

Defining the Aesthetic

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We use the word "aesthetic" a great deal. We use the word most times as a modifier of "property" "object" "experience" "attitude" and "attention". The word "aesthetic" is used as both an adjective and as a noun, but when it is used as a noun, the word is offered as a short-hand description of an alternate, more precise description. For example, when an ordinary object is said to be "aesthetic" usually this means either (1) that the object is beautiful, elegant, balanced, etc., i.e. has some positive aesthetic quality, or (2) that the object is such as to offer one who would attend to it an aesthetic experience that is either readily available or rewarding in some way. The word is an adjective, and so to define the word is to define it as a modifier of some noun. The question now: which noun?

The history of the word's usage goes back to Alexander Baumgarten, who began using the word in a philosophical context in 1735 to refer to a systemic attempt at a metaphysics or psychology of art. He believed that the foundations of the arts are "sensitive representations" which are not merely sensations but are connected with feeling. Today we tend to think that aesthetics has to do with the sensuous aspects of experience. Of course, to say that aesthetics has to do with the sensuous aspects of experience is to give little in the way of an answer to students who want the word "aesthetic" defined. But at least it does, at least implicitly, narrow the field so that some discussion may begin. To talk about the "sensuous aspects of experience" is to talk about experience. This seems an appropriate place to begin. Let me say why.

Aesthetic Experience as Basic

Consider "aesthetic" as a modifier of "attitude." The philosophical tradition which focuses on understanding if there is an aesthetic attitude and what it consists in is nestled in England and Germany of the 18th and 19th Centuries, and America of the 20th. There are a plurality of aesthetic attitude theories, but certain strong trends allow us to describe the tradition as a whole without taking

too many liberties. Originally the focus was on how one could go about making correct aesthetic judgments. Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, and Immanuel Kant believed that if one were to adopt the aesthetic attitude, one would be in the position to make correct aesthetic evaluations. They each described adoption of the aesthetic attitude as adoption of a perspective of disinterest, disinterest in the functionality of the object or event under consideration. (This is found in Hume's work, too, but he is traditionally not numbered amongst aesthetic attitude theorists.) This trend toward describing the conditions for correct aesthetic evaluation was replaced, through the work of such figures as Arthur Schopenhauer and, recently, Jerome Stolnitz, by a focus on the conditions for aesthetic experience. That is, instead of adopting the aesthetic attitude in order to make correct aesthetic judgments, the discussion turned to adoption of the aesthetic attitude in order to experience aesthetically, or, better, to have an aesthetic experience. If one were to adopt the posture of disinterest—for Schopenhauer and for Stolnitz — one would bring about an aesthetic experience. The content of that experience would be some aesthetic object or event, made an aesthetic object or event merely by the act of viewing it from this aesthetic point of view, through adoption of the aesthetic attitude.

If this is an adequate quick rendering of that tradition, it allows us to understand in a sort of hierarchy some of the nouns which "aesthetic" might modify. Aesthetic attention is attention directed toward aesthetic objects, events or properties. Aesthetic objects and events are the content of aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic attitudes, or, better, the aesthetic attitude (if there even is such a thing) is what allows us to have aesthetic experiences (which, even on the earlier view that adoption of an aesthetic attitude was for the purpose of aesthetic judgment, still places the having of an aesthetic experience logically earlier than attitude or judgment — that is, going on the supposition that one cannot make an aesthetic judgment in the absence of having an aesthetic experience). This leaves two things at the ground level in terms of discussing "the aesthetic": aesthetic properties and aesthetic experiences. I believe the latter is the more basic of the two. I believe this because it seems impossible to circumscribe the set of aesthetic properties (in either an objective or subjective way) such that a single definition would capture what it is to be an aesthetic property. This is true for the following sorts of reasons:¹

- (1) The attempt to attach objective properties either to the identification of the presence of aesthetic properties OR to aesthetic judgments has been

historically unsuccessful. This failure is explained, and argument for why such connections will not be successful has been offered, perhaps most famously by Frank Sibley.¹

- (2) It seems impossible to identify any set of objective properties which can be called *the* set of aesthetic properties. This is a problem of inclusion, but there is also the problem of exclusion. It seems impossible to designate any objective property as a nonaesthetic property. This is because there is no reason to exclude from being an "aesthetic property" any (objective) property which actually enters into the making of a particular aesthetic judgment. So no property which *could* contribute to an agent's aesthetic experience ought to be dismissed (a priori) as a candidate aesthetic property. In determining the scope of what counts as an aesthetic property, it is not merely the internal relations that we need be attentive to, just as it is not merely the external relations that we need be inattentive to, in experiencing an object aesthetically. Many internal relations may be superfluous to our aesthetic experience of an object. For instance, it may not be necessary to understand what motivates Iago to be such a treacherous character to fully appreciate his place in *Othello*. It may not even be necessary to understand that Iago is treacherous to fully appreciate the play, so long as the actions which flow from his character serve to bind the "thesis" of the play together (the jealousy that Othello feels and what results from that). Conversely, some external relations may be relevant to our appreciation of the object. In knowing something of the conditions under which Mozart composed and of the instruments that were available to him at the time, one's appreciation of his music could increase. Another example, more clearly external, might be one's motivation to view a film more closely if it is known that the film had been nominated for an Oscar. This is not an unusual occurrence. The film's nomination is not an internal relation of the object, but the knowledge of the nomination might nonetheless change one's experience of the film for the better if her attention is colored or motivated by this knowledge. To argue a priori that some properties are not or cannot be aesthetic properties seems counter-intuitive to what seems to be our goal in viewing aesthetic objects. One ought not be interested in a boundary over which we must not tread in order to gain the best experience. We should be interested in loosening boundaries so

that whatever might contribute to the overall best experience might be admitted to our set of aesthetic properties. None of this is to say that we ought pay attention to each and every one of the object's properties (such a thing is not possible). It is, however, to say that all properties ought to be candidates for attention, so that no matter how *prima facie* incidental or peripheral a property, no matter how detached a property from the internal or formal set(s) of aesthetic properties, one might have the legitimate option of attending to that property given its efficacy to enrich her experience of the object.

- (3) Aesthetic properties seem to be hybrid properties, mixtures of both objective aspects and evaluative aspects. As such, it will be impossible to offer a purely objective account of aesthetic properties. Monroe C. Beardsley writes

The alternative that remains is to say that a distinguishing feature of A-qualities [aesthetic qualities] is their intimate connection with normative critical judgments — or, more explicitly (though still tentatively and roughly), that an A-quality of an object is an aesthetically valuable quality of that object. On this proposal, what guides our linguistic intuition in classifying a given quality as an A-quality is the implicit intuition in classifying a given quality as an A-quality is the implicitly recognition that it could be cited in a reason supposing a judgment (affirmative or negative) of aesthetic value.... This proposal has another advantage... to give a reason in support of a judgment of a work — or of any object, considered from the aesthetic point of view — you have to cite a quality of that object or of some part of it.²

This connection with the aesthetic value, or aesthetic values, as Alan Goldman writes,³ places aesthetic properties in line with their most popular linguistic use, viz. as offering a defense or a justification for a particular broad evaluative claim about a work or natural object/event (that the object is beautiful, for instance). This also ties together aesthetic properties with the meanings and interpretations of the work.

A detailed articulation of the meaning of a work will inevitably cite aesthetic properties, properties that contribute to the validity of the interpretation being articulated, and given that an interpretation may well be thought of as a vehicle for enhancing appreciation of an artwork,⁴ such citations will pick out aesthetically valuable aspects of the work.

(4) The 19th and 20th centuries are filled with objects which most viewers are happy to call art objects, yet whose aesthetic character lies not much at all with the sensuous but with the cognitive. Duchamp's readymades and Cage's music are clear examples. Aesthetics, to encompass discussion of Duchamp's art, cannot *merely* be a focus on the sensuous aspects of experience. Of course, on the other hand, it is also fair to say that were there nothing there to look at, Duchamp's work would not be art. An external object upon which one's attention is bent, even if that object functions simply as a trigger for cognitions of one sort or another, is necessary: an aesthetic object is necessary for an aesthetic experience. This is even true of Cage's music, and it is even true of some memory or act of imagination. There must be a content to that memory or "imagining" which acts as a focus, albeit perhaps only in a triggering way, for an aesthetic experience to occur. The point, finally, is that one cannot describe in *simply* objective terms the aesthetic properties of all those recent objects best labeled "conceptual art." Simple objective accounts of aesthetic properties are insufficient here.

(5) Finally, consider a Lockean-relational analysis of the ontology of aesthetic properties, one where aesthetic properties are understood as Lockean secondary qualities. The *relationalist* believes that (a) the basic properties of objects, such as lines, shapes, colors, are only in part responsible for the aesthetic properties of the object; (b) the "higher" aesthetic properties, such as harmony, grace and elegance, are not in the object per se, but are found in a *relationship* between the basic objective properties *and* the attending subject. Aesthetic properties exist as they are perceived to exist; aesthetic properties exist in a doubly indexical position: indexed to objective properties and indexed to the attending agent's subjective state. While advocates of this position do not deny that it is the objective properties of the object that form the bases upon which the attender's aesthetic experiencing (appreciation, evaluation) of the object is made, it is the *attending* of the agent which brings these

elements into actuality. Without the attending agent, the object's properties which we take to be the basis for our aesthetic experience remain in a potential state. Historically, this is a popular position; it can be found in the work of such figures as Hutcheson, Kant, and, more recently, Beardsley:

The presence of value in the object does not of course depend on it actually being experienced — even if no one ever sees the Rhodora, it still retains its capacity to provide aesthetic enjoyment. So in a sense the value is independent of anyone's experience of it. But at the same time its value is not unconnected with actual or possible experiences, for its value is in fact defined in terms of such experiences.... Setting aside transcendent beauties or ineffable intuitions, the only ground that seems to be left for attributing goodness to works of art is the sort of experience they have it in them to provide.⁵

Yet another such account is that of Michael Mitias; he writes that "...Valse Triste has the capacity, i.e. potentiality, to occasion or actualize a musical experience which has the affective character of sadness."⁶ Such accounts explain how aesthetic qualities function and how they exist. *If* such accounts are correct, strict circumscriptions around the set of all-and-only aesthetic properties from an objective point of view will be impossible.

All of these arguments taken together suggest that it is not possible to say, in any objective, essentialist, noninductivist way what an aesthetic property is. Perhaps then our time is better spent in focusing not on the objective, but on the subjective. That is, instead of focusing on what an aesthetic property is as a property of some object or event, it is better to consider aesthetic properties as properties of experiences (at least in the relational way described above). We may say that aesthetic properties are those properties which importantly and relevantly make up the content of aesthetic experiences. This allows us to privilege talk about aesthetic experience as foundational to understanding what "aesthetic" means.

An Inductivist Approach to Understanding Aesthetic Experiences as Distinct from Other Experiences

If everyone has had aesthetic experiences — and this seems an

uncontroversial assumption — then to some degree everyone can draw a line between those experience she has had which are aesthetic and those which are not. This line will probably be quite vague, but that does not matter. The point is not to draw the line so solidly that it can support a metaphysical discussion (of differences in kinds of experience) but to have the line be just strong enough to apportion some experiences from others. Then, in as strong or as loose terms as we wish and as our arguments will support, we can begin to say what is different about aesthetic experiences and nonaesthetic experiences. The doubt that such a line can be drawn so strongly that a metaphysical distinction can be defended, along with a general interest in ontological economy, may make the wiser choice the nonessentialist one, where aesthetic and nonaesthetic experience is on a continuum - albeit a continuum where at each end there are fairly clear examples of aesthetic and nonaesthetic experiences.

One philosopher who described aesthetic experience in a nonessentialist, nondivisive way was John Dewey. Dewey's account centers on what he calls "*an* experience." *An* experience is any garden-variety experience that one might have which has the character of being maximally unified and highly meaningful. *An* experience is a bounded organic whole; when a moment is sufficient to itself, is individualized, this is *an* experience. In aesthetic experience there is a heightened interest in the factors that constitute *an* experience, in the experience's "omnipresent form, in its dynamic construction, in its rhythmic variety and unity."

The difficulty with Dewey's account is that it seems easily to admit of counterexample. There are many experiences which, it seems, adequately fulfill Dewey's aesthetic-experiential criteria, but which seem clearly nonaesthetic. A nondomestically-oriented spouse making his or her first grocery-buying trip might have an experience which fulfills Dewey's criteria, but this may not be the sort of experience that this individual would class with his or her aesthetic experiences.

Nonetheless, there are several things that are still attractive about Dewey's account.

- (1) Dewey focuses on experience and the subjective in his treatment of aesthetics. The praises of this approach have already been sung.
- (2) Dewey does not preventively exclude any properties or states, subjective or objective, from inclusion in some particular aesthetic experience.
- (3) He does not focus on what *ought* to be paradigmatic instances of aesthetic

experiences, such as those had in galleries and concert halls. Instead he takes the experience of "the common man" as basic.

- (4) Dewey's account is not divisive; it does not seek to draw a hard line between the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic. Dewey believed that every event has something of the aesthetic about it -B some, of course, more than others. Even an episode of brushing one's teeth might have something of the aesthetic about it, albeit something small. This nondivisiveness is much more in line with the way that people label some experiences aesthetic and others not. There are those who have nothing like an aesthetic experience though their attention is directed at, say, a work by Warhol. There are those who have aesthetic experiences looking at the butterfly and shell motif of a bathroom wallpaper. Dewey allows for the wideness of the range of aesthetic experience.

One of the key offerings of Dewey's account is that it offers us a deep freedom in understanding and discussing the nature of aesthetic experience. This is a blessing, to be sure. But it is also a bit of a curse because with such freedom comes the spectre of relativism, and with relativism comes the difficulty of not being able to offer any intelligible discussion about aesthetic experience. Was Dewey an aesthetic relativist? Probably. But he was no more a relativist in aesthetic discussions than any inductivist would be required to be. Different human beings have different aesthetic experiences than others, even though their attention is directed toward the same objects or events. The trick for Dewey was to describe, in the manner of a scientist, what was *generally* common to the ways in which common individuals labeled some experiences aesthetic and others not. This process is at heart inductivist, and so its results cannot be essential or necessary. However, to pick out a general pattern, as science does, is reason enough to listen closely to Dewey. Predictions about gravity are nonessential, but no one denies that it is better to predict that gravity will obtain tomorrow as it does today. Predictions that aesthetic experiences will have the character that Dewey describes — that they will be those experiences which are maximally unified and highly meaningful — are worthy of attention.

Monroe Beardsley takes up where Dewey left off. Beardsley's reliance on psychology surpasses Dewey's. Beardsley's last (published) analysis of what constitutes an aesthetic experience is this:

My present disposition is to work with a set of five criteria of the aesthetic character of experience...

- (1) **Object Directness.** A willingly accepted guidance over the succession of one's mental states by phenomenally objective properties (qualities and relations) of a perceptual or intentional field on which attention is fixed with a feeling that things are working or have worked themselves out fittingly.
- (2) **Felt Freedom.** A sense of release from the dominance of some antecedent concerns about past and future, a relaxation and sense of harmony with what is presented or semantically invoked by it or implicitly promised by it, so that what comes has the air of having been freely chosen.
- (3) **Detached affect.** A sense that the objects on which interest is concentrated are set a little at a distance emotionally — a certain detachment of affect, so that even when we are confronted with dark and terrible things, and feel them sharply, they do not oppress but make us aware of our power to rise above them
- (4) **Active Discovery.** A sense of actively exercising constructive powers of the mind, of being challenged by a variety of potentially conflicting stimuli to try to make them cohere; a keyed-up state amounting to exhilaration in seeing connections between percepts and between meaning, a sense (which may be illusionary) of intelligibility.
- (5) **Wholeness.** A sense of integration as a person, of being restored to wholeness from distracting and disruptive influences (but by inclusive synthesis as well as by exclusion), and a corresponding contentment, even through disturbing feeling, that involves self-acceptance and self-expansion.⁸

Is Beardsley's account the right one? Does it accurately describe the general nature of aesthetic experience? There are a few problems with Beardsley's account:

- (1) Item 3, "detached affect," clearly has a place in the aesthetic tradition; something like "detached affect" is present as a part of the theories of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Kant, Schopenhauer, Bullough, Stolnitz and others. However, "detached affect" fights with the intimacy that Dewey seems to describe in his offering of an account of aesthetic experience. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the recent work of Arnold Berleant. Berleant describes, in what certainly seems to be a following of Dewey, a great intimacy B sensuously, cognitively, and emotionally B with the object or event under aesthetic attention, or, better, with the object or event with which one finds oneself in aesthetic relation or involvement.⁹ How does one reconcile, for instance, the knowledge or feeling that she ought not stand in the theatre, shouting out a warning to the still living Duncan with the knowledge or feeling that if she claps vigorously Tinkerbell will live or the knowledge or feeling that tears are appropriate as Butterfly prepares for her death? Some emendation or amendment to "detached affect" is needed.
- (2) Both Dewey and Beardsley missed what I would call the "temporal" element or "evolving" facet of aesthetic properties. Recently Harold Lock, a native American, and I participated jointly in an exercise being run by the ecopsychologist Laura Sewell. Sewell asked Lock and me to imagine that one of us was a camera and the other a photographer. We were to walk around taking photographs. First, the photographer would describe the scene that was about to be "shot." Then the photographer, with a tap on the head of his companion, would open the camera's shutter — the companion's eyes — for a brief time. I found that my descriptions, when I played the photographer, were very static. I focused on formal elements and compositions in my "photographs." Lock's descriptions, however, were always lively and dynamic. He focused on movement, and so, implicitly, he focused on change. Many aestheticians have foci more like mine than like Lock's. They see objects and events in three dimensions rather than four.

Art objects, for the most part, are static. In fact, we go to great lengths at times to keep them from changing, or, if they have changed, to bring them back to how they were at the point of their creation. Since art objects are, for many, a primary source of regular aesthetic experiences, we tend to think about our experiences of those objects in

static terms as well. We tend to think that if we view a work of art, its aesthetic properties will present themselves to us (regardless of how they exist, i.e. objectively or subjectively). Once we have seen (heard, etc.) the detail of the work, we are ready to move on. This is typical. But it is not always rewarding. Lately art critics have offered advice contrary to the cafeteria model of viewing paintings in a gallery (or seeing a film or play once). We are now told to move through the gallery until we find a painting that catches the eye. Then we are told to stand or sit and view it for a time (perhaps twenty minutes). Once this investment is made, the chances that the viewer will have a rich aesthetic experiences are greater than they would otherwise be. It takes time, the point goes, for aesthetic properties to reveal themselves.

This can be extended even further. Aesthetic properties can and do continue to reveal themselves even after one has left an aesthetic object. Through memory, through continued associations made between the object and other thoughts and other experiences, the object's aesthetic richness can grow. A symptom of a good film (or, really, any good aesthetic object) is that one is motivated to view the film again and again, and each time that attention is rewarded, usually in new and different ways, but sometimes simply in appreciating the qualities of the film more deeply and poignantly. The point of this is that neither Dewey nor Beardsley seem to take into account that aesthetic experience is not three-dimensional; it is four-dimensional.

- (3) "Is Beardsley right?" It may be that this question, given the very approaches that they took, is wrong-headed. No one over the age of two, since well before Sir Issac Newton, has needed much instruction on the fact that if an unattached object is released in mid air it will move swiftly and directly toward the earth. The effects of gravity are easy to see and generally easy to predict. Though gravity itself has been explained in a number of different ways - an attraction of an object for its home, a move toward greater maturity or actuality, as a field theory, as a bending of space - the effects of gravity are rather uncontroversial. Does this mean, then, that we ought cease our attempt to understand gravity, and thereby cease our attempt at greater precision regarding predicting gravity's effects? Now that airplanes stay in the air, should

we stop our inquiries into aerodynamics? The nature of science is such that it is an ongoing enterprise. Dewey and Beardsley realized that their projects were inherently inductivist, and that such nonessentialist projects cannot be said to be (finally) correct or incorrect. Morris Weitz described the concept of art, the definition of art, as evolving and growing.¹⁰ With more "data" in the form of new works of art, new art movement and new artforms, the very concept of art will stretch to include those new data. This is how it must be with an inductivist approach to aesthetic experience. As a matter of course any such account will grow and evolve to include the additional data of new human beings having new aesthetic experiences. Today empirical psychology could probably give us a more accurate account than Beardsley's, but tomorrow it could give us a more accurate account still.

Defining The Aesthetic

What are the lessons to be learned about defining "the aesthetic"?

- (1) To define "the aesthetic" is to understand that word primarily as a modifier, as an adjective. Uses of "aesthetic" as a noun are euphemisms, place-holders or short-hand for other, more precise, descriptions in which "aesthetic" is an adjective.
- (2) To define "the aesthetic" is to understand why some experiences are apportioned off from others, the former labeled "aesthetic," the latter not. This approach is more basic than attempting to understand why some properties (or states) of objects (or events) are aesthetic and some not. Such properties only take on their roles as aesthetic properties as they are involved in (actual) aesthetic experience.
- (3) Aesthetic experience is relational. Michael Mitias writes:
any attempt to explain the aesthetic character of experience either from the standpoint of the perceiver exclusively or from the standpoint of the art work, or aesthetic object, exclusively is doomed to failure from the start - why? Because the aesthetic experience is a complex, organic, event; it is relational in its very essence. It happens, it comes into existence, in an encounter between two types of reality, a percipient and

an art work; and outside this encounter this experience does not, and cannot exist.¹¹

The ontological account of the existence of aesthetic properties which best fits the relational character of aesthetic experiences is the Lockean one described above. Aesthetic properties are actualized in the relationship between aesthetic attender and the objective properties of the object under attendance.

- (4) Aesthetic experiences must have aesthetic objects as their contents. These objects can be physically present, or they can be the products of memory or imagination, but there can be no content-less experience.¹²
- (5) To understand the nature of aesthetic experience without prejudice is to adopt an inductivist approach. The principal reason that this is the correct approach is that the raw data that we are attempting to understand in all this (given (1) above) is actual aesthetic experiences. To attempt to do this in anything but an inductivist manner is to invite inevitable counterexample. We are not, in trying to explain the nature of aesthetic experience, in the business of saying to people under what conditions they will and will not have aesthetic experiences. Rather we must take the plethora of data with which we are faced and try to find some pattern or patterns to it. This is the naturalist, inductivist approach of Dewey and Beardsey. It is the right one.
- (6) From what foundations does an inductivist approach proceed? When teaching ethics and the history of moral philosophy, I always say that the foundation of what we are doing is attempting to explain a certain sort of behavior: the verbal offering of moral judgments. That behavior is public, present, common and undeniable - even for the positivist who would reduce it away to nothing other than emotion. The same is true in aesthetics. Aesthetic experiences are private. But we cannot deny the publicness of behavior that I will call "aesthetic behavior": people talking about how they feel and what they think about objects and events they primarily attend to sensuously; people spending time creating objects/events designed for others to attend to (primarily) sensuously; people arranging those objects/events in ways that facilitate people attending to them (primarily) sensuously, to facilitate the longevity of that attention, to facilitate behaviors which indicate that those attending to these objects/events are rewarded through this attention. This is the

undeniable data that we use to pronounce that those behaving in these ways are experiencing objects/events aesthetically. All of us can cite examples of aesthetic experiences and nonaesthetic ones. All of us do in fact apportion off, in our individual continua of experience, aesthetic experiences from nonaesthetic ones. The trick then, or at least the trick for the aesthetician (and probably for the thoughtful aesthete, too), is to understand how and why we apportion our experiences as we do.

We cannot approach this the other way round. To set up the boundaries of the aesthetic (and here, of course, I mean "aesthetic experience") in order to facilitate classification of our experiences serves only a taxonomical purpose. On the other hand, we cannot do without some foundation from which to begin. The approach I champion here is foundational. It has to be, else we will be locked into a tight vicious circle of defining aesthetic experience as those experiences we identify, given some criteria or other, as aesthetic. The foundations I have used are two:

- (1) People exhibit "aesthetic" behaviors.
- (2) "Aesthetic" behaviors are those which focus primarily on the sensuous aspects of those objects/events under our attention.

Since our goal is the identification of what makes aesthetic experiences aesthetic, since our approach is inductivist, and, finally, since experiences are private, and as much as any other, incorrigible, we want to include as little as possible by way of foundations for our inquiry. Consider the way that we identify the nature of various colors. When I see something red, I have an experience of redness; and I may utter "that thing is red." An expert in optics may investigate this phenomenon, and note that I make utterances like this one when I am (i) in the presence of a surface which reflects light at such and such a wavelength, and (ii) when particular electro-chemical processes take place in my eye, optic nerve and brain. This would allow the optician (optiologist?) to predict when I will make such utterances. The optician may place before me an object which reflects light at the appointed wavelength and then upon noting my central nervous system undergoing the appointed processes, may say to me "you are experiencing redness now, right?" to which I will probably respond "yes." (Minus the central nervous system notings, this is the

process we use to teach small children to label colors the way we do.) But what if my response is "no" to the optician's question? Suppose that all the physical pieces of the puzzle are in place, yet my response to the optician is "no, I am not experiencing redness now." Can the optician possibly convince me that I am wrong? Impossible. Such experiences are incorrigible, but more importantly, the entire account that these are the physical pieces of the puzzle which lead to the behavior "yes, I am experiencing redness now" are completely built upon my original "testimony," my original "color behavior." The foundations used in such an optical inquiry are two:

- (1) People exhibit "color" behaviors.
- (2) "Color" behaviors are those which focus on the sensation of reflected light as such (as opposed to the visual sensations of shape or size).

Without such foundations, optics cannot proceed. And so, without such foundations as those mentioned above, inquiry into the nature of aesthetic experience will either be viciously circular or will go no where. The data that people exhibit such behaviors is undeniable. But to say more than that these behaviors are about the sensuous aspects of experience is to render our enquiry into the nature of aesthetic experience tainted by our additional preconceptions. To say more would defeat the possibility of discovery, but to say less would give us no starting block against which to push off in our inquiry.

- (7) There is another lesson to be learned about defining "the aesthetic" and investigating aesthetic experience. While a *purely* disinterested or disengaged approach to aesthetic experience is challengeable, and I believe ultimately untenable,¹³ it is still the norm that when we attend to aesthetic objects we tend to view them without regard to what functions they may serve - apart, of course, from their "functions" as the contents of our aesthetic experiences. If this is true, then how do we account for our motivation to attend to aesthetic objects? If we do not attend to them for some functionary benefit, then why? The answer has to do, of course, with the fact that we value aesthetic experiences as aesthetic experiences. But what is it about aesthetic experiences that we find valuable?

Alan Goldman's recent account of aesthetic value focuses on the ability of engagement with an aesthetic object to provide one with an aesthetic experience characterized by the sense that one is in another world, another place and time, in a different set of world circumstances than one's everyday world.¹⁴ I do not wish to argue here that this is a correct account, but one of the lessons that we learn from understanding that we are motivated to attend to aesthetic objects, to seek out and invest time in aesthetic experiences, is that we find something valuable about those experiences for their own sake. Accounts like Goldman's must be taken quite seriously in understanding why these experiences have such a motivating power over us.

Notes and References

1. Frank N. Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *The Philosophical Review*, 1959.
2. Monroe C. Beardsley, "What is an Aesthetic Quality?" *Theoria* 39 (1973), pp. 61, 65.
3. "Aesthetic properties are those which contribute to the aesthetic values of artworks (or, in some cases, to the aesthetic values of natural objects of scenes).... We might conclude that works of art are objects created and perceived for their aesthetic values, and that aesthetic properties are those which contribute to such values." Alan H. Goldman, "Properties, Aesthetic," *A Companion to Aesthetics*, David Cooper, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).
4. Alan H. Goldman, "On Interpreting Art and Literature," *Journal of Philosophy* (1990).
5. Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Aesthetic Point of View*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 63, 68, 80.
6. Michael Mitias, "Locus of Aesthetic Quality," *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience*, Michael Mitias, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p. 36. Mitias makes this point even more eloquently, though somewhat less briefly, in describing how the lines and colors in Vermeer's *Kitchen Maid* give rise in the viewer to a sense of a flood of light; this is discussed at various points, starting on page 76, in his *What Makes an Experience Aesthetic?* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988). On page 77 Mitias writes: "So when I perceive it as light I move to a higher level of perception, or apprehension, in which I *actualize* (realize, concretize) a feature potential in the configuration I perceive." On page 151 he writes "Here I should stress once more than in perceiving the art work *aesthetically*... we

do not literally transcend or surpass the physical reality of the work. For the qualities which we intuit become actual only in perceive definite aspects of the sensuous form.”

7. John Dewey, “Having an Experience,” *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, Putnam’s Sons, 1934).
8. Beardsley, *The Aesthetic Point of View*, pp. 286, 288.
9. Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).
10. Morris Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1956.
11. Mitias, *What Makes an Experience Aesthetic?*, p. 8.
12. This is discussed by Mitias on pp. 79-82 of *What Makes an Experience Aesthetic?* under the heading “vehicle.”
13. Consider the work of Berleant cited above; see also Fenner, “Aesthetic Disinterest,” *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, XVIII:1-2 (1995), pp. 81-88, and chapters two and three of Fenner, *The Aesthetic Attitude* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996).
14. Alan H. Goldman, *Aesthetic Value* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

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