism, the thought that an object is beautiful if it is ordered or unified, if its parts harmonise to form a whole, rather than requiring specific properties such as lines, shapes, colour, size, depth and spatial relations, that Bell advocated. Furthermore, she sees Kant’s account of aesthetic judgment as a disjunctive argument in terms of a three-fold distinction between types of representation, representations that are grounded in sensation, those that are grounded in form and those that are grounded in concepts. In other words, the three-foldness consists in sense experience; the object’s seemingly purposive form; and cognition, the concepts we use to make sense of our experience.<sup>325</sup> So, while Kant’s whole formalism speaks of order, harmony and unity, and is led by the object’s features, other contextual features we often take to be relevant to aesthetic experience can be accounted for in other elements that gradually supplement aesthetic experience.

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<sup>323</sup> Bell, *Art*. 8, 27.

<sup>324</sup> Zuckert, "The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism." 600.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.* 604.

How this account of formalism plays out in relation to artworks is more promising than how Bell's account did. The aesthetic value of an object is derived from its parts, its sensible properties, being ordered or unified and their harmonisation to form a whole. Whether or not an artwork is a representation need not matter, what matters is that all the parts form a whole such that in our sensual experience of it we may apply concepts to make sense of it. In order to do so we attend to the object's features, rather than the abstract features derived from it that allow it to fit into an aesthetic theory. We are compelled, according to the Kantian/Zuckertian account, to experience the representational features of a work of art as representational features and we are compelled to apply concepts to it. Central to the view, however, is that we attend to the work's sensible properties.

We thus have a situation where much art, both representational and non-representational, can be of interest and, where representational art is concerned, we need not see it as structurally abstract. What a picture is or represents can feature as part of our experience of it. It thus seems that a property may be relevant to an aesthetic experience even though it is not necessary and sufficient for the experience to be had in the first place.

Some of the properties that relate to art, such as the artist's intentions, may come into play where the artwork is concerned. However, where nature is concerned, Kant provides an understanding for the purposes of my argument here:

The reflecting power of judgment, therefore, can only give itself such a transcendental principle as a law [that orders empirical principles], and cannot derive it from anywhere else (for then it would be the determining power of judgment) nor can it prescribe it to nature: for reflection on the laws of nature is directed by nature, and nature is not directed by the conditions in terms of which we attempt to develop a concept of it that is in this regard entirely contingent.<sup>326</sup>

On the one hand, our reflective judgment orders our experiences, but on the other, our reflections and the way we order our experiences should not be seen as nature itself. Furthermore, as Zuckert writes, “[w]e cannot judge that nature *was* designed by an intentional agent (i.e. God) [...], we must think of empirical laws only *as if* they were

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<sup>326</sup> Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 5: 180. 69.

legislated or designed by an understanding “not ours”<sup>327</sup>. We look to nature to direct our reflective judgment, even though we see it *as if* it were designed (neither by us, nor by God) and as an object, or a collection of objects, in themselves.

What this means for our aesthetic experience of nature is richer than the Bellian account affords: we are no longer restricted to the abstractions that Bell’s formalism entails. Rather, we can experience each of the properties the object displays, if ordered and unified, and harmonised to form a whole via all of our senses. This is important for nature because we not only see it as we do a framed painting, we are often in motion when we engage with it, we hear bird song, the wind through the trees, or smell the damp, mugginess of the lagoon on a hot summer’s day. Kant may not have explicitly endorsed my particular application of his view to the experience of nature, but it contributes to how we might represent or constitute a natural object in aesthetic experience, that in tandem with the concepts we use to make sense of our aesthetic experiences.

Lastly, it seems that being guided by nature in our experiences of it intimates a closeness to nature, whereas following the criteria that Bell advances in his formalist aesthetic theory suggests that we would have to abstract from it. Even if we can not know nature in itself on Kant’s terms, Kantian formalism can give us “a surprising intimation of what it would be to transcend human cognitive limitations, to have an intuitive understanding of a (sic.) individual being as a whole, in all its particularity; it suggests that individual things—even the world as a whole—are, in their contingent character, meaningful, intelligible, ordered for us; it gives us a sense of what it would be to be divine”<sup>328</sup>.

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<sup>327</sup> Zuckert, "The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism." 606.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. 622.



## **§ Conclusion**

It is not the kind of object of an experience that determines whether the experience is aesthetic, but the kind of attention that is afforded it and the properties that it displays. Aesthetic attention, which can partly be characterised in terms of disinterest, as I wrote in the second section of the chapter, is required for an aesthetic experience. This kind of attention entails concentrating both on the object of experience and how we sensually experience, describe and talk about it. Attending to the object does not mean focusing either on stipulative properties (such as the formal properties), at the expense of everything else, nor does it mean focusing on what we know, or theoretical frameworks. It involves focusing on the object's appearance, how we conceptualise and describe it. This kind of perceptual account grounds, structures how we experience and conceptualise aesthetic objects and then allows us to better understand how it relates to other elements, such as emotive ones or epistemic ones. These latter features thus contribute to an experience of objects that is already perceptually rich (depending on the object's features) in a way that is true to its phenomenology.

## **General Conclusion: Perceiving Nature Aesthetically**

I have argued for two inter-related strands of argument: one strand that takes account of perceiving aesthetically, which has been formulated in terms of ‘whole formalism’, that allows for the idea that an object’s aesthetic properties are non-causally related to its non-aesthetic concepts; the second strand capturing what it is that is important about our aesthetic experiences of nature. A historical dimension to the thesis has been provided in order to establish historical, philosophical, precedence for ascertaining what has historically been thought in relation both to aesthetic perception and nature as a subject matter for perceptual, aesthetic experience. To that end I addressed Plato’s skepticism about aesthetic, mimetic properties in artworks, Aristotle’s teleology about them and Aquinas’ realism about aesthetic properties in chapter one, where in the end I agreed with Aristotle and Aquinas’ non-skeptical views. Chapter two allowed me to introduce concepts, such as immediacy, disinterest and aesthetic perception that established a basis for my own conclusions about perceptual, aesthetic, experience and the importance of nature as a subject matter for aesthetic experience. Chapter three addressed the issue of priority being given to either to art or nature in the aesthetic realm, but showed that concerns about not allowing art conceptual priority in aesthetic realm, primarily linked to the idea that nature is not intentionally created, are ill-founded and that nature is at least as important as art as has been suggested by contemporary approaches to the aesthetics of nature. To provide further support for the importance of nature to aesthetics, despite its lack of intentionality, chapter four confirmed nature’s importance as a paradigm of aesthetic experience and concentrated on nature’s expressive properties in order to reveal the richness of nature as an object of aesthetic appreciation and with which we have emotive affinity. Chapter five laid out the respective arguments put forward by contemporary, non-cognitive formalists about the aesthetics of nature and their opposing scientific cognitivists. This was important because both sides of the debate dig their heels in at the expense of the richness provided by the other. I laid out why one side insisting on an austere formalism that dispenses with, or at least minimizes valuable, contextual aspects of aesthetic experience, and the

other side insisting on the necessity of context or frameworks of scientific knowledge as it relates to nature in particular. One possible resolution was articulated in chapter six, where the idea of ‘whole formalism’ took a different approach from many austere formalists and is arguably the best interpretation of Kant’s formalism. Here, a perceptually rich account of aesthetics that does not deny the possibility for non-formal, or non-perceptual elements of objects to figure in aesthetic experience and does not assume that the non-determinism, or lack of intentionality in nature means it should relate to an austere account of formalism.

Attending aesthetically to nature, then, brings with it experiences of an external world from which we stem and on which we depend not merely for our existence, but for our capacity to experience it in a range of ways: from the striking presence of a heron, elegant in disposition and demeanour as I run past the lake to the ugliness of a hawk capturing a baby rabbit for its dinner. It reminds us that we are thinking, reflecting creatures, able to use our capacity for thought to avoid ugliness in our engagement with the world. Rooting the aesthetic in perception allows us to understand that it has an impact on our daily activities and routines, rather than being restricted either to a particular kind of object or to the knowledge we might have about it. If aesthetic experience is anything, it is at least perceptual, which means that it is not restricted either to art or to nature. It may be different in either case, different depending on how the aesthetic, perceptual, experience attaches to affective properties and cognitive approaches. What’s distinctive about nature is that it is the external we inhabit, rather than a product of human intentionality. This does not minimise its aesthetic appeal, but heightens it for that very reason.

Whole formalism, unlike austere formalism, articulates how non-formal, aesthetic features figure in experience, because the object is unified in perceptual experience and integrates its various features into that uniform object. This describes perceptual experience and how it combines with other features of aesthetic experience: what we might know about the object, intellectual, creative, imaginative or affective responses to it. This is important for both art and nature, but resists the scientific cognitive approach to aesthetics simply because nature is not like art where the aesthetic is concerned,

because no such discipline as the history of nature exists in the way it does for the history of art. The idea of whole formalism rests on an interpretation of Kant that is generous to his account of how form fits into aesthetic experience than austere formalists allow. This, combined with the acknowledgment that nature is at least as rewarding an aesthetic subject as art allows us to explore its significance for us. This is not just for ethical reasons, but for reasons that we may, as a consequence, attend to it carefully, care about it, and acknowledge its importance to how our moods and emotions correlate with its expressive qualities. By tracing the idea of aesthetic perception, I have shown the role of nature as a paradigm of aesthetic experience through history, not only that perception is crucial to aesthetic experience and that nature is a repository for rich aesthetic experiences, but also for a rich experiential exchange with it.

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