THE AESTHETIC ATTITUDE IN THE EVERYDAY

by

Tomasz Piekarski

A thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
(September, 2015)

Copyright © Tomasz Piekarski, 2015
Abstract

This thesis takes as its starting point a body of literature focusing on what is commonly referred to as ‘everyday aesthetics’. This literature is engaged in the process of chipping away at the intuition that the artwork is the paradigmatic object of aesthetic experience. My aim is to lend support to the everyday project.

The everyday aesthetician is concerned with defending the possibility of aesthetically experiencing an elegant ottoman, a luxurious car, and a stylish pair of pants. Some doubt that appreciating such everyday objects as listed above can properly be described as aesthetic. I argue that this doubt is mistaken and due to an art-centric conception of the aesthetic. I will defend the legitimacy of everyday aesthetics by appeal to aesthetic attitude theory. I argue that we can legitimately understand our everyday lives as aesthetic by appeal to a mental activity that human beings are capable of engaging in.

In Chapter Two, I give a historical account of the aesthetic attitude theory as it has been traditionally conceived. I turn my attention to everyday aesthetics in Chapter Three. There is some tension between the everyday project and aesthetic attitude theory. The latter tends to recommend divorcing objects from their practical dimensions. One view on offer contends that this is a misleading strategy. To divorce the ordinary from practical considerations is to rob the experience of the very thing that gives it its everyday quality. Chapter Four introduces a philosophical compromise by way of a more nuanced version of the aesthetic attitude theory. I suggest that a plausible construal of an attitude theory should not commit it to being an unusual, infrequent, or cognitively burdensome activity. Revising these features renders the theory flexible enough to account for those ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences. Furthermore, I show how we might conceive of attitude theory without necessarily limiting the role practical considerations play in our aesthetic experiences.
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Dr. Deborah Knight, whose help has been invaluable. This thesis would not be what it is without her insightful suggestions and consistent encouragement. I am grateful for the hard work and patience of the members of my Thesis Examining Committee. Jared Houston and Hershy Jaiprakash deserve thanks for their generous aid in the completion of this project. I am indebted to Jessica Celebre for essential guidance on how to live through the ideas found in the work. Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the whole of the Queen’s University Philosophy Department, which provided a stimulating and welcoming environment in which to succeed and improve.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

Chapter 1 Introduction: Aesthetics in the Raw ................................................................. 1

Chapter 2 Aesthetic Attitude Theory Traditionally Conceived ........................................ 10

  2.1 Contemporary Influence and Historical Origins ..................................................... 11

  2.2 Immanuel Kant’s Disinterestedness ....................................................................... 15

  2.3 Edward Bullough’s Psychical Distance .................................................................. 23

  2.4 Jerome Stolnitz’s Aesthetic Attention ..................................................................... 29

Chapter 3 Everyday Aesthetics and Aesthetic Attitude Theory ......................................... 34

  3.1 Aura Theory and the Phenomenological Method .................................................... 35

  3.2 The Aesthetic Continuum and the Limits (If Any) of Aesthetic Experience ............. 40

  3.3 Problems with Disinterestedness and the Aesthetic Attitude ................................. 51

Chapter 4 Aesthetic Attitude Theory Defended and Reconceived .................................. 61

  4.1 Psychical Distance Regained ................................................................................ 61

  4.2 The Practical Problem ......................................................................................... 68

  4.3 The Aesthetic Attitude, a Myth? ........................................................................... 82

Chapter 5 Conclusion: A New Hurrah ............................................................................ 87

References ......................................................................................................................... 92
Chapter 1

Introduction: Aesthetics in the Raw

This thesis takes as its starting point a growing body of literature focusing on what is commonly referred to as ‘everyday aesthetics’. Part of this body of literature is engaged in the process of chipping away at a longstanding intuition prevalent in the aesthetic theorizing of philosophers past and present: the intuition that the artwork is the paradigmatic object of aesthetic experience. My aim is to lend support to the project of contesting this intuition. As such, I follow other everyday aestheticians in pursuing John Dewey’s recommendation that our theorizing should begin with the aesthetic “in the raw”.¹ One way to get a handle on what beginning “in the raw” could mean is to define by exclusion. Everyday aesthetics aims to explain those aspects of our aesthetic lives that do not involve objects of pristine nature, mathematics, science, and art. Consequently, what one takes as falling within the domain of everyday aesthetics will depend on how one conceives of art, or whether one thinks there is any bit of nature left that could be properly called ‘pristine’, to name just two possible complications.

Consider the art case. If one holds an institutional view regarding the definition of art, as I am inclined to, then one will distinguish everyday objects from artworks partially on the basis of their exclusion from the institution commonly referred to as ‘the artworld’.² The beautiful vase I bought last week is not on display at The Met, nor do I expect it to sell for millions of dollars at an art auction. Otherwise, if one is inclined to argue for alternate, non-institutional conditions in determining what counts as a work of art, such as having been crafted for the purpose of aesthetic

---

² See George Dickie, Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974) and The Art Circle: A Theory of Art (New York: Haven, 1984). In the latter work, Dickie defines the artworld as the set of social conditions and institutions that allow for the presentation of an artwork to a public.
appreciation, then the dried up piece of cow manure on display at my local gallery simply does not belong.

Allow me to side-step the definitional problem of art to provide a rough and ready list of everyday aesthetic phenomena. Thomas Leddy takes the everyday aesthetician to be concerned with our aesthetic experiences “of the home, the daily commute, the workplace, the shopping centre and places of amusement”. Of course, it is true that we often encounter artworks and natural objects in and around such places. What Leddy has in mind are such objects as “our clothes and other adornments, the decoration of our living spaces, everyday artifacts from toasters to automobiles, packaging, the appearance of our faces and bodies, the artificial environments we create, the food we eat…” Consider the elegant ottoman in your living room, a luxurious car spotted on the freeway, a new and improved letterhead in your office, and a stylish pair of pants found at a clothing store.

Presumably, there are ways of answering the definitional question of art that end up including some or all of those objects that I have just listed. One complication involves those activities that are often referred to as the minor arts, such as cooking and pottery. Some will want to maintain that neither of these deserve recognition as genuinely art-creating activities. Others will make use of the minor art classification in hopes of differentiating one’s steak dinner from a Picasso painting. Still others will take this distinction to be inconsequential or a mere product of historical, social or cultural contingencies. Where one stands on this issue will shape how one views the domain of everyday aesthetics. I take it that, unless one is of the view that everything is an artwork, there is room to recognize that there are everyday objects that might merit consideration as objects of aesthetic experience.

---

Yet, there are those who doubt that appreciating a haircut or a freshly ironed shirt can ever warrant being described as an aesthetic experience. One of the goals of this work, perhaps its most central one, is to convince those people that they are mistaken. My suspicion is that the root of this mistake is an art-centric conception of the aesthetic. Along with others writing on everyday aesthetics, I harbor a skepticism regarding the appropriateness of art-centrism in theorizing how and why it is we find things aesthetically pleasing. Given art’s dominance in the literature, it might seem as though everyday aestheticians are fighting an uphill battle. As Thomas Leddy points out, a look through the aesthetic canon provides a mix of help and hurt.

Plato’s *The Symposium* includes the suggestion that our development of an aesthetic sense begins with the appreciation of young men’s bodies.\(^5\) In other places, such as the *Gorgias*, he writes of his disdain towards activities such as “fashion, cooking, and cosmetics”, three areas of life plausibly construed as falling within the domain of everyday aesthetics.\(^6\) David Hume begins his discussion of taste with comments on wine and proceeds to apply what we learn in the case of discerning elements in drink to his theorizing about art.\(^7\) Immanuel Kant is both a friend and foe of everyday aesthetics. He is a friend insofar as he distinguishes between those aesthetic experiences that are agreeable, beautiful, and sublime.\(^8\) We might think we have in the agreeable a category that encompasses those everyday experiences which we deem pleasant enough to warrant being considered aesthetic, but not so pleasant as to be on par with the beauty of a Brâncuși sculpture.\(^9\)

\(^9\) Leddy resists interpretations of Kant that place everyday aesthetic objects squarely within the agreeable. Against this line of thought, Leddy points to instances in Kant where everyday objects are considered beautiful. See Leddy, 27-32.
Yet, this same distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful thrust modern aesthetic theorizing down a path amenable to trivializing or even wholly neglecting the possibility of everyday aesthetic experience. Consider one of the ways Kant separates objects of beauty from the merely agreeable, namely, by invoking the disinterested attitude with which we view beautiful things. The disinterestedness thesis, at least as it appears in Kant, states that our experience of things as beautiful is punctuated by a lack of concern for their “practical, moral, or intellectual”\textsuperscript{10} dimensions.\textsuperscript{11} Instead, it is a beautiful object’s formal qualities that are relevant, and our focus on these is what renders the aesthetic experience ‘pure’.\textsuperscript{12} On the other hand, those things that we deem agreeable, such as the scent of cotton candy, are entangled with our inclinations, desires and interests. My experience of the agreeable taste of a meal was brought about by hunger and produces an inclination to consume more food. On account of being tied to inclination in this way, Kant takes the agreeable to be a domain of experience available to all animals, while beauty is reserved for human beings.\textsuperscript{13} Coupled with philosophical commitments to dualism and the superiority of our supposedly ‘higher’ cognitive capabilities over those of the body, this privileging of perceiving beauty as a distinctly human activity led some to ignore the importance of the agreeable dimension of our aesthetic lives.\textsuperscript{14} This line of reasoning culminates in the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.\textsuperscript{15} The activity of art creation dominates Hegel’s aesthetic theorizing. His comparative disregard for the objects of everyday life is apparent when he writes that “art exalts these otherwise worthless objects”.\textsuperscript{16} For Hegel, these objects are of aesthetic

\textsuperscript{10} Leddy, 27.
\textsuperscript{11} Kant, 37.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Kant, 41.
\textsuperscript{16} Hegel, 195.
value only insofar as they provide inspiration for artists and the artworks they produce, not in and of themselves.\textsuperscript{17}

While this predilection towards the artwork still dominates much of the work in aesthetics, it has not gone unchallenged. The later nineteenth century saw authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson emphasizing the importance of nature to the cultivation of an aesthetically enriched life.\textsuperscript{18} Spearheaded by such writers as John Ruskin and William Morris, the Arts and Crafts movement argued that developing our aesthetic sensibilities through a broad range of ordinary daily life activities should be viewed as a prerequisite for living well.\textsuperscript{19} Charles Baudelaire introduced the notion of the “flâneur”, an ideal aesthetic spectator ever sensitive to the pleasures of the surrounding city.\textsuperscript{20} Leddy argues that even Karl Marx’s \textit{Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844} could be understood as providing an implicit account of negative aesthetic experiences brought on by the alienating working conditions of capitalism.\textsuperscript{21} The mid-twentieth century saw John Dewey’s attempt at loosening the distinction between art and the everyday\textsuperscript{22}, prompting Leddy to consider him “the grandfather of everyday aesthetics”.\textsuperscript{23}

More recently, a number of broader social considerations have contributed to the suspicion that our concept of art does not range over all that could be the subject of aesthetic theorizing. One step towards this suspicion was the crumbling of the high art/popular art distinction as a means of neglecting the art objects of the latter variety. Rock, jazz, television shows, radio programs, comic books and many other forms of popular art are now fair game for

\textsuperscript{17} Hegel, 194.
\textsuperscript{22} Dewey, 12.
\textsuperscript{23} Leddy, 44.
theorizing alongside the best of orchestral compositions. Another step was the legitimization of certain artistic moves within the world of high art itself. Consider John Cage’s identification of audience as noise as music in his 4’33” (1948) or Marcel Duchamp’s displaying of ready-made objects in art galleries as instances of bringing aspects of the everyday into larger social conversations about art. Outside of the artworld, feminist theory shone light on the various domestic activities some women’s aesthetic lives were, and continue to be, limited to, such as crocheting or quilt making. Growing environmental concerns turned humanity’s attention to the ways we might cultivate a more sustainable relationship with our environment, with one suggestion among many turning on a more robust aesthetic appreciation of nature. Concerns that intellectual projects within many disciplines were largely based on Western perspectives drove work that examined the aesthetic judgments of multiple cultures, judgments that often departed quite radically from those of traditional aesthetic theorizing. In their work on everyday aesthetics, philosophers such as Thomas Leddy, Yuriko Saito, Sherri Irvin, Joseph H. Kupfer, David Novitz, and Richard Shusterman have made philosophical use of such developments.

For my part, I will defend the legitimacy of everyday aesthetics by appeal to aesthetic attitude theory. This is the second aim of my work. I argue that we can understand parts of our

everyday lives as properly aesthetic by appeal to a sort of mental, cognitive, or psychical activity that human beings are capable of engaging in. Exercising this ability is to undertake the aesthetic attitude. I do not wish to argue against the possibility of understanding everyday aesthetic phenomena by appeal to aesthetic objects, experiences, values, or judgments. Indeed, I use such terminology throughout. I focus on the aesthetic attitude because it has been undeservedly neglected in recent aesthetic theorizing, largely due to objections that I will argue fall flat.

My defense of aesthetic attitude theory involves applying it to a problem within everyday aesthetics. I call this the Practical Problem. Think of this as a case study aimed at testing the limits of the aesthetic attitude theory. Briefly, the Practical Problem asks us to consider whether experiences with strong practical or utilitarian elements can also be correctly classified as aesthetic. Consider my assessment of a friend’s room as messy. For some everyday aestheticians, this experience is potentially an aesthetic one. For some attitude theorists, the everyday aestheticians are mistaken on account of the fact that my experience if the messy room is, let us stipulate, inextricably tied to my feeling compelled to clean. Recall that some aesthetic theories, like Kant’s, locate beauty in those aesthetic experiences that are devoid of practical, moral, or intellectual interests. Pace Kant, I agree with Saito that experiences punctuated by utilitarian considerations can still be aesthetic. I disagree with her in her assessment of aesthetic attitude theory as hopeless when it comes to explaining such experiences. This brings me to my third and final aim. I argue that it is possible and fruitful to argue for the inclusion of utilitarian-aesthetic experiences, and for doing so squarely within the bounds of an aesthetic attitude theory. The relationship between the two considerations is symbiotic. Thinking about potentially aesthetic experiences steeped in practical considerations points us in the direction of avoiding the standard objections leveled at aesthetic attitude theory. Rethinking our conception of the aesthetic attitude

31 See Leddy, 131-132.
33 See page 4.
gives us a plausible explanation of how it is we should understand some experiences as both aesthetic and utilitarian.

My attempt to achieve these aims proceeds as follows. In Chapter Two, I give an account of the aesthetic attitude theory as it has been traditionally conceived. In tracing how the view has developed, I touch on the work of Immanuel Kant, Edward Bullough and Jerome Stolnitz. I spend the most time on Bullough’s version of the theory as I find it the most developed and the most amenable to my purposes. I turn my attention to everyday aesthetics in Chapter Three. Specifically, I frame the Practical Problem by presenting the work of Thomas Leddy. The differences between his view and how Yuriko Saito treats everyday aesthetics are especially enlightening. Briefly, the disagreement is this. Leddy thinks that aesthetic experiences of the ordinary necessarily transform them into the extraordinary. He takes inspiration from aesthetic attitude theories that describe the attitude as divorcing the object of the experience from its practical dimensions. In aesthetically experiencing such objects, we extract them from their ordinariness. Saito thinks this a misleading strategy. To divorce the ordinary from practical considerations is to rob the experience of the very thing that gives it its everyday quality. Everyday aesthetic experiences are not like experiences of art works. They are not sublime and rapturous experiences, at least not often. Thus, Leddy is mistaken in imposing on such experiences a theoretical framework that borrows too heavily from our art-centric experiences. This line of reasoning distorts essential characteristics of everyday aesthetic experiences. Chapter Four introduces a philosophical compromise by way of a more nuanced version of the aesthetic attitude theory. I suggest that a plausible construal of an attitude theory should avoid entailing an

---

36 Leddy, 111, 115, 176.
37 Saito, 26-27.
immediate and phenomenologically felt onset of the so-called disinterested attitude. That is, our view of the aesthetic attitude should not commit it to being an unusual, infrequent, or cognitively burdensome activity. Revising these features renders the theory flexible enough to account for those everyday aesthetic experiences that are typically ordinary as well as those that are extraordinary. Furthermore, I argue that an aesthetic attitude theory should remain flexible in regards to what sort of considerations - i.e. moral, intellectual, biographical, etc. - are relevant to aesthetic experience. Still more specifically, I show how we might conceive of attitude theory without necessarily limiting the role practical considerations play in our aesthetic experiences. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how a revised version of the aesthetic attitude theory avoids some of its supposed pitfalls, many of which are taken for granted in the contemporary literature.\(^{38}\) The fifth and final chapter summarizes the achievements of the preceding sections.

\[^{38}\text{Many of these are due to an influential piece by Dickie. See George Dickie, “The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude” American Philosophical Quarterly 1, no. 1 (1964): 56-65.}\]
Chapter 2

Aesthetic Attitude Theory Traditionally Conceived

If any one belief is the common property of modern [aesthetic] thought, it is that a certain mode of attention is indispensable to and distinctive of the perception of beautiful things. We meet it in Kant, Schopenhauer, Croce, Bergson, and also, what is almost more revealing, in those...whose desperate protest against it shows how well-entrenched the belief has become.39

The above quote is from Jerome Stolnitz’s “On the Origins of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness’” (1961). The subject of that article is the development of what I have been calling the aesthetic attitude theory. For historical reasons, the theory appears in Stolnitz’s work under the guise of “aesthetic disinterestedness”. For quite some time, indeed, for most of the theory’s life, the aesthetic attitude was to be understood just as the disinterested attitude. My task in this chapter is to illuminate exactly what that means. I will have succeeded if, after reading the following, my audience feels better-equipped to understand my reasons for arguing that a successful aesthetic attitude theory, especially as it applies to the everyday cases, should not be spelled out in the terms of disinterestedness.

I will outline the views of three attitude theorists: Immanuel Kant, Edward Bullough and Jerome Stolnitz. While a survey if those three thinkers is far from exhaustive as far as aesthetic attitude theories go, the mix is a good one. Kant’s is perhaps the most systematic iteration of the view, and is certainly the one appealed to most in outlining its historical origins.40 Bullough’s view is presented, unsurprisingly, in a more modern vein. It reformulates Kant’s position in terms more suitable to aesthetic theorizing in the analytic tradition. Jerome Stolnitz appears as a

contemporary flag-bearer of the aesthetic attitude theory. His is, at worst, the post popular, and, at best, “the most plausible twentieth-century version of the aesthetic attitude theory”.\(^4\) It is also something of a last hurrah for the view. With the publication of George Dickie’s “The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude” in 1964, the arguments of Stolnitz and company were perceived as sunk or else largely ignored.\(^2\) On the other hand, Dickie’s article enjoys continued success, if regular appearance in anthologies is any indication.\(^3\)

2.1 Contemporary Influence and Historical Origins

Despite its infamy, there is much of importance to say about the contemporary influence and historical origins of the concept of an aesthetic attitude. In this section I will be concerned with outlining some of the ways the aesthetic attitude developed before Kant, as well as how it is still operative in some contemporary ideas about aesthetic experience. Stolnitz draws attention to the now familiar assumption that an art object is “‘autonomous’ and ‘self-contained’” as an indication of the pervasiveness of the concept’s influence on contemporary thought, both within the academy and without.\(^4\) For instance, we do not take the sole business of art to be the cultivation of moral virtue or the representation of social status. Yet, “throughout most of the history of Western art…the values of art are iconic, or otherwise cognitive, or moral, or social, with nothing left over that art can call its own”.\(^5\) Stolnitz goes as far as to say that, for a member of the Western world living in times prior to the age of disinterestedness, the thought that aesthetic experience should be pursued only for its own sake would be utterly alien.\(^6\) Indeed, we are to understand the development of aesthetic attitude theory as a sort of “Copernican Revolution

\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid.
in aesthetics,” one that turns the philosopher’s attention to what the observer needs to contribute for aesthetic experience to get off the ground.\textsuperscript{47}

Regarding the details of the idea’s birth and subsequent growth, Stolnitz points to British philosophers of the eighteenth century. Stolnitz does the good work of reminding us that much of what appears in Kant has beginnings in others. We find in Lord Shaftesbury’s writings the first substantial treatment of disinterestedness, albeit in the context of ethics and religion.\textsuperscript{48} The influence of Hobbes gave currency to discussions of “interest” and “interestedness”, so, as philosophers are wont to do, an oppositional term was devised.\textsuperscript{49} This crucial bit of history goes some way in explaining why, even to this day, the aesthetic attitude is framed in opposition to other attitudes: for instance, moral, practical, intellectual, etc.

Writing with the intent of opposing ethical egoism, Shaftesbury introduces “disinterestedness” as a remedy for conceptions of ethics centred on self-interest. In acting morally, we should not be concerned about our own prospects for reward or punishment. For Shaftesbury, morality has an intrinsic worth, not an interest-directed one; it is the kind of thing that should be loved for its own sake.\textsuperscript{50} Note an important result of the conceptual shift from interestedness to its opposite. Interest in the moral domain is principally about actions and consequences. Agents have goals they wish to achieve, subsistence being just one. The egoistic model draws conclusions about what is permissible by cashing out the details of the relationship between those goals and the sorts of actions we might need to undertake in order to achieve them. Disinterestedness presents a markedly different orientation. Instead of privileging action and

\textsuperscript{48} Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc., ed. J.M Robertson, (London: G. Richards, 1900).
\textsuperscript{50} Stolnitz, “Origins”, 133.
consequence, it is primarily about contemplation.\textsuperscript{51} For Shaftesbury, “a man is ‘disinterested’…when he takes no thought for any consequences whatever”.\textsuperscript{52}

Ever the aesthetician, this same framework appears in Shaftesbury’s writings about beauty. Indeed, Stolnitz claims that the whole disinterested thesis was formulated by Shaftesbury already with an eye to the aesthetic.\textsuperscript{53} Although there is certainly a sense in which we are interested in the pleasure derived from those things we find beautiful, the very disposition to seek beautiful objects is itself disinterested and present only through the love of those things.\textsuperscript{54}

Finally, while Shaftesbury generally disagrees with talk of any interest toward the beautiful whatsoever, this position is especially clear in his opposing disinterestedness with the desire to possess or use an object. This characterization of the view “is widely adopted in later British thought and in modern aesthetics generally”.\textsuperscript{55} For instance, Francis Hutcheson builds on Shaftesbury by excluding any desire for knowledge of the beautiful object.\textsuperscript{56} Such desire might result in intellectual pleasure, but such pleasure is, on Hutcheson’s view, not to be confused with the pleasure derived from beauty.\textsuperscript{57} In Alexander Gerard, the thesis appears in the form of the claim that we are cut off from the prospects of aesthetic experience if we are driven by “gratification of appetite” and “the pursuits of gain”.\textsuperscript{58} Again, disinterestedness does crucial work in Edmund Burke’s writings on the sublime, a concept used to denote an intense, rapturous aesthetic experience bordering on the terrifying.\textsuperscript{59} I stipulate that the sublime borders on the terrifying because, for Burke, a sublime experience is one where there is a certain degree of

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Stolnitz, “Origins”, 134.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Francis Hutcheson, \textit{An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue}, (D. Winter: London, 1738).
\textsuperscript{57} Hutcheson, 4, 11.
\textsuperscript{58} Alexander Gerard, \textit{An Essay on Taste}, (Edinburgh, 1764) 99.
distance between one’s self and that which is the cause of terror. If a tornado is too close, the
danger becomes so salient that one is forced to retreat for survival’s sake. Given sufficient
distance, the same tornado can be both an object of terror and aesthetic pleasure. In Archibald
Alison we find the crux of the aesthetic attitude shifting from motive to attention. Still taking
“the useful, the agreeable, the fitting, or the convenient in objects” as essentially non-aesthetic
considerations, Alison goes a step further in emphasizing that the aesthetic attitude is not just to
be defined by exclusion. Alison writes, “That state of mind…is most favourable to the emotions
of taste…in which the attention is…to leave us open to all the impressions, which the objects that
are before us can produce”.

Consider, as a last bit of general historical framing, four crucial respects in which Stolnitz
thinks aesthetic attitude theory reoriented philosophizing on the subject. Three of these changes
have to do with a newfound generality in aesthetics. In the first place, much of the work done by
philosophers on beauty was organized by art-form or genre. The result was a great amount of
writing on music or tragedy, for instance, but not on what we can say about our aesthetic
experiences of all art-forms and genres. Just as the attitude theory pushed discussions of art-forms
to more general talk of our experience of all art, so too did it loosen the hold that “beauty” had as
an organizing concept. If previous aestheticians were inclined to organize the field according to
what admits of beauty, and further, to organize the beautiful according to what admits of
“proportion, order, and symmetry”, then the addition of the sublime and other related
experiences pushed the discipline to recognize that aesthetically pleasing objects are far more
varied. This is the second important change brought about by aesthetic attitude theory. We should

---

60 Burke, 40.
63 Alison, 10-11.
64 Stolnitz, “Origins”, 139.
65 Shaftesbury, 296.
want to know what makes something beautiful. However, the more interesting question, under the assumption that beauty does not exhaust the ways in which something could be aesthetically pleasing, becomes the more general question: what makes something aesthetic?

The third change broadens the scope of aesthetic theorizing even beyond that of artworks. While the objects of nature and mathematics were occasionally taken to be beautiful even before the move to disinterestedness, placing the emphasis on the attitude of the observer opens the door for arguments to the effect that many things besides works of art can and are experienced aesthetically. The last of these changes is “the introduction of the psychological, introspective approach”, as opposed to the metaphysical one. The aesthetician’s burden is now one of finding the cognitive mechanisms by which we perceive objects as beautiful. This includes, among other things, inquiry into such mental phenomena as creativity, imagination, understanding, etc. Given these four contributions to aesthetic theorizing, Stolnitz’s insistence on the revolutionary role of the aesthetic attitude theory seems reasonable.

2.2 Immanuel Kant’s Disinterestedness

The most well-known iteration of the aesthetic attitude theory is found in Immanuel Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment*. It deserves our attention, not in the least due to Kant’s influential development of concepts such as ‘beauty’, ‘disinterestedness’, and ‘the agreeable’. These are terms which will pop up again in more modern contexts, but it will be of immense help to understand their Kantian formulations. It is in the first part of the aforementioned work, titled “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment”, that Kant presents his theory of beauty. His is a complex and extensive aesthetic theory deserving much more detailed attention than I can give it here. My aim is only to provide the reader with an idea of how Kant placed the aesthetic attitude within the concerns of those theorizing about the aesthetic, and why Kant himself took that attitude to be

---

essential. As the title suggests, Kant is interested in framing his view in terms of the possibility and conditions of aesthetic judgment, not aesthetic attitude. Nevertheless, it will soon become clear that, for Kant, making such judgments requires that the observer undertake a very specific sort of attitude towards the object of experience. Judgments of taste are possible only because we are capable of exercising the disinterested attitude.

In the Third Critique, Kant is interested in illuminating what he takes to be the a priori conditions that ground our ability to make judgments.\textsuperscript{68} For Kant, judgment is a faculty of our minds, distinctive although related to other such faculties like understanding and reason.\textsuperscript{69} Now, Kant defines judgment generally as “the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal”.\textsuperscript{70} The first two Critiques make extensive use of the language of judgments, so, in the interest of filling in the picture, Kant’s focus in this last Critique is on a very specific kind of judgment of which aesthetic judgments are an example. These are referred to as ‘reflective’ judgments. To understand them, it is best to contrast them with what Kant calls ‘determinate’ judgments. Determinate judgments involve subsuming an object or situation under an already-acquired concept, a particular under an already-given and familiar universal, something specific under something general. Consider a scientific judgment. When judging a newly-discovered species as belonging to an already recognized genus, what is involved is the application of already understood and previously established criteria according to which the judgment is made. A concept, or various concepts, are applied in a given situation such that a judgment is produced. Kant is adamant that aesthetic judgments are not like this. While it may seem as if I am applying a concept such as ‘beautiful’ when I judge an object as aesthetically pleasing, Kant argues that this is a mistaken assessment of what is occurring. Unlike the case of identifying a new species as belonging to a determinate genus, I do not have a set of criteria for the application of ‘beautiful’

\textsuperscript{68} Kant, 3.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Kant, 15.
about which I and others agree. The point extends beyond a lack of consensus among different individuals about what deserves positive aesthetic appraisal. Consider the problem from the standpoint of a sole observer. I might be able to give you a list of qualities that an object bears in virtue of which I find it beautiful, but it remains possible that other objects might possess those same qualities and yet incite my negative judgment.

One important feature of Kant’s position is that aesthetic judgments are necessarily subjective. Determine judgments, like the scientific example above, involve exercising our cognitive faculty of understanding. Such judgments require the grasp of a concept and the ability to correctly apply that concept to particular objects or situations. Aesthetic judgments, judgments of a reflective variety, are not about the correct categorization of an object. Instead, they are about how the object is represented to the subject and the sensations of pleasure or displeasure that accompany this representation. In Kant’s terminology, these sensations are called feelings. Thus, an aesthetic judgment is subjective because it “denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation”.

What Kant is after in theorizing about aesthetic judgments is not our apprehension of a building in front of us, but the combination of the representation of that building with a feeling of pleasure. It is not the object that we are interested in, but the experience of the object as mediated by our cognitive faculties.

It is essential that we specify exactly what kind of pleasure it is that is indicative of aesthetic judgments on Kant’s view. Judgments are properly deemed ‘aesthetic’ when the pleasure which we derive from them is independent of all interest. Here, ‘interest’ means “[t]he

---

71 Kant, 35.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Kant, 36.
75 Ibid.
delight which we connect with the representation of the existence of an object”.\(^{76}\) There are feelings of pleasure which expose or create in us a desire for the existence of a given object. In Kant’s words, “[a]ll interest presupposes a need, or calls one forth”.\(^{77}\) For Kant, aesthetic judgments are not about ensuring something’s continued existence or abundance such that we can go on deriving pleasure from it.\(^{78}\) Such considerations are beside the point. In theorizing about how it is we judge something aesthetically pleasing, we are not concerned with the existence of the beautiful object. What we are concerned with is “how we judge it on the basis of mere contemplation”.\(^{79}\) Allowing one’s aesthetic judgment to admit of a dependence upon the object would be to admit that one’s judgment is “very partial and not a pure judgement of taste”.\(^{80}\) Pure aesthetic judgments are to be disinterested.

One way Kant helps us to better understand what he is after in emphasizing the disinterestedness of pure aesthetic judgments is by contrasting it with a related sort of judgment. Like judgments of beauty, judgments of the agreeable please the subject through sensation.\(^{81}\) Consider Kant’s short list of agreeable predicates: “attractive, charming, delicious, enjoyable...”\(^{82}\) Like a judgment of beauty, judging something as delicious is a subjective sensation. My judgment of a car as red is an objective sensation because it involves something that belongs to the object of sensation. It is the car’s redness that I am perceiving. Deliciousness, however, does not belong to my apple. Instead, it is a feeling of mine about a representation of the apple. So far, judgments of beauty and judgments of the agreeable are quite alike. The crucial difference is the interest in the object of sensation that is characteristic of the agreeable. Our experience of something agreeable “provokes a desire for similar objects, consequently the

\(^{76}\) Ibid.
\(^{77}\) Kant, 42.
\(^{78}\) Kant, 36.
\(^{79}\) Ibid.
\(^{80}\) Kant, 37.
\(^{81}\) Ibid.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
delight presupposes…the bearing its existence has upon my state so far as it is affected by such an object”.\textsuperscript{83} It is for that reason that Kant proposes we distinguish between objects of beauty, which merely please, from objects of agreeableness, which \textit{gratify}. In this context, gratification is pleasure of the sort that arouses an inclination in the subject, most generally in the form of an interest in the continued existence of the object of sensation.\textsuperscript{84} Judgments of beauty differ insofar as they are “indifferent as to the existence of an object, and only [decide] how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure”.\textsuperscript{85} In Kant’s terminology, judgments of beauty are \textit{contemplative}.\textsuperscript{86}

There is another important difference in regards to the kind of delight associated with the beautiful and that of the agreeable. The latter is inextricably tied with personal inclinations, so our delight in agreeable objects stems from pure sensory experience either coupled with an already established inclination toward enjoyment or with a newly formed desire for more of the object of experience. Conversely, the necessarily disinterested delight in the beautiful is due to what Kant calls “free play”.\textsuperscript{87} Free play is a kind of cognitive capacity available to human beings in virtue of our ability to engage in cognition in general.\textsuperscript{88} Like engaging in other sorts of cognitive activities, exercising one’s free play ability involves bringing the cognitive faculties of \textit{imagination} and \textit{understanding} to bear on a representation.\textsuperscript{89} Uninhibited by connection to a determinate concept or a personal interest, an individual engaging in free play is able to arrange the sensations of the object of experience in a much looser manner, privileging the imagination over the understanding, thus providing the latter with a myriad of ways to organize the experience. Human beings can experience and judge aesthetically because we possess a special cognitive ability, a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Kant, 38.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} Kant, 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{87} Kant, 48.
  \item \textsuperscript{88} Kant, 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
sort of imaginative contemplation that allows us to loosen the conceptual restraints of the understanding on our cognition.

It is crucial that our delight in the agreeable not be confused with our delight in the *good*. Both are coupled with interest: the former in a sensuous, “pathologically conditioned” delight, the latter in a practical one. In this respect, both differ from aesthetic judgments. Indeed, on some understanding of the gratification that arises from agreeable objects or situations, this gratification might be considered good. Proclamations to the effect that something is good, however, depend on a determinate concept, and so are unlike the reflective judgments of beauty and agreeableness. So, while we might ask of something previously judged to be agreeable whether it is also good, and so ask whether it is “useful or good in itself”, this is always to ask a different question of something already determined to gratify reflectively. Borrowing Kant’s example, consider the difference between deeming a dish delicious and deeming that same dish unhealthy. The first is a *feeling*, a subjective judgment based on sensation. The second is a determinate judgment relating a sensation to some end.

There are further differences between the agreeable and the beautiful that will prove useful in later discussions, differences concerning the character of the delight indicative of its respective judgement. For instance, Kant argues that a consequence of the disinterested nature of pure aesthetic judgments is that we should understand the delight we experience on account of beautiful objects as *universal* delight. If it occurs to me that I judge an object as beautiful independently of any interest I may have in the existence of that object, Kant sees it as “inevitable

---

90 Kant, 41.
91 Kant, 39.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Kant, 40.
96 Kant, 42.
that [I] should judge the object as one containing a ground of delight for all human beings”. So while the aesthetic judgment is still very much subjective - that is, based on my feelings of pleasure or displeasure toward the object and not on the application of a concept - it nonetheless legitimates in me the expectation that everyone else experience “a similar delight”. Agreeable judgments, since tied to personal interests, are not subjectively universal. When we judge something as agreeable, we judge it as such “to me”. Consequently, we do not expect of everyone that they have grounds to agree with our judgment in the same way we do if that judgment is one of beauty. Kant sees this in our lack of desire to contest agreeable judgments, such as when someone expresses a dislike for my favourite culinary dish. An interesting feature of Kant’s position is the extent to which it relies on a picture of the psychology of aesthetic experiences. Take Kant’s declaration that

\[
\text{one must get firmly into one’s mind that by the judgment of taste (upon the beautiful) the delight in an object is imputed to everyone…and that this claim to universality is such an essential factor of a judgement by which we describe anything as beautiful, that were it not for its being present to the mind it would never enter into anyone’s head to use this expression, but everything that pleased without a concept would be ranked as agreeable.}\]

The distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable seems at least partially based on the empirical observation that we are compelled to argue about some of our aesthetic judgments and not others. In some cases we expect agreement on the part of others. Still in other cases, doing so seems to us misguided.

Before moving on to the aesthetic attitude theorists of more recent times, it should be noted just how extreme the Kantian move of cleaving interest from judgments of beauty really is.

97 Ibid.
98 Kant, 43.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Kant, 45.
102 Ibid.
According to Kant, “[e]very interest vitiates the judgement of taste and robs it of its impartiality”\textsuperscript{103}. The moral outlook promoted by a piece of literature, a painting’s role in a broader artistic movement, the relationship, if any, between the biography of a sculptor and their work, the emotions a musical composition arouses: all of these considerations betray an interest in the object. Consequently, taking such factors into account yields an impure judgement of beauty. It is on these grounds that Kant’s theory is understood as a radical version of formalism. Roughly, formalism is the thesis that what counts toward the aesthetic appreciation of an object is just its form. We can expect that most formulations of the doctrine exclude those considerations mentioned above. Some go as far as to say that features of the work such as its representational qualities, for instance that a painting is of a particular individual, are also excluded. That an artwork is a representation of a battle that took place during World War II is, or should be, of no significance to my aesthetic experience of it. What form consists in for Kant is, as mentioned, rather extreme. Consider the following passage:

In painting, sculpture…in architecture and horticulture…the design is what is essential. Here it is not what gratifies in sensation but merely what pleases by its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite for taste. The colours which give brilliancy to the sketch are part of the charm. They may no doubt, in their own way, enliven the object for sensation, but make it really worth looking at and beautiful they cannot.\textsuperscript{104}

The colours of a painting, the timbre of the instruments performing a composition, the texture of the material that makes up a sculpture; all of these are merely agreeable aspects of their respective artworks. What counts for Kant “is either figure or play”.\textsuperscript{105} Figure refers to the shape of a statue or building, the lines of a painting, the musical structure of a composition. Play refers to the relationship between several figures, as in the movement of bodies in dance, or the succession of movements in a symphony. All of those features we deemed outside the scope of form contribute

\textsuperscript{103} Kant, 54. Italics mine.
\textsuperscript{104} Kant, 56.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
to the judgment of beauty only insofar as they “make [the] form more clearly, definitely, and completely perceptible”. Otherwise, they are agreeable features of the object. Of course, our ability to engage in free play gives us some choice in the matter. That is, we can choose to appreciate a painting in such a way that renders the experience aesthetically impure, as when a great deal of weight is placed on the brilliant colours. Alternatively, we can choose to limit the colours’ role to helping us along our way to recognizing the form of the object, thus bringing us closer to an aesthetically pure judgement of beauty.

2.3 Edward Bullough’s Psychical Distance

Aesthetic attitude theory owes much of its contemporary relevance to Edward Bullough’s “Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle”. There, Bullough argues for the existence of an aesthetic principle of ‘distance’ more general than that of the spatial or temporal variety. Understanding this conception of a psychical distance will be essential for engaging with Thomas Leddy’s view of everyday aesthetics, presented in the Chapter Three, as well as my reformulation of the aesthetic attitude theory, presented in Chapter Four.

To be psychically distanced is to “[put] 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’”. Here, ‘objectively’ does not correspond to how we might use it in cases of scientific or historical inquiry. Nor is it the sense of ‘objective’ found in Kant. Indeed, there is a sense in which psychical distance is both ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’. Briefly, we distance ‘objectively’ by focusing on the form of the object of experience, albeit in a broader sense of form than we saw in Kant. We bracket those aspects of the experience that are

---

106 Kant, 56-57.
107 Kant, 62.
109 Bullough, “Distance”, 89.
110 Bullough, “Distance”, 90.
not a part of the phenomenon itself, and focus instead on shape, colour, size, etc. We are first interested in how a sensation presents itself to us, not our reaction to it. Yet, the experience will admit of some ‘subjectivity’ because it will be crucial to consider, not ignore, those non-formal considerations found in our reactions to the sensation.

Bullough illustrates this distance by asking us to imagine ourselves as passengers on a boat enveloped by fog. The fog is a source of fear and anxiety as it brings with it the potential for dangerous accidents and other unpleasant consequences. Despite this potential, Bullough suggests that the fog can just as well be a source of aesthetic pleasure and excitement.\textsuperscript{111} If one brackets those practical considerations that lend the experience its frightful nature, one can ‘objectively’ experience:

\begin{quote}
the veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk, blurring the outline of things and distorting their shapes into weird grotesqueness; observe the carrying-power of the air, producing the impression as if you could touch some far-off siren by merely putting out your hand…; note the curious creamy smoothness of the water, hypocritically denying as it were any suggestion of danger; and, above all, the strange solitude and remoteness from the world, as it can be found only on the highest mountain tops: and the experience may acquire, in its uncanny mingling of repose and terror, a flavour of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to contrast sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of its other aspects.\textsuperscript{112}
\end{quote}

This example illustrates the aesthetic attitude as one that creates distance between the perceiver and the practical aspects of what is perceived. Bullough stipulates that the affections from which one can distance oneself should be construed broadly, “as sensation, perception, emotional state or idea”.\textsuperscript{113} By “affections”, Bullough means “anything which affects our being, bodily or spiritually”.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{111} Bullough, “Distance”, 88.
\textsuperscript{112} Bullough, “Distance”, 88–89.
\textsuperscript{113} Bullough, 89.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
Bullough’s psychical distance is not just negative in the sense that it brackets the practical features of our experience and its attendant thoughts. It also admits of a positive element. Recall that the bracketing built into the distancing attitude allows us to privilege the objective features of our experience. One might be inclined to interpret this to mean that the subjective affections are completely ignored or eliminated. This would be a mistake. Bullough assigns a role to these subjective affections in the distancing attitude, maintaining that we interpret them “not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon”. Consequently, the positive element involves construction or elaboration of the affections in their new and distanced form.

Another important feature of Bullough’s theory is the immediate and phenomenologically felt onset of the distancing attitude. Bullough characterizes the phenomenological change in attitude, from practically-loaded to distanced, as often one of “startling suddenness…like a momentary switching on of some new current, or the passing ray of a brighter light, illuminating the outlook upon perhaps the most ordinary and familiar objects”. The suggestion is that we are frequently acutely aware of this distancing factor in our perception of the phenomena in question. Since the distanced attitude is one that brackets those practical considerations that Bullough thinks pervade most of our experiences, and has a special phenomenological character, it cannot be our usual way of experiencing.

Although I have referred to the components of the relevant experience as ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, it must be made clear that, for Bullough, the aesthetic attitude resists such dichotomization. Along with the two just mentioned, other such conceptual opposites used to describe aesthetic experiences are ultimately inappropriate and lead to confusion. Bullough lists the following pairs: ‘idealistic’ and ‘realistic’, ‘sensual’ and ‘spiritual’, ‘individualistic’ and

---

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
‘typical’, ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’. According to Bullough, these terms have their origin and use in contexts other than the aesthetic and, when directed at our aesthetic experiences, admit of ambiguity.

Let us take the case of ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’ as illustrative of this resistance to dichotomization. One might think that bracketing in the way suggested by Bullough yields wholly impersonal aesthetic experiences. This is not so. Recall that our subjective affections, such as our personal and emotional response to a particular object of aesthetic experience, are not eliminated in bracketing. The positive component of distancing involves reconstructing the experience such that the subjective affect is involved. So, for Bullough, distance does involve a personal element. However, the character of the experience is such that the personal element “has been, so to speak, filtered” by the distanced attitude. Bullough offers the events and characters of a drama as a paradigmatic example of this. We feel emotionally touched by the various events of the dramatic play, but it is not so personal that we feel our life has been directly affected.

This ‘personal’ dimension of the distanced attitude leads Bullough to a discussion of what he calls “the antinomy of Distance”. On the one hand, we have the intuitive consideration that a degree of training in aesthetic experience lends us the tools to better appreciate an object of aesthetic experience. I presume aesthetic training refers to the various ways human beings are taught, from a very early age, to recognize or provoke aesthetic experiences. Call to mind the process by which children are taught to consider this or that flower as beautiful, a dress as pretty, or an insect as ugly. In many cases, such training enters very quickly into the domain of artworks by way of formal education. Crucially, Bullough extends the antinomy beyond our specifically aesthetic preparation, stating that “[t]he success and intensity of its appeal would seem…to stand

118 Bullough, “Distance”, 90-91.
119 Bullough, “Distance”, 91.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Bullough, “Distance”, 92.
in direct proportion to the completeness with which it corresponds with our intellectual and emotional peculiarities and the idiosyncrasies of our experience”.123 Seeing as these aspects of our lives colour our aesthetic experiences, Bullough suggests we might plausibly locate differences in taste on these grounds.

To see the other side of the antinomy, reflect on what occurs when an aesthetic spectator is too wrapped up in his or her own intellectual or emotional state. Bullough asks us to consider a man witnessing a performance of Shakespeare’s Othello.124 Overcome with doubts regarding his wife’s fidelity, the spectator might be thought of as perfectly primed for appreciating the experiences and actions of the play’s title character. Bullough warns against this assumption. Our spectator is so immersed in the details of his own marital plight that he lacks the attitude necessary for engendering a distanced aesthetic experience. The professional critic is – perhaps unexpectedly - in a similar position. Insofar as his or her practical and intellectual investments in a particular aesthetic object might overpower the experience, (s)he will lose the distance necessary for a proper aesthetic judgment.125 In such cases, Bullough recommends actively moving from an attitude with distance to an attitude without.126 The lesson we are to learn from these cases is that there is only so much emotional or intellectual baggage that should be brought to the experience if we are to maintain a distanced attitude. While these peculiarities and idiosyncrasies are often integral to the content of our aesthetic experiences, it is important that they not gain enough currency so as to render psychical distance impossible.

Taking into account the lesson drawn from considering the above antinomy, the distanced attitude is best construed as admitting of degrees. Bullough calls this the “variability of Distance”, and takes this to be particularly important in distinguishing the distanced attitude from those less

123 Ibid.
124 Bullough, “Distance”, 93.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
flexible conceptual pairs discussed above.\textsuperscript{127} Individuals have at their disposal the ability to occupy a more or less distanced attitude. Furthermore, individuals will differ among themselves in regards to just how subtle their distancing abilities are.\textsuperscript{128}

This variability is not limited to just the distancing attitude of individuals. The degree of distance available will also depend on the nature of the object of aesthetic experience.\textsuperscript{129} So, not only will previous aesthetic experience and training have an influence on the degree of distance available to an individual, but the very character of the object will impose a certain degree of distance to be maintained.\textsuperscript{130} As with the antinomy, this twofold variability offers an account of the source of differences in aesthetic taste. Moreover, it provides a plausible explanation of cases where there is failure in stimulating aesthetic experience: such failures are due to a loss of the distancing attitude. This loss comes about either through under-distancing or over-distancing, and can be traced back to either the individual or the composition of the object.\textsuperscript{131} Consider a case where one’s appreciation of what would otherwise be a positively received artwork is inhibited by a negative moral assessment of an event depicted in a novel. Here, the subject is not sufficiently distanced from his or her ethical inclinations to properly aesthetically experience the work. This is under-distancing. Next, consider an individual who harbors a disdain for instrumental music on account of the lack of lyrical content. No clear message is being portrayed through the music, and so the individual is making a claim as to the music’s over-distanced character.

Perhaps most important to the everyday aesthetician is Bullough’s recognition that “[i]n theory…not only the usual subjects of Art, but even the most personal affections, whether ideas, percepts or emotions, can be sufficiently distanced to be aesthetically appreciable”.\textsuperscript{132} Bullough

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{127} Bullough, “Distance”, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Bullough, “Distance”, 95.
\end{itemize}
presented his framework as flexible enough to account for our aesthetic experiences even outside of the art context. As such, my aim here is in the spirit of Bullough’s original argument.

2.4 Jerome Stolnitz’s Aesthetic Attention

I turn now to the most recent of our three aesthetic attitude theorists: Jerome Stolnitz. His most developed articulation of the theory appears in his 1960 *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism: A Critical Introduction*. He begins by suggesting that theorizing about the aesthetic by way of positing a special kind of attitude is superior to attempts that list aesthetically pleasing properties of objects. Aesthetic attitude theory is to be preferred because the property-based views “have proven to be too limited” and “have not done justice to the tremendous diversity of works of art and all of the other…things men find interesting to look upon”.133 We allow for more diversity and flexibility in the aesthetic realm if we begin our investigation by examining the conditions of the percipient’s attitude instead of looking for commonalities among a vast amount of aesthetically pleasing objects.134 If the history of art has taught us anything, it is that positing a list of such characteristics will only tend to set the future artist up for creating works that undermine our theory.

Stolnitz’s definition of an attitude in general is “a way of directing or controlling our perception”.135 In experiencing the world around us, we perceive selectively by privileging certain features of our experience. That is, we are paying attention to some aspects of our surroundings and ignoring others. The kind of attitude an individual is undertaking will affect the parameters of one’s attention. Furthermore, the kinds of goals or activities an individual is engaging with at a given time will make a difference in what features of the world are

---

134 ‘Percipient’ is Stolnitz’s preferred term for what we have been calling the ‘observer’, ‘spectator’, or ‘perceiver’. The advantage of ‘percipient’ is that it does not give the impression that all aesthetic experience must be visual or even sensory. As such, I am sympathetic to this change in terminology.
emphasized. There is also a preparatory element to an attitude insofar as it dictates that we “act in a way we think will be most effective for achieving our goals...[and] supress or inhibit those responses which get in the way of our efforts”.136

Stolnitz’s definition of the aesthetic attitude is “disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone”.137 He goes on to spell out what he means by every clause of the definition. The “disinterested” portion takes on a meaning similar to that which we have seen in earlier philosophers. To look at an object disinterestedly is to be free of practical concerns related to its use, manipulation, or possession. It is to be free of cognitive concerns directed towards gaining knowledge of the object or judging it in the way a critic might.138 The stipulation that the aesthetic attitude is disinterested and fundamentally opposed to the practical attitude has as its consequence the view that the former cannot be our usual way of orienting ourselves.139 The reader will remember that this is also Bullough’s conclusion.140 The attitude we are most prone to adopt in our interactions with the world is the interested, practical, goal-oriented one. That attitude involves apprehending an object “with an eye to its origins and consequences, its interrelations with other things”.141 As such, it is best described as “fragmentary”, “momentary” and “limited”.142 By contrast, the aesthetic attitude isolates the objects from its various interrelations and potential uses.143 It is distinguished by a form of attention that is focused and dedicated to apprehending the whole object as it presents itself, not just those features of it that are amenable to whatever goal a practical attitude would have us attempt to achieve.144

136 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 33.
137 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 35.
138 Ibid.
139 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 33.
140 Bullough, “Distance”, 89.
141 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 35.
142 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 33-34.
143 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 35.
144 Ibid.
The “sympathetic” clause in the definition refers to the preparatory function of the aesthetic attitude. Being sympathetic means making “ourselves receptive to the object and [setting] ourselves to accept whatever it may offer to perception”. We are to adopt an attitude that is conducive to aesthetic experience and to inhibit those “un-sympathetic” interests and considerations that pull us in the practical, cognitive, or moral direction. Given this “sympathetic”, preparatory feature of aesthetic attention, it is clear that we are not passive in adopting the aesthetic attitude. Aesthetic experience requires us to focus on and engage with the object with our cognitive and emotional capacities primed. This is not to say that all aesthetic experiences require equally intense focus. Some aesthetic experiences are fleeting. Others absorb and transport us. In both cases, what is important is that an object occupies our attention in the way Stolnitz has set out. The stipulation that we perceive the object sympathetically has the benefit of explaining why we engage in some still-unpractical forms of activity when in the presence of objects of potential aesthetic experience. Consider activities such as positioning oneself in various distances away from a painting for maximum effect, walking around a sculpture to take in all of its sides, or bobbing one’s head to the rhythmic movement of a piece of music. These are all attempts to orient ourselves toward the object in a manner conducive to aesthetic experience.

Two features of Stolnitz’s view deserve closer attention, especially because they will reappear in crucial bits of later chapters. Recall that Stolnitz’s definition stipulates that the aesthetic attitude can be turned toward “any object of awareness whatever”. This provides Stolnitz the benefit of not restricting the field of inquiry as property- or characteristic-based frameworks tend to do. The view is not open to defeat by way of counterexample from some

---

145 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 36.
146 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 37.
147 Ibid.
148 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 38.
149 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 35.
rarely thought-about corner of the artworld or art history. Still, it may be objected that this opens
the floodgates. Are there no limits whatsoever to what sorts of objects can be aesthetically
experienced? Stolnitz provides no conceptual defence of this move over and above what is found
in his aesthetic attitude theory. Instead, he thinks the best argument for being so liberal in our
potential application of the aesthetic is “evidence that human beings have contemplated
disinterestedly objects which are enormously diverse”.150 If other theories have trouble
accommodating the diversity of aesthetic experience, then Stolnitz’s view looks all the better.

The last bit of Stolnitz I will concern myself with here is how he deals with what he calls
the problem of aesthetic relevance.151 For Stolnitz, the aesthetic experience “seems to isolate both
us and the object from the flow of experience” and, consequently, “from [the object’s]
interrelations with other things”.152 But what of those “personal memories and images, and
extraneous items of knowledge” that often do enter into our experiences of artworks? Does my
interest in an artist’s biography, my concern for a film’s moral content, and my association of a
musical piece with a fond memory necessarily cause my experience to be unaesthetic? The
answer is no. There are some associations we can make between an object and intellectual, moral,
and personal considerations that do move the experience into decidedly unaesthetic territories.
This happens when, for instance, an emotion associated with a song overtakes the experience
such that our attention is almost entirely directed toward the sadness, not the song.153 The other
kind of association “fuses” with the object in such a way that holds, perhaps even strengthens, our
attention toward the object itself.154

This fusing is especially interesting in connection with the practical. While the aesthetic
attitude has been sharply distinguished from the practical one, Stolnitz does “not want to leave the

150 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 39.
151 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 53.
152 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 52.
153 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 54.
154 Ibid.
impression that aesthetic and practical experience are necessarily fatal to each other”.
Indeed, “practical and aesthetic interest can, and frequently do, coexist with each other”. There are cases where our orientation is predominantly goal- or task-driven, and yet our attention is at least partially directed to the aesthetically pleasing or displeasing around us. The justification for this arrives with the consideration that it seems possible as a matter of psychology that we may adopt more than one attitude at any given time. Stolnitz maintains that while “the aesthetic and practical attitudes are mutually opposed…attention is always a matter of degree and it can be controlled simultaneously by different purposes”. Consider the fact that the design and function of an object are often contributors to our aesthetic experience. When not wholly driven by our practical purposes, our recognition of an object’s “fitness for its job” can enhance the extent to which we find it worthy of aesthetic admiration. Keep this feature of Stolnitz’s view in the back of your mind. It will be crucial when it comes to examining the prospects of aesthetic attitude theory in the context of everyday aesthetics.

155 Stolnitz, *Aesthetics*, 44.
158 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
Chapter 3

Everyday Aesthetics and Aesthetic Attitude Theory

In this chapter, I take a close look at the work of Thomas Leddy. Despite offering an account of everyday aesthetic phenomena by appeal to properties and experiences, Thomas Leddy is a friend to the everyday aesthetician wishing to construct an attitude-based framework. His *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* includes a thorough discussion of the literature and offers a detailed account of what Leddy takes to be the advantages and disadvantages of aesthetic attitude theories in the everyday context. Leddy deals with a number of thinkers, and it will be beneficial for us to examine the ways in which some of their thoughts impact the plausibility of an aesthetic attitude theory, especially in the domain of the everyday. Specific attention will be paid to Paul Ziff’s contention that anything viewed can be worthy of aesthetic viewing\(^{161}\), Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological method as it applies to the aesthetic attitude\(^{162}\), Monroe Beardsley’s characterization of aesthetic experiences as ‘unified’\(^{163}\), Allen Carlson’s insistence that appreciating nature involves ‘composing it’\(^{164}\), Yuriko Saito’s opposition to disinterestedness on the grounds that it distorts ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences\(^{165}\), and Peg Brand’s suggestion that we can and should toggle between interested and disinterested attention when experiencing an object aesthetically.\(^{166}\)

\(^{164}\) Carlson, 22-37.
\(^{165}\) See Saito.
3.1 Aura Theory and the Phenomenological Method

Because Leddy identifies supposed pitfalls, his position amounts to endorsing aesthetic attitude theory as useful in describing a certain kind of aesthetic experience and in prescribing a certain type of psychical exercise for the purposes of extending our aesthetic abilities. Still, Leddy suggests that attitude theory is insufficient in capturing all that is relevant to everyday aesthetic experience, and that our endorsement of it should be limited. I think this conclusion is rushed and that some tinkering with the attitude theory will yield theoretically advantageous results, so a closer look at Leddy’s reasoning is in order.

Leddy is especially interested in maintaining a dialectical relationship between art and the everyday. Unhappy with what he sees as hasty rejections of anything remotely art-centric in everyday theories, Leddy takes care to emphasize the theoretical virtues of “understanding how artists perceive the world in their daily practice”. A stroll around most galleries will quickly demonstrate the importance of everyday objects and experiences to the inspiration and practice of artists. For Leddy, “[f]ailing to study the aesthetics of everyday life is failing to study the basis for the practice of art itself”.

The influence is, of course, bidirectional. Our aesthetic training in the domain of art has a considerable impact on how we perceive the world around us. This emphasis on the reciprocity between art and the everyday appears in Bullough as well, albeit in a less developed form. Everyone can distance and everything can be distanced, but the artist is best situated to undergo this aesthetic task. Leddy shares this assumption and expresses it in terms approaching that of the attitude theorist: “all non-art phenomena can be perceived aesthetically under some circumstances: one needs simply look at it in the right way, or provide it with a suitable framing

---

167 Leddy, 11.
168 Leddy, 13.
169 Bullough, “Distance”, 95.
or background story”.\textsuperscript{170} We saw this same view propounded in Stolnitz’s version of the aesthetic attitude theory. He took the framework’s promiscuity with regards to the potential objects of aesthetic experience as a theoretical virtue.\textsuperscript{171} A similar line of reasoning will appear very shortly in my discussion of Paul Ziff’s argument in his “Anything Viewed”, albeit in a slightly different context.

The indiscriminate nature of the aesthetic attitude theory, at least as far as concern with the objects of aesthetic experience goes, is a welcomed tool for the everyday aesthetician. Unconstrained by frameworks that impose restrictions on aesthetic objects, the everyday aesthetician working from within an attitude theory gains some philosophical license to talk of the aesthetic experience of objects created without aesthetic intentions, or of objects that were not even created at all, i.e., pure nature. The door is open for items of clothing, pieces of furniture, vehicles, bodies and their parts, toys, theoretical entities etc. Some things we might be hard-pressed to consider objects might also sneak in. Consider the possibility of finding aesthetic pleasure in a transient cloud, a walk through a park, or a difficult play in a sport or game. So long as we retain the cognitive ability to perceive or apprehend a given object of experience, exercise selective attention toward it, isolate it from its various interrelations, and view it disinterestedly and sympathetically, it is the sort of thing that we can experience aesthetically.

We should take some time to spell out what Leddy’s view is given his only partial allegiance to aesthetic attitude theory. His alternative is called ‘aura theory’. It is supposed to “emphasize the way in which an object can take on a quality when it is perceived aesthetically”, the quality thereafter being referred to as the object’s aura.\textsuperscript{172} Leddy’s framework keeps in line with aesthetic attitude theory as it relies on positing an ability to perceive aesthetically, but it

\textsuperscript{170} Leddy, 21.
\textsuperscript{171} Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 35.
\textsuperscript{172} Leddy, 11.
ventures a step further in its attempt to characterize the qualities or properties of an object once perceived in that way.

Part of Leddy’s motivation is the thought that there is an array of aesthetic properties that are often ignored due to some theorists’ inclination to limit their scope to art, or due to our propensity to understand them non-aesthetically. He suggests that we might get at such properties by looking at related predicates.\(^\text{173}\) Some such predicates he considers are: “neat”, “messy”, “fun”, “sad”, “sexy”, “tasty”, “cute”, “nice”, “sacred” and “delicate”.\(^\text{174}\) Seeing as our usual understanding and application of these terms are nonaesthetic, Leddy needs a way to differentiate those uses that are aesthetic. This is where ‘aura’ comes in. If the object of the experience can be identified as having an ‘aura’, that is a marker of the aesthetic. To say that a property like “messy” is being used aesthetically is to say that the “property is one in which the aesthetic object takes on an ‘aura’ within experience”\(^\text{175}\).

Now that we know what role Leddy wants ‘aura’ to play on his view of everyday aesthetics, and aesthetics in general, we should want a definition. Doubtful that one in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions can be provided, Leddy nevertheless ventures a characterization: “Aura is a phenomenological characteristic of an object experienced attended with pleasure or with combination of pain and pleasure (as when we are fascinated with the ugly)”.\(^\text{176}\) The importance of describing aura in phenomenological terms cannot be understated for understanding Leddy’s view and how it makes use of attitude-theoretical insights. Indeed, aesthetic attitude theory can be plausibly construed in phenomenological terms. Leddy explains his theory’s reliance on phenomenology with reference to Edmund Husserl’s account of what is called the phenomenological method. Applying this method to our experience “requires

\(^{173}\) Leddy, 64.  
\(^{174}\) See Leddy, 151-185.  
\(^{175}\) Leddy, 128.  
\(^{176}\) Ibid.
bracketing considerations of the real objective or science-based nature of [an] object. To describe it phenomenologically we need to focus on the object-as-experienced”.\textsuperscript{177} In words less problematically tied to talk of objects, “[a] phenomenological view of aesthetic experience is one that starts with conscious experience and then analyzes the structure of that experience”\textsuperscript{178}

To illustrate, consider phenomenologically experiencing an apple on your plate. Note that the experience is not of the inside or backside of the apple, both of which are not immediately available to your senses. The experience also does not include reference to the geographical area from where the apple was picked. An “objective or science-based” account of the apple might include details of the composition of the apple, including the parts of it you do not presently see, as well as details about its origin and interrelations with other objects in the world. Your experience of the apple on the plate, one that might prompt you to refer to it as “good looking”, for instance, does not include those things, at least not when you have phenomenologically bracketed. Your experience is of the side of the apple you can see, the one that is shiny and smooth.

The phenomenological method need not be applied to objects of sensory experience. Imagine being exposed to the horrific details of another person’s immoral actions. One way we might be inclined to describe our response to the experience is with reference to the biological and physiological responses that we exhibit upon learning the details. Alternatively, we could explain our response by citing the objective details of the immoral actions. The phenomenological method asks that we bracket those ways of describing. Instead, we might talk about how being exposed to the details of the immoral action caused us to feel arrested, overwhelmed, dejected or troubled.

\textsuperscript{177} Leddy, 128-129.
\textsuperscript{178} Leddy, 129.
The above goes some way in explaining how we might apply the phenomenological method to aesthetic experience, but it is still too crude. Leddy provides a fuller picture of the relationship when he writes that a “phenomenological characteristic of an object is not in the object as an external thing and is not merely the result of the physical character of the object…Nor is [it] just something subjective or personal”. Phenomenological characteristics are not just in objects as external things because they depend on how I am experiencing the object. Recall Stolnitz’s point that our attention is selective, and that the attitude we hold dictates what portions of our environment are salient in experience. Phenomenological characteristics are not exhausted by the physical properties of an object. They include the specific ways in which properties are presented to conscious experience. Strictly speaking, aura is not a property. It is better understood as “what aesthetic properties have in common”. Aura is not some aspect that an object of experience “owns”, like the extension of a physical object, or a feature of something that could be changed, like the colour of my hair. “Rather”, Leddy writes, “[aura] is an intensification of that thing or its qualities”. We should not assume that phenomenological characteristics are strictly subjective or personal, for we can agree with others that an object-as-experienced admits of this or that aesthetic characteristic, or that a particular person’s confrontation with a story involving immoral acts will include specific reactions. These similarities in what we perceive and how we perceive it are perhaps better described as intersubjective.

Leddy goes on to draw comparisons between aura and other similar concepts. While he resists identifying aura with any of the following characterizations, he nevertheless thinks they prove helpful comparisons. When we experience something with aura, we experience it as having

179 Leddy, 128-129.
180 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 31.
181 Leddy, 135.
182 Ibid.
183 Ibid.
“heightened significance” or “emotional force”.\textsuperscript{184} Objects aesthetically experienced seem meaningful in ways they did not before. This cannot be sufficient on the grounds that many things can become meaningful, significant or emotional powerful for individuals without being the objects of aesthetic experience.

3.2 The Aesthetic Continuum and the Limits (If Any) of Aesthetic Experience

The resemblances between Leddy’s use of the phenomenological method and the aesthetic attitude theory are striking. This is especially true if we compare the former with Bullough’s account. Both posit the existence of a cognitive ability or activity through which we are able to experience things aesthetically. In Leddy this is the ability to perceive aesthetically. In Bullough it manifests itself in holding the aesthetic attitude. Both involve bracketing our scientific, practical, or “objective” understanding of the object in favour of fixing our attention on the object-as-experienced, as it presents itself to us in a given situation. The scare quotes around “objective” point to another similarity. For Leddy and Bullough, the objective/subjective distinction is not one that applies well to aesthetic experience. Your aesthetic experience of the apple on the table undoubtedly involves the physical features of the apple. These are plausibly described as objective. But the experience is also crucially personal. Your position relative to the apple, the lighting of the room, your preference for the look of Macintosh over Granny Smith: all of these will have important effects on the experience.

Another important point of contact between Leddy and Bullough is their desire to couch aesthetic experiences in terms of the ‘extraordinary’. We saw this in Bullough when he wrote that the distanced attitude is not our usual one, and that it is often marked by a phenomenologically distinct and overwhelming feeling.\textsuperscript{185} This is particularly apparent in Leddy as he frequently makes the contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary in our aesthetic experiences.

\textsuperscript{184} Leddy, 132.
\textsuperscript{185} Bullough, “Distance”, 89.
many objects of everyday experience might be construed as ordinary or mundane, Leddy insists that to aesthetically appreciate them requires a movement toward the extraordinary.\textsuperscript{186} He wonders “whether it is possible [in aesthetic contexts] to approach the ordinariness of the ordinary without making it extraordinary”.\textsuperscript{187} After all, if perceiving with aura involves something like experiencing heightened significance or meaning, then our ordinary way of relating to objects seems antithetical to aesthetic experience.

Consider the claim that “the ordinary becomes somewhat less ordinary when it is experienced in aesthetically positive ways”.\textsuperscript{188} This squares with his discussion of low-level aesthetic experiences, that is, those that are not best described as extraordinary, sublime, rapturous, transcendent etc. Leddy conceives of a continuum between aesthetic experiences, properties, pleasures and qualities, ranging from low-level to high-level. Part of the impetus behind Leddy’s analysis of such aesthetic predicates as “cozy” and “comfortable” is to demonstrate just how wide-ranging the continuum is. That such a continuum exists in the way we speak of aesthetic experiences is apparent in the difference between referring to a painting as “nice”, “beautiful”, and “awe-inspiring”. That a difference exists beyond just our aesthetic predicates can be gleaned from experience. Sometimes a song moves us to tap our foot or hum along. Other times, we may be brought to tears. Perhaps some of our low-level aesthetic experiences of everyday objects are not extraordinary, but they are also not ordinary “in the sense of banal and uninteresting”.\textsuperscript{189} They are not usually so powerful as to be extraordinary, nor are they uninteresting so as to always preclude positive aesthetic judgment. If we find Bullough, Stolnitz, and Leddy compelling, there is nothing stopping us from orienting our aesthetic attitude

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{186} Leddy, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{187} Leddy, 121.
\item \textsuperscript{188} Leddy, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{189} Leddy, 57.
\end{itemize}
towards the objects of our everyday lives. Whether the experience turns out to be low- or high-
level will depend on various factors, including how successful our distancing attempts are.

One notable figure who opposes this line of reasoning is Monroe Beardsley. In arguing for the cogency of the concept of an aesthetic experience, Beardsley defines it such that it excludes certain kinds of experiences which the everyday aesthete is prone to consider properly aesthetic. The definition runs like this: “a person is having an aesthetic experience during a particular stretch of time if and only if the greater part of his mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which his primary attention is concentrated”. For Beardsley, such an experience is comprised of two elements, those that are objective and those that are affective. The objective elements are those sensuously presented or imaginatively intended aspects of the work that we perceive or contemplate, such as the contours of painted lines, the staccato notes of a violin, or the steady pace of a plot. The affective elements are subjective events that “may be said to be ‘evoked by’ or to be ‘responses to’ the work of art”. In other words, they are feelings and emotions caused by the objective features of the work. Beardsley grants that much more can occur in the specified time stretch than just awareness of the objective and affective elements. Attention can waver. For him, only those elements that are features of the work or responses to it count as part of the aesthetic experience. “[T]raffic noises or sudden thoughts of unpaid bills” are to be excluded.

Having provided this definition, Beardsley attempts an elaboration by means of the connection between the work of art and the experience. His main contention is that certain terms we apply in describing an art work can also be correctly said of aesthetic experiences, namely,

---

190 Beardsley, “Experience”, 5.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
that they are ‘unified’. That experiences can also admit of unity leads Beardsley to argue that when an aesthetic experience is unified, it is so because of the unity of the artwork that is the object of the experience. What exactly does it mean for an aesthetic experience to be unified? Here the definitional task is deferred; a unified experience is one that is “more or less coherent, and more or less complete in itself”. Coherence is supposed to signify that “[o]ne thing leads to another.” It includes “continuity of development, without gaps or dead spaces, a sense of overall providential pattern of guidance, an orderly cumulation of energy toward a climax, [all of which] are present to an unusual degree”. Completeness is explained with reference to what Beardsley calls “the pattern of expectation-and-fulfillment”. Consider musical passages, scenes in films and plays, the corner of a painting where one first fixes one’s gaze. All of these can be said to arouse expectations in the observer. It is on the basis of already-experienced parts of the artwork that we formulate the assumption that the work will continue on in a similar way, and that we will understand newly-experienced parts in connection with those already absorbed. We can see that this applies readily to experiences and not just artworks if we consider that

this is just the nature of an experience considered as such: that its character is partly given by its end. When the gestalt completes itself, we now think of the whole experience as building to that end; the (musical) significance of much that we have heard is now at least revealed, and the recollection of our earlier expectations and the way the music played with them takes on a new intensity in the light of what is now happening, in the final moments.

What is most important to our present discussion is not the soundness of Beardsley’s view, but how he uses it to exclude certain experiences from being considered aesthetic.

194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
Beardsley has this to say in addressing the fear that unity is a feature of all or most experiences, not just those of the aesthetic variety:

[D]oes the experience of riding a crowded subway really have unity; or is it a mass of jarringly diverse and confused impressions, without dramatic structure or formal development? Even in a "chronicle play" the appearances and disappearances of important characters are far more interrelated than the arrival and departure of subway straphangers. (I must add that I checked this impression only last week while riding on the Broadway-7th Avenue subway.) These brief remarks are only the beginning of an argument to show that...our experiences of works of art, and especially our experiences of good works of art, are in fact generally of a high order of unity - of coherence and completeness - compared with most daily experiences. But even if I had time I would hesitate to present such an argument here: the point seems to me somewhat elementary, once we establish the propriety of discussing the question at all.201

While not an explicit endorsement of attitude theory, Leddy defends everyday aesthetics from Beardsley’s characterization of a subway ride in terms reminiscent of Bullough. The suggestion on Beardsley’s part is that the experience of the subway ride could not be sufficiently coherent and complete, thus not sufficiently unified, so as to qualify the experience as aesthetic.202 Leddy retorts that it is still open to the everyday aesthetician to hold on to those everyday aesthetic experiences that do admit of unity as stipulated by Beardsley. Still, Leddy takes issue with Beardsley’s assessment of our experience of the subway ride. He asserts that it is conceivable that “someone could experience a subway ride in a unified way by constructing the experience as unified”.203 He suggests that human beings have the ability to construct their experience so as to create a sense of unity among the sensations. To merely stipulate, as Beardsley does, that a subway ride cannot have unity or dramatic structure is to ignore human beings’ ability to construct the contents of their perception such that aesthetic experiences can be

---

202 Leddy, 60.
203 Ibid.
had. While Leddy does not provide any specific account of just how it is we do this aesthetic constructing, we have Bullough’s distance theory ready and waiting.

We can add more strength to the claim that a subway ride can be experienced aesthetically by looking at the work of Paul Ziff. The thesis of his “Anything Viewed”, written in Ziff’s idiosyncratically punctuated style, is that “[a]nything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention”.204 Ziff argues for the claim by examining the differences between customary objects of aesthetic attention and those things which many people, aestheticians and others alike, would not usually wish to include in that category. He wants to know on what basis it is that we consider artworks worthy of aesthetic attention but “not soiled linen greasy dishes bleary eyes false teeth not excrement”.205 If we can isolate a criterion, or several, we get a step closer to asking whether or not the considerations we have picked out should matter.

One suggestion is that we distinguish between objects worthy of aesthetic attention and those that are not by way of the former admitting of beauty. This won’t do. As Ziff rightly points out, “not all objects of aesthetic attention are beautiful…[n]ot being beautiful needn’t matter”.206 Perhaps we say that to be worthy of aesthetic attention is to be an artwork. This is a common assumption, one that I identified in the Introduction as pernicious. Nevertheless, the thought deserves to be entertained. There is some trouble here on account of not having a fixed definition of an artwork; controversial cases abound. Ziff suggests that we proceed regardless. All we need to generate an initial list of distinguishing features are widely accepted instances of art.207 Consider one plausible feature: artworks are artefacts, they are human-made objects. Note that if one is committed to the claim that aesthetic appreciation of pristine nature is possible, then the artefact suggestion is untenable. Ziff argues further by offering two complementary thought

204 Ziff, 29.
205 Ziff, 23.
206 Ibid.
207 Ziff, 24.
experiments. Imagine “a field in which there are two virtually identical mounds of dried dung. One was and the other was not man-made. Would that fact render the latter less accessible than the former to aesthetic attention?” \(^{208}\) His answer is that he cannot see why it would, and Bullough, Stolnitz, Leddy, I and others are in agreement. Next, imagine “that the Henry Moore statue at Lincoln Center was in fact not an artefact by Moore but a naturally formed that is nonman-made object found in a desert and transported to Lincoln Center”. \(^{209}\) Learning that the statue is not human-made might have an impact on how one aesthetically appreciates the object, but it does not preclude the possibility of that appreciation. Ziff’s indictment is a harsh one: thinking aesthetic appreciation is somehow restricted to artefacts is to display a “narcissistic obsession with the marks of men’s endeavours”. \(^{210}\)

The next criterion entertained is that the object display craftsmanship. This seems to take us even further into doubtful territory as being an artefact is a prerequisite for displaying craftsmanship. Either this suggestion fails because it depends on privileging artefacts, or else it adheres to a more specific understanding of craftsmanship, perhaps excellent craftsmanship. That gets us into even more trouble. Determining excellence of craftsmanship seems to require aesthetically attending to the object. We are brought dangerously close to circularity. Alternatively, if you chose to stipulate what counts as excellence of craftsmanship independent of attending to the object aesthetically, you gain the old and problematic consequence that artworks you have judged to be poor are not even worthy of aesthetic attention. For instance, stipulating a high level of skill in the crafting process problematically excludes many artworks, for instance various paintings by Piet Mondrian. \(^{211}\)

\(^{208}\) Ibid.  
\(^{209}\) Ibid.  
\(^{210}\) Ibid.  
\(^{211}\) Ziff, 25.
The consideration that Ziff thinks deserves the most attention in our search for the reason artworks are taken to be paradigmatic objects of aesthetic attention is that they are sometimes literally, but probably always figuratively, framed objects. Yet, Ziff will go on to say that “both the efficacy and the necessity of a frame are something of an illusion”.\textsuperscript{212} Consider why a work is exhibited (“framed mounted hung illuminated displayed”).\textsuperscript{213} Presumably, it is in hopes of aiding individuals in their attending aesthetically. Ziff puts it like this: “a person $p$ performs certain relevant actions $a$ in connection with a work of art an entity $e$ under conditions $c$. The entity $e$ is supposed to be of a kind or character to facilitate and make valuable the performance of $a$ by $p$ under $c$. If so $e$ is then a fit object for aesthetic attention”.\textsuperscript{214} Given this characterization of the situation, it seems that whether or not an object is fit for aesthetic attention is more a matter of person $p$, the actions $a$, and the conditions $c$. In principle, nothing is stopping us from exquisitely displaying a chewed up piece of bubble-gum. “With appropriately placed lights and shadows walls of the right tint in the right position of the right height carefully proportioned pedestals anything at all that could be displayed could be a fit object for aesthetic attention”.\textsuperscript{215}

Must a chewed up piece of bubble-gum be framed or exhibited to be an object worthy of aesthetic attention? If the question is meant literally, the answer is no. While placing the gum on a base as one does with sculptures could facilitate turning one’s aesthetic attention towards it, there’s no reason similar conditions cannot be achieved, and similar actions performed, in other contexts. If the question is meant figuratively, then it seems as though the gum is already framed. It is the sort of object that has boundaries, and we can look at it stuck to a restaurant table while attempting to ignore the colour of the table, the people walking by us, the noises surrounding us, etc. This is no different than our attempting to ignore the colour of the walls, the people walking

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{215} Ziff, 26-27.
by us, and the noises surrounding us when in a gallery. It might be a difficult task for some to aesthetically attend to a chewed up piece of bubble-gum on a restaurant table. But just as the kinds of objects we can pay aesthetic attention to vary, so too do the “character of the actions the conditions and the requisite skills and capacities of the person”.

Put another way: “That [I am] psychologically incapable of attending aesthetically to a certain object tells you something about me nothing about the aesthetic qualities of the object”.

Return to Beardsley’s characterization of the subway ride as a “mass of jarringly diverse and confused impressions, without dramatic structure or formal development”. We can now ask a set of questions, bearing in mind what we’ve learned from Ziff. Is there something about a subway ride as an object of aesthetic experience that renders it unworthy of, or worse, disqualified from, aesthetic attention? Ask the same question, removing the reference to the ride as an object, thus thinking of the ride as just an aesthetic experience, perhaps comprised of various sites, sounds, smells, etc. I think the answer to the first version is “probably not”, depending on how lenient you are in assigning aesthetic objecthood. I think the answer to the second version is a more resounding “no”. Consider first a short film of a subway ride. Next, a short film of a subway ride shot as if from the perspective of a passenger in the train. Now, in surround sound and with accompanying subway-like smells courtesy of a Smell-O-Vision.

Skip a few steps to an elaborate instillation put on by a well-regarded artist. It involves the construction of a short subway track, trains, surrounding sights, actors playing passengers, etc. Call it “Your Own Personal Subway Ride”. Of course, I need not even propose such a thought experiment to get the point across. I could have just as well made reference to various forms of art, for instance, happenings, environmental art, and everyday art, all three of which present

216 Ziff, 27.
217 Ziff, 29.
challenges for Beardsley’s characterization of the subway ride. Surely, differences between artworks and your daily commute remain. It is less and less clear, however, that those differences can make a difference aesthetically, so to speak.

Reference to our framing ability appears again when Leddy assesses Allen Carlson’s insistence that appreciating nature involves ‘composing it’. Carlson’s composing activity involves selecting, emphasizing, and grouping certain elements of the natural object for the purposes of aesthetically experiencing it. While this approaches the sort of ability Leddy posited in response to Beardsley, it retains much of Beardsley’s skepticism regarding its potential application in everyday contexts. For instance, Carlson seems unwilling to accept that the sound of nearby traffic can factor into one’s aesthetic experience of a natural environment. That sound cannot be selected, emphasized, and grouped along with the rest of what one is perceiving because, along Beardsleyan lines, it would make for an experience too confused and jarring to be aesthetic. To the extent that we have the composing ability, we can select some parts of what we perceive as appropriate factors in our aesthetic experience. Just as what is beyond the frame of a painting is, on Carlson’s view, inappropriate to the aesthetic experience of the artwork, so too the traffic sounds to the experience of nature.

Leddy has no qualms with Carlson’s insistence on the composing activity as it applies to aesthetic experiences of nature. However, he rejects the importance that Carlson gives to the appropriateness of some bits of our experience over others. Wishing to avoid any sign of relativism in aesthetic evaluation, Carlson wants to determine the elements that compose our

---

220 Yuriko Saito writes of “Rirkrit Tiravanija’s installation/performance/interactive piece at Wexner Center for the Arts in Ohio State University, which consists of a life-scale and fully functioning replica of his East Village apartment where he cooked Thai curry and served it to gallery-goers” in Saito, 32-33.
221 Carlson, 22-37.
222 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
224 Leddy, 103.
aesthetic experience in a manner that retains as much objectivity as possible. Leddy’s response, much like what he offered to Beardsley’s objection, is that there seems to be nothing stopping one from framing the experience in a vast number of ways. Furthermore, prescribing strict criteria of appropriateness for the composing activity creates trouble in the very contexts that Carlson is modeling his aesthetics of nature after, namely, our experiences of art. Leddy thinks Carlson is mistaken in claiming that our experiences of art should not take into account various pieces of contextual information that run the gamut from historical facts to the gallery walls and lighting. The argumentative move, appearing here only in broad strokes, is the claim that modelling our everyday or natural aesthetic experiences on the art cases would actually support the possibility of including the traffic sounds. Other writers have made similar claims even while recognizing that this significantly differentiates everyday aesthetic experiences from those of artworks. Saito writes that “the absence of an equivalent conventional agreement on medium or evidence of the artist’s intention renders a non-art object ‘frameless’, making us a creator of it as aesthetic object”.

Ronald Hepburn provides a compelling alternative to Carlson’s ‘composing’ activity, one that is less restrictive and in step with the insights we gained from Ziff:

[T]here is no frame, and where nature is our aesthetic object, a sound or visible intrusion from beyond the original boundaries of our attention can challenge us to integrate it in our overall experience, to modify that experience so as to make room for it. This of course, need not occur; we may shut it out by effort of will, if it seems quite unassimilable. At any rate, our creativity is challenged, set a task; and when things go well with us, we experience a sudden expansion of imagination that can be memorable in its own right.

---

225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Leddy, 106.
228 Saito, 19.
Leddy also explicitly defends attitude theory against some of its detractors. For instance, Arnold Berleant rejects frameworks that privilege distance in his attempt to emphasize those everyday aesthetic experiences that do not primarily involve our sense of sight. Leddy points out that there is nothing inherent to attitude theories that precludes us from distancing with respect to senses other than sight. Leddy goes as far as to suggest that aesthetic appreciation through senses generally not taken to be relevant to such experiences might actually “[require] some detachment from purely practical considerations”.  

3.3 Problems with Disinterestedness and the Aesthetic Attitude

Yuriko Saito opposes the application of attitude theories to everyday contexts on the grounds that they surrender too much of the “everydayness” of the experience. In bracketing the practical aspects of the aesthetic experience, we re-contextualize the object of aesthetic appreciation such that it is difficult to see exactly what grounds our claim to its everydayness. She conceives of many of our ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences as “diverse and dynamic, as more often than not [leading] to some specific actions: cleaning, purchasing, repairing, discarding, and so on”. Saito is worried that an emphasis on distancing and bracketing will lead to the privileging of those everyday aesthetic experiences that admit of strangeness or extraordinariness. These are, according to her, the more unusual of our aesthetic experiences. Consequently, attitude theories run the risk of being unable to account for those low-level aesthetic experiences which she thinks comprise a majority of our everyday aesthetic appreciation. On Saito’s account, these are essentially value- and action-laden, thus steeped in the practical. Consider:

---

230 Leddy, 97.
231 Leddy, 120.
232 Saito, 4.
233 Saito, 26.
234 Leddy, 114.
The aesthetic value of a knife consists not only of its visual qualities, but also of its feeling in my hand, determined by its surface texture, weight, and balance, but most importantly by how smoothly and effortlessly I can cut an object because of the material, shape, length, texture, and weight of the blade and handle. The appreciation here is not simply directed toward the fact that the knife functions well; it rather concerns the way in which all its sensuous aspects converge and work together to facilitate the ease of use. If I appreciate this knife exclusively for its cutting performance, I don’t think I am appreciating it aesthetically, because as long as I can derive the same degree of cutting capability from any other knife, the specific sensuous qualities do not matter. I suspect that the reason why functionality of an object was generally shunned from the realm of the aesthetic is because exclusive attention to functionality steers us away from attending to the sensuous surface of the object. However, considering an object’s functionality does not necessarily lead us away from its surface qualities. I can appreciate the way in which the materials, design, size, and craftsmanship are integrated to provide the superb functional quality.235

Leddy offers two responses on behalf of the aesthetic attitude theorist. First, the extent to which those lower-level experiences dominate our everyday aesthetic lives might well be exaggerated.236 Short of engaging in or citing some empirical date (if such data could even be collected), it is unclear what grounds one might have for thinking that most of our everyday aesthetic experiences are tied to some sort of practical response.

Next, Leddy points to Peggy Brand’s suggestion that it might be aesthetically beneficial to ‘toggle’, that is, to switch between the distanced and supposedly unusual view and the usual one. Contra feminists who hold the position that interested attention is the only sort appropriate for experiencing feminist art, Brand argues “not only that feminist art can be experienced disinterestedly, but at times it is highly appropriate to do so”.237 The feminist position Brand is rallying against is one that identifies disinterestedness with paternalism. Disinterestedness represents a denial of “one’s identification and involvement with the work…”[and] a masculinist

---

235 Saito, 27.
236 Ibid.
237 Brand, 533.
mode of thought in which it is assumed that the best (the only?) way to experience a work of art is as a neutral, unbiased, selfless observer”. But some feminist art is made with the express purpose of inviting the observer to dwell on the biased and interested role one inherits as a member of a gender.

Brand does not deny that disinterestedness is a masculinist approach, only that it is useless as a tool for viewing feminist art. Her proposed revision to the feminist position posits two types of attention through which one focuses on an artwork, as opposed to just the single disinterested attitude. She calls these Interested Attention (IA) and Disinterested Attention (DA). In the interest of gaining as much aesthetic insight as possible, Brand recommends we actively engage in both types of attention. While “one cannot ‘see’ with both types of attention at once”, one can toggle one’s attention, deliberately or unconsciously switching between the two modes of aesthetic perception. Brand demonstrates the usefulness of this toggling by asking us to consider an image of a nude female body. A disinterested viewing attends to “its color, texture and overall balance”, while an interested one might include “viewing it with a possessing or objectifying male gaze”. Engaging in the former kind of attention “may be just what distinguishes the art lover’s gaze…from the lascivious pornographer’s gaze”.

This is reminiscent of Stolnitz’s view. He argued for the existence of an interested and disinterested attitude, both of which we could hold simultaneously in a given situation. On the Stolnitzean view, only the latter is properly aesthetic. Nevertheless, what we gain in the interested view can be fused into our aesthetic experience. It often turns out that interested considerations have some effect on the character of our aesthetic experience. Assuming such toggling is not out of our cognitive reach, this would mean that there is no necessary conflict between attitude

---

238 Ibid.  
239 Brand, 534.  
240 Brand, 535.  
241 Ibid.  
242 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 45.
theories and Saito’s emphasis on the more ordinary aspects of our everyday aesthetic experiences. If distancing is inappropriate in those usual contexts, we should not engage in that attitude. If it turns out that it is appropriate, we could at least switch back and forth between it and our more ordinary, interested way of viewing. Leddy is on board with this suggestion because he sees it as potentially allowing for richer aesthetic experiences.243

I turn now to the ways in which Leddy makes explicit use of the attitude framework in constructing his own aura theory of everyday aesthetic experience. My aim here is to provide a sharper picture of where he takes attitude theories to flourish and where he takes them to falter. Recall that Leddy frames his aura theory as a predominantly phenomenological account. Leddy is interested in the phenomenological characteristics of an object-as-experienced, not in those properties which we might describe when treating the object as a merely physical and external entity.244 One achieves this is by applying the phenomenological method, which “requires bracketing considerations of the real objective or science-based nature of the object”.245 For Leddy, it also involves bracketing the very distinction between the objective and subjective characteristics of the object. Undoubtedly, a phenomenological description of an object-as-experienced will be inescapably tied to the subjective sensuous experience of the perceiver. Nevertheless, the foundations for such descriptions are the physical characteristics of the object. Consequently, there is a sense in which we can make reference to the objective features in explaining our phenomenological experience.

I hope that the extent to which this parallels Bullough’s distancing attitude is apparent. In fact, after giving a description of how his phenomenological aura theory operates, Leddy suggests that his account just “is what…Edward Bullough earlier referred to simply as ‘distancing’…the

243 Leddy, 114.
244 Leddy, 128.
245 Leddy, 129.
distancing that may be carried out through taking an aesthetic attitude”.246 A little further down we find the most explicit instance of support for the attitude theory, where Leddy asserts that “there is such a thing as the aesthetic attitude, a matter of looking or otherwise sensing in a certain way, and that this attitude tends to generate aesthetic experiences when we take it in approaching everyday phenomena”.247

Having offered up such a striking endorsement, Leddy turns his attention to dealing with some of the objections that have been directed towards attitude theories in the past. The first of these, and on my view the weakest, charges attitude theories with being excessively interested in the formal properties of an object of aesthetic experience. Recall that, in Chapter Two, I wrote of Kant’s formalism that it excludes “[t]he colours of a painting, the timbre of the instruments performing a composition, the texture of the material that makes up a sculpture”.248 On this view, formal properties are limited to what Kant calls “figure”: “the shape of a statue or building, the lines of a painting, the musical structure of a composition”.249 Not all formalisms are so extreme. In its most liberal iteration, desire to limit aesthetic experience to formal properties means that, to borrow Kendall Walton’s words, “[w]hat is important about…works of art is what can be seen or heard in them. This [view asks that we] purge from [our experience] of works of art supposedly extraneous excursions into matters not available to inspection of the works”250 It is certainly true that attitude theories do, or should, purport to provide an account of the sort of psychical exercise needed to privilege formal properties. Still, a proper understanding of the distancing attitude should not limit it to just that function. Leddy writes that his view of the aesthetic attitude also affords us the ability to “focus on the symbolic or content-oriented aspects of the object

246 Leddy, 130.
247 Leddy, 131.
248 See pg. 14.
249 Ibid.
perceived”\textsuperscript{251}. One need not turn to Leddy to see this; a close reading of Bullough should have made this sufficiently clear. Recall that Bullough’s discussion of the distanced fog includes such descriptions as “the veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk” or “the curious creamy smoothness of the water”\textsuperscript{252}. Recall also that the sort of affections at play when distancing include those as varied as “sensation, perception, emotional state or idea”\textsuperscript{253}. Bring to mind the emphasis Bullough places on an individual’s aesthetic training, emotional dispositions, and intellectual idiosyncrasies in determining the extent to which one can distance, and towards what objects one will be appropriately situated to do so. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, recall the subtlety involved in Bullough’s account due to the inclusion of a positive element. Those non-formal aspects of the experience, such as the fear of the fog, are bracketed but, crucially, they are not ignored. The experience is constructed so as to include them as what some less careful than Bullough might be inclined to call the ‘objective’ properties of the object. It is difficult to see how any of this might plausibly be understood as pointing in the direction of formalism, however thinly construed. The attitude theorist can still make reference to formal properties. In fact, the phenomenological bent of aesthetic attitude theories is conducive to bracketing just those things that the strict formalist considers extraneous. What we are left with are the objects as they are “sensuously presented” to us, to use Beardsley’s terms\textsuperscript{254}.

I have mentioned that arguing for an attitude theory often brings as a consequence the view that anything can be an object of aesthetic experience. This appears in Bullough, Stolnitz, Ziff, and Leddy. Beardsley took this to erode our ability to aesthetically value some objects over others\textsuperscript{255}. If our aesthetic appreciation of a fork can be as intense as that of Michelangelo’s Pietà, what sense is there in attaching more aesthetic value to the painting than the utensil? Leddy’s

\textsuperscript{251} Leddy, 132.
\textsuperscript{252} Bullough, “Distance”, 88-89.
\textsuperscript{253} Bullough, “Distance”, 89.
\textsuperscript{254} Beardsley, “Experience”, 5.
\textsuperscript{255} Leddy, 197.
immediate reply is that valuing some aesthetic objects over others is not inconsistent with the view that anything can be aesthetically experienced.\textsuperscript{256} It was suggested earlier that the best way to capitalize on the insights of attitude theory is to persuade people to toggle between their usual point of view and a distanced one. If this psychical toggling is an ability we possess, which Leddy thinks it plausible to assume, then it is open to us to have the intense aesthetic experience of the fork while distanced. It is also open to us to realize its comparatively diminished aesthetic potency whilst occupying our usual mode of perceiving. As Leddy suggests, “[o]nly by swinging between the two perspectives can a fuller and richer experience be achieved”.\textsuperscript{257}

Notice that a variety of positions regarding the aesthetic value of ordinary everyday objects are consistent with the view that anything can be the object of an aesthetic experience. I, myself, am in agreement with Ziff when he writes:

\begin{quote}
If anything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention aren’t some things more fit than others? No why think it? But granted that both a gator basking and Leonardo’s Ginevra are fit objects for aesthetic attention isn’t Ginevra more fit? No. In what way? It would make sense to compare the two only if there were some basis for comparison. But there isn’t.\textsuperscript{258}
\end{quote}

Of course, the claim that there is no basis for comparison whatsoever is a contentious one. Ziff argued that exhibiting craftsmanship or enjoying the status of an artefact are not necessary conditions for warranting aesthetic attention. Nevertheless, they might be good criteria by which to formulate a continuum of aesthetic value. Certainly some hold the view that one should aesthetically value a crafted object over one that isn’t. This has as a consequence the counterintuitive judgment that a mediocre painting is to be valued over the Grand Canyon. Value judgments based on difficulty in crafting are also dubious in this respect. That the Mona Lisa is more valuable than a stop sign is easy to swallow for many. But is it more valuable than a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[256] Ibid.
\item[257] Leddy, 201.
\item[258] Ziff, 30.
\end{footnotes}
Mondrian? So long as it is granted that everyday objects can be worthy of aesthetic attention, it seems the best one can do is come up with some criterion of aesthetic value that pushes those objects to the less valuable end of a continuum. I have my doubts about finding such criteria, doubts that I think everyday aestheticians would be right to hold, but we should not be totally opposed to the philosophical attempts to find them.

Thus far, I have painted a pretty picture of the attitude theory and its theoretical relevance to everyday aesthetic experience. This is in no small part thanks to Leddy’s argumentative support. As we have just seen, he puts a lot of emphasis on the advantages of the aesthetic attitude, even going as far as suggesting ways around objections and routes for strengthening the theory. Yet, Leddy is not an attitude theorist. He is arguing for his own aura theory and, unsurprisingly, takes attitude theories to have some disadvantages that put it a step behind his own view. While these disadvantages are framed largely as reasons for rejecting a view resembling Kant’s, it will prove useful to investigate the extent to which Bullough’s psychical distance might suffer a similar fate.

One perceived disadvantage is that attitude theory is not neutral enough regarding how our aesthetic experiences come about. While Leddy acknowledges that “contemplation, the aesthetic attitude, the aesthetic point of view, losing oneself, or…concentrating on certain features in the aesthetic object…can be useful [strategies], we also have spontaneous aesthetic experiences that are not preceded by any strategy.” 259 I think this is best construed as a phenomenological point. It is unclear that we are undergoing the sort of phenomenological activity that attitude theories posit when we have an aesthetic experience of the weather, for instance. It is doubtful that any bracketing, sublimating or constructing is involved. We have spontaneous aesthetic experiences where a strategy as phenomenologically complex as bracketing does not seem to be involved.

259 Leddy, 143.
Another disadvantage runs along similar phenomenological lines. An important part of attitude theories seems to be the presence of what Noël Carroll calls a special feeling-tone. Recall Bullough’s description of the onset of distance as startling and sudden. Again, it is unclear that our aesthetic experience of a flower’s scent is accompanied by a feeling approaching the intensity of the fog experience as outlined by Bullough.

I think both of these disadvantages could be summarized together as follows: attitude theory posits a sort of phenomenological activity and feeling that seems ill-suited in describing ordinary aesthetic experiences. In the interest of including as wide a variety of everyday aesthetic experiences as theoretically allowable, everyday aestheticians should shy away from a theory that stipulates a process so psychically specific and a feeling so phenomenologically intense. What and how are we bracketing when we judge a shirt to be aesthetically pleasing while shopping? Is our positive aesthetic assessment of a recently gifted mug really punctuated by a phenomenologically intense feeling?

Expressed in Leddy’s terms, the worry is that attitude theory captures the extraordinary but not the ordinary. He tries to quell Saito’s worry that we might end up overlooking the everydayness of everyday aesthetic experiences by stipulating that all that is really necessary is a move away from the ordinary qua boring, uninteresting, or mundane. Signs point to attitude theory being unable to achieve this delicate balance. Recall that Leddy’s strategy in defending attitude theory against Saito’s everydayness worry and Beardsley’s valuing worry was just to remind us that we can turn the attitude on and off. In other words, we can toggle. So, on the one hand, these perceived disadvantages are not necessarily devastating to attitude theories. We can still say, along with Leddy, that it is a useful framework in describing a certain limited sort of psychical activity, one that can engender a certain limited sort of aesthetic experience.

---

260 Bullough, “Distance”, 89.
I do not think that those who find attitude theory a compelling framework for explaining our aesthetic experiences should settle for this limited scope of applicability. This would be to put the view on horribly shaky ground. As we see with Leddy, attempts will be made to offer rival frameworks that include the advantages of attitude theory but are not so limited in the ground they cover. Those committed to some form of aesthetic attitude should endeavor to alter the view such that it can adequately account for those ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences. It is to this goal that I now turn.
Chapter 4

Aesthetic Attitude Theory Defended and Reconceived

My strategy for presenting a more adequate attitude theory for the everyday aesthetician is twofold. The first facet of my argument is largely clarificatory. I think that a Bullough-style aesthetic attitude theory gets into trouble if the subtle phenomenological aspects of the framework are glossed over. Moreover, key passages in Bullough suggest that his development of attitude theory is precisely not open to some of the phenomenology-based criticisms pointed out above, at least notwithstanding some new argument. Invoking psychical distance as if it necessarily comes with a special phenomenological feeling is to unduly privilege certain parts of Bullough’s argument over others.

This will only get us part of the way to an attitude theory that can account for ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences. This is because a crucial component of Bullough’s framework involves affirming the Kantian distinction between the aesthetically beautiful and the merely agreeable. This distinction, in combination with Bullough’s emphasis on bracketing the practical portion of our experience, makes it difficult to reconcile distance with ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences, no matter how phenomenologically neutral we might make the theory. Consequently, I will point to some alterations I think should be made to the idea of the aesthetic attitude. This is the second facet of my argument, and it is motivated by portions of Bullough’s and Stolnitz’s original formulations, the bits of Leddy that lend support to the overall framework, recent work by Bence Nanay and my own arguments for the explanatory virtues of a reconceived version of the theory.

4.1 Psychical Distance Regained

Nothing in Bullough’s account commits him to a necessarily phenomenologically intense feeling accompanying the distancing attitude. Again, Bullough characterizes distance as “often
emerging with startling suddenness”.\footnote{Bullough, “Distance”, 89. Italics mine.} It is crucial not to overlook the qualification. The everyday aesthetician committed to an aesthetic attitude theory is not consequently committed to the claim that all of our aesthetic experiences are startling or sudden.\footnote{Stanley Paluch makes a similar point when he writes: “It sounds as if shifting from the ‘practical’ to the ‘aesthetic’ perspective is a temporal psychological shift and must - as such - be attended by feelings which permit the philosopher or psychologist of art to distinguish between ‘aesthetic’ and non-aesthetic’ states. But I do not mean to imply this.” See Stanley Paluch, “Are There Aesthetic Attitudes?”, \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research}, 27, no. 4 (Jun., 1967), 607.} There will, of course, be disagreement over whether or not it is even right to say that our aesthetic attitude is \textit{often} accompanied by something like a startling feeling. We saw a version of this debate when discussing Saito’s worry that we privilege the unusual point of view when we take on attitude theories. I don’t claim to have a definitive answer regarding which point of view is more or less usual. Again, this seems to me a question that can’t be answered without good empirical evidence, if such evidence could even be collected. My aim is to present aesthetic attitude theory in a way that renders it potent regardless of where one locates the usual and the unusual.

One might still think that undertaking the distanced attitude is too complex a psychical activity to account for ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences that often happen in a matter of seconds. The whole business of bracketing and reinserting affections as objective features of the experience could strike one as much too phenomenologically loaded to capture my aesthetic enjoyment of a shiny car as it drives by quickly. Two responses are immediately available. As just mentioned, Bullough states that the onset of distance could feel sudden. To the extent that we have the ability to undertake an aesthetic attitude on the fly, so to speak, it doesn’t look to be so phenomenologically burdensome as to exclude aesthetic experiences that are abrupt.

The role that aesthetic training plays in the account of distancing is also important here. Remember that Bullough ties the degree of achievable distance to both the object \textit{and} the distancing capabilities of the individual. Someone well acquainted with noise music might be
expected to require much less time and contemplative effort to properly distance so as to aesthetically experience a musical piece of that variety. That we do not feel our aesthetic experience of a well-decorated room to be anywhere close to as phenomenologically taxing as that of a Picasso could be plausibly construed as a testament to how comparatively well-trained we are in aesthetic matters of the everyday.

Now in its more phenomenologically neutral form, Bullough’s framework still presents two obstacles in the attempt to square attitude theory with the concerns of everyday aesthetics. The first involves the emphasis on the practical as that which is to be bracketed in order to aesthetically experience an object. The second, which I have purposely made little mention of thus far, is Bullough’s desire to hang on to the Kantian distinction between the merely agreeable and the beautiful.263

Bullough thinks one of the virtues of his attitude theory is that it can explain the difference between our experiences of beauty, which are certainly aesthetic, and those that are just agreeable, which are not so certainly aesthetic: the agreeable ones lack the distanced attitude.264 In this respect, his account explicitly endorses what I identified to be a failing of attitude theories in the everyday context, namely, that they seem to preclude those experiences which do not strike us as beautiful or sublime, but that we might nevertheless want to deem aesthetic. Aesthetic experiences involving rooms, houses, furniture, food and drink, clothing, vehicles and other such aspects of our lives might be plausibly construed as belonging to the category of the agreeable.

The contrast Bullough presents is this. An agreeable pleasure is “felt as an affection of our concrete, practical self”.265 So, we might presumably classify the experience of the sensuous features of my morning cup of coffee as agreeable, and so not aesthetic. Despite including some

263 Bullough, “Distance”, 90.
264 Bullough, “Distance”, 108.
265 Ibid.
of the hallmarks of an aesthetic experience, the pleasure I derive from drinking the coffee is too
tied to practical considerations such as my thirst, the lengthy process of brewing, how impressed
my incoming guests will be when they taste my superior roast, etc. The beautiful experience of a
Reich composition is not like this. It is distanced and does not admit of those practical
considerations so intimately tied to my concrete self.

One immediate difference to notice between the two experiences is which senses they
involve. Combing through the everyday aesthetics literature, one often encounters attempts to
bring those experiences involving “taste and temperature, muscular and tactile, and organic
sensations” back into the fold of aesthetic theorizing. Bullough himself suggests that the
question of the difference between the agreeable and the beautiful takes on a sharper form when
discussing the ‘lower senses’. The general trend in everyday aesthetics is to account for the
ways in which experiences involving these lower senses can be aesthetic.

Bullough’s take on the matter is not so different from that of the modern everyday
aesthetician. According to him, the claim that these lower senses are incapable of producing
aesthetic experiences is “theoretically unfair to the senses, and in practice often false”. While it
might be much more difficult to distance the related affections due to “the materialness of their
action, their proximity and bodily connexion,” we are still theoretically capable of coming to
aesthetic experiences through these lower senses. Bullough suggests we include such
experiences in a third category existing between the agreeable and the beautiful, what he calls the
‘poetical’.

---

266 Bullough, “Distance”, 109. See Brady as an example.
267 Ibid.
268 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
270 Ibid.
Bullough’s reason for doing this boils down to just that these lower-sense-based experiences are “usually felt more as a bodily caress than as an aesthetic experience”. On the one hand, we have the familiar claim that, in part due to the experience’s relation to our body, it is tied to our concrete/practical self and so not aesthetic. On the other hand, frequency plays a role. If it were the case that we did experience the taste of wine more often as an aesthetic experience than as a ‘bodily caress’, then it seems that a good follower of Bullough would have to categorize our wine-tasting experiences as beautiful and not poetical.

These two reasons do not fare particularly well as support for affording lower-sense experiences a diminished aesthetic status, let alone for denying their aesthetic status tout court. Take the first claim, that experiences such as those involving the scent of a rose are usually felt as bodily and not as aesthetic. Much more needs to be said about how lower-senses such as smell are usually felt bodily, but sight, for instance, is not. The source of this assertion seems to be the relatively intuitive claim that the phenomenological character of our experience will differ depending on which sense it involves, that touch or taste are somehow experienced a little more ‘bodily’ than sight and sound. Alternatively, there is the more substantial claim, already made by Bullough, that these lower senses make it harder, but not impossible, to distance. Both of these options fall far from endorsing an exclusion of the lower-senses from the domain of the aesthetic. At best, they amount to the suggestion that we work a little bit harder at distancing these lower senses due to their character as embodied experiences.

The second reason for construing the lower-sense experiences as poetical and not beautiful is due to frequency. We include our experiences of tasting freshly baked pie under the poetical because such experiences are, according to Bullough, very rarely aesthetic. Of course, this involves first getting clear on exactly what makes an experience aesthetic, and then going out

---

271 Ibid.
into the world and checking, if at all possible, whether our pie eating experiences often or rarely admit of the relevant criteria. It is also important to note that the answer to the frequency question will in part be determined by cultural and historical factors. It is perfectly conceivable to imagine a group of people for whom eating and drinking are paradigmatic cases of aesthetic experience while other aspects of life are less so. I want to stress that the main upshot of introducing the poetical category to the psychical distance model is just the claim that our lower-sense experiences tend less towards the aesthetic. Even if Bullough is correct about this, it poses no fundamental problem for the everyday aesthete trying to work out of an attitude theory. According to the theoretical model Bullough has advanced, everything from the smell of coffee to the sight of a sharp new haircut can be the object of an aesthetic experience given sufficient distancing. As such, the model has no problem capturing the possibility of those ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences that arise from touch, taste, and smell.

My contention that Bullough’s account does not discriminate against lower-level aesthetic experiences proceeds with the assumption that Kant’s view somehow does. I wrote in the introduction that Leddy resists an interpretation of Kant that necessarily identifies everyday aesthetic experiences, some of which are of the lower-level variety, with the notion of the agreeable. I agree with Leddy’s reading of Kant, and will now briefly present some textual support for understanding Kant along the same lines as the above reading of Bullough. Recall that, for Kant, what distinguishes the agreeable from the beautiful is the interested character of the former kind of judgement. Our experience of something agreeable “provokes a desire for similar objects, consequently the delight presupposes…the bearing its existence has upon my state so far as it is affected by such an object”. The pleasure derived from the agreeable is inextricably tied with personal inclinations, so our delight in agreeable objects stems from pure

---

273 See Leddy, 27-32.
274 Kant, 38.
sensory experience either coupled with an already established inclination toward enjoyment or with a newly formed desire for more of the object of experience. Is there anything in Kant that suggests that lower-level aesthetic experiences, a plausible sub-class of everyday aesthetic experience, are necessarily agreeable and never something other than agreeable? Quite the opposite. Consider this passage, which implicitly suggests that one might make judgements of taste and beauty in regards to food:

So far as the interest of inclination in the case of the agreeable goes, everyone says: Hunger is the best sauce; and people with a healthy appetite relish everything, so long as it is something they can eat. Such delight, consequently, gives no indication of taste having anything to do with choice. Only when people’s needs have been satisfied can we tell who among the crowd has taste or not.\(^{275}\)

Kant is explicit that the agreeable is a category that “applies not only to the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat, but to what may with anyone be agreeable to eye or ear”.\(^{276}\) Most telling are the various examples of everyday objects that Kant affirms as beautiful or capable of inciting judgments of beauty. Examples include: roses, men, various animals, buildings, even wallpaper.\(^{277}\) A close reading of Kant yields a continuum of aesthetic judgment, with everyday objects occupying a variety of positions along the spectrum.

As a final point on Kant, recall that the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable seems at least partially based on the empirical observation that we are compelled to argue about some of our aesthetic judgments and not others.\(^{278}\) This proves very weak ground on which to build a necessary connection between everyday aesthetic objects and judgments of the agreeable. Consider that, while I may not feel inclined to argue with a friend regarding the

\(^{275}\) Kant, 42.
\(^{276}\) Kant, 43.
\(^{277}\) The first example can be found in Kant, 46. The last four examples are to be found in Kant, 60. Some of the cited examples are of adherent beauty, and so not totally pure, but others are beautiful in the “free” sense.
\(^{278}\) Kant, 45.
aesthetic status of a particular ingredient, a food critic or a chef could present us with a number of culinary situations in which she would be shocked to hear of dissatisfaction or negative aesthetic judgment, or else would consider our taste deficient. The same goes for perfumers and their ability to create beautiful objects of olfactory experience. The empirical observation that we tend to argue for our judgments regarding paintings but not meals is plausibly based on the contingencies of aesthetic training and valuing, not conceptual differences in aesthetic status between art objects and those of the everyday.

4.2 The Practical Problem

I have shown that Bullough’s psychical distance does not present insurmountable trouble for the everyday aesthete hoping to work from within an attitude theory. I have demonstrated that we do not have to depart from Bullough in presenting attitude theory as flexible enough to account for the phenomenology of those ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences that are not marked by any sudden or intense feeling. Furthermore, Bullough’s account readily accepts a vast range of experiences as potentially aesthetic and is noteworthy for its inclusion of the lower senses as sites of such experiences. The everyday aesthetician concerned with our ordinary aesthetic experiences involving touch, taste and smell need not worry that an attitude theory will be incapable of accounting for such phenomena.

However, I have yet to account for the fact that many of our ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences are potentially understood as practically-loaded. My negative assessment of bleak and downcast weather might have been significantly different had I not been planning on gardening that day. My positive assessment of an elegant set of brand new cutlery might have not been so had the first few forks snapped in two upon use. When I experience my room as dirty or my facial hair as disheveled, I am compelled to clean and to groom, respectively.

Given aesthetic attitude theory’s historical emphasis on moving away from those concrete and practical elements that seem to pervade our ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences,
it should come as no surprise that it looks to have trouble accounting for the relevant phenomena. This is the Practical Problem. It is worth mentioning that for many aestheticians, past and present, this is not a problem but an advantage. For instance, one might take the view that we would not be misrepresenting our aesthetic experience of the messy room if we did not make any mention of the practical implications that accompany it. This is because those implications could, on some theory, be described as not properly belonging to the aesthetic experience. They might be construed as considerations that arise out of the aesthetic experience or occur alongside it.

There is also a prescriptive version of this broad position. An aesthetician holding such a view might assess Bullough’s theory as adequate precisely because it asks us to distance away from moral, intellectual, or practical considerations. The prescriptive position could maintain that these factors cannot be pulled out of our descriptions of some aesthetic experiences, but that they should nevertheless be bracketed or eliminated in favour of making the experience more aesthetically pure. This sounds closer to Bullough’s position if we remind ourselves of the positive dimension of psychical distance.

I remain agnostic as to whether the prescriptive position is correct. Again, I think a version of the aesthetic attitude theory can be presented such that it successfully accounts for the ordinary everyday cases no matter what position we should eventually adopt regarding the appropriateness of practical, moral, or intellectual considerations. But I take seriously Saito’s claim that “[i]n our everyday, normal interaction with a utilitarian object, the aesthetic and the practical are experienced as fully integrated and we lose some dimension of its aesthetic value if we surgically remove its functional value”. Saito thinks that considering the design of an object as it is related to functionality need not put us in competition with the potential inciting of an

---

279 Saito, 26.
The aesthetic experience, at its best, seems to isolate both us and the object from the flow of experience...But we must not ignore an obvious and yet important fact: both the aesthetic percipient and the object have a history which extends beyond the duration of the aesthetic experience. Though the percipient has no concern for things past and future, he of course enters into the experience with the imprint of all of his past history upon him. He has a certain amount of knowledge, certain beliefs and values, and certain emotional predispositions. How he responds to the object is largely determined by what he has experienced in the past...Now notice a curious fact about these memories, images, and bits of knowledge which enter into the aesthetic

---

280 Saito, 27.
281 Ibid.
experience – they are not embodied in the aesthetic object itself, but arise rather from the percipient’s previous experience…But this creates an interesting and difficult problem. The aesthetic attitude, we have said, is concerned with the object alone, to experience whatever it may offer to awareness. Does it not follow that if we permit personal memories and images, and extraneous items of knowledge to enter into the experience, it thereby becomes unaesthetic?...Can it be that all of their knowledge about the work gets in the way of attending to it and enjoying it aesthetically?  

I wrote in Chapter Two that Stolnitz’s answer to both questions is: not necessarily. With the help of a psychological experiment done by Bullough, Stolnitz conceives of two types of association between a potential object of aesthetic experience and “personal memories and images, and extraneous items of knowledge”. The subject of Bullough’s experiment is the variety of associations people make in response to perception of single colors. Bullough identifies two types of association. The first is “illegitimate from the aesthetic point of view” because it overtakes the experience such that our attention is almost entirely directed toward the association and not its cause. The object of experience “almost completely loses its already endangered position in the field of consciousness”. The second type of association occurs when “an actual fusion may be effected, so completely that the [object] appears as the direct expression of the association, or, for that matter, the association as the expression of the [object]”. Stolnitz agrees that this type of association is aesthetically legitimate because the percipient keeps “the [object] attentively in the focus of consciousness” all the while fusing it with the association. This fusion is consistent with disinterested attention because it “re-enforces the focusing attention upon the object”.

---

283 Stolnitz, Aesthetic, 52-53.
285 Bullough, “Perceptive”, 432.
286 Bullough, “Perceptive”, 454.
287 Bullough, “Perceptive”, 455.
288 Ibid.
289 Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 55.
Stolnitz presents concrete examples based on I. A. Richards’ collection of undergraduate students’ reactions to various poems. Stolnitz cites one student’s dissatisfaction with a poem’s religious content as an example of an irrelevant association. Stolnitz states that “[t]his student has not read the poem ‘sympathetically’...He has failed to inhibit his religious convictions, which interpose themselves between him and the poem. He has therefore failed to experience the imagery and emotions to be found in the poem when it is apprehended aesthetically”. Another student’s response involves describing an image that came to mind while reading the poem, that of a cathedral. Stolnitz considers this association legitimate on the grounds that “[t]he poem speaks explicitly of prayer and adoration, e.g., ‘a place to pray’...We can also see how a ‘forest-aisle’ of ‘erect and solemn trees’ may suggest the image of the ‘aisle of a great cathedral’”. The association is “congruous with both the verbal meaning of the poem and the emotions and mood which it expresses. It does not divert attention away from the poem. Rather, it occurs in the course of attentive reading”. Stolnitz goes on to reference two other illegitimate associations made, one to the sport of rugby, which appears nowhere in the poem, and the other to pine trees, which betrays a misreading of the poem on account of specific reference to leaves on the trees.

Recall that Stolnitz insists on disinterestedness while maintaining that, “in concrete experience, practical and aesthetic interest can, and frequently do, coexist with each other”. Again, this is because he proceeds under the, I think reasonable, assumption that attention is a matter of degree, and that, during the course of a given experience, we can hold two different attitudes – even opposing ones – turning our attention to the objects of experience first in one way, then in another. Experiences can be predominantly aesthetic but also partway practical. However, the situation is significantly more complicated than this. For not only can practical

292 Ibid.
293 Ibid.
considerations be attended to over the course of an experience that also admits of aesthetic qualities, but those practical considerations often have an effect on the aesthetic portion of the experience. Consider that “[w]hat an object such as an axe or a railroad locomotive is designed to do, is frequently integral to its aesthetic value”.\textsuperscript{295} If the use of an object counts as the sort of knowledge that was earlier described as potentially extraneous, which I think it reasonable to assume, then we need an account of the conditions under which practical considerations can legitimately effect the aesthetic value of an object. It is presumably through the fusion discussed above that “[a]esthetic interest is enhanced [when] the total appearance of the object, its color, shape, and so on, bring out its usefulness”.\textsuperscript{296}

One problem with the Stolnitzean picture is that we are not told enough about this fusing activity. We are given conditions for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate fusion, but not much in the way of explanation of the fusing process itself.\textsuperscript{297} Furthermore, what we are told is too underdeveloped to be of much use. I am in general agreement with Stolnitz regarding the claim that some types of associations are more favourable than others. Some ways of attending to an object pull our attention too far away from aesthetic considerations, thus engendering an experience of a different variety. Still, Stolnitz’s examples of illegitimate associations are misleading if the goal is to identify considerations that thwart aesthetic experience if fused to the object. If the first student’s only reason for disliking the poem is on account of its religious content, then I suspect a “sympathetic” reading was not undertaken. But it’s not clear to me that a careful balancing act, one where careful consideration is given to one’s convictions as well as the details of the poem, is wholly impossible. The same thought holds for the student who thinks of rugby when reading the poem. While I am inclined to think that a better interpretation of the

\textsuperscript{295} Stolnitz, Aesthetics, 46.
\textsuperscript{296} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{297} George Dickie makes this same point: “It is not clear how something could fuse with a single color, but “fusion” is one of those words in aesthetics which is rarely defined” in “Myth”, 61.
poem rests on associations more in line with the words on the page, I am not convinced that we
want to consider more far-fetched interpretations as decidedly anti-aesthetic. It is a truism that
most works of art can be interpreted in various ways even on the closest of readings, viewings,
etc. We should often want to stay as close as possible to the object of experience, but aesthetic
sympathy admits of degrees.

A closer look at Bullough’s original article bears this out. Venturing a final answer as to
the aesthetic legitimacy or illegitimacy of association, Bullough states that it rests “on the degree
of fusion which can be reached by the individual between the [object]-impression and the
associated content”.298 Bullough distinguishes between subjective and objective associations. The
former are the kind that the subject takes to be a result of their own idiosyncratic experience. My
judgment of a particular song might be effected by it having played in the background during a
particularly embarrassing moment in my life. This is the sort of association I do not expect others
to have, and there is a good chance, says Bullough, that I will be unwilling to give my judgment
much credence due to the subjective nature of the association.299 Objective associations are those
that I have reason to believe will be shared by a large amount of people, such as that between a
blue patch of colour and the sky. We might, on this basis, consider all subjective associations as
illegitimate. After all, “[t]he more ‘subjective’ and the more personally tinged, and consequently
the more emotionally potent the suggested content is, the more obstinately does it refuse to
become subordinate to the [object]-impression”.300 On the other hand, “in the case of [an
objective] connexion as [green: nature], an actual fusion may be effected”.301

---

298 Bullough, “Perceptive”, 454.
299 Bullough, “Perceptive”, 454. Bullough writes that this is especially true in cases where the judgment is
negative. If pleasure is had in connection with the subjective association, we are less likely to question the
legitimacy of the judgment.
300 Ibid.
301 Bullough, “Perceptive, 455.
There is, however, a crucial second factor involved in fusion, besides just the “possibility, dependent indeed upon the [associated] content, of subordinating the content to the [object]-impression”. That crucial second factor is the varying ability of the percipient to fuse the association with the object. Bullough expresses this ability as “the effective control of attention and…an especially highly developed ‘emotional imagination’”. The important consequence of this ability is that the subjective content that Stolnitz seems ready to jettison is, theoretically, just as capable of being fused to the object. Again, we are presented with a way of understanding the aesthetic legitimacy of associations as being, in principle, largely dependent on the psychical abilities of the subject. That objective associations prove more successful is a matter of contingent psychological and aesthetic abilities, habits, training, etc. It is only after this power of the subject is introduced that Bullough is ready to state that no hard and fast rule can be laid down concerning the aesthetic value of association in general. Provided the fusion succeeds, I can see no reason for denying this aesthetic value. It undoubtedly may help to impart significance and life to the [object], without endangering – thanks to the fusion – the self-contained character of the experience.

To be clear, I do not wish to argue that the examples Stolnitz provides are actually legitimate aesthetic associations. I merely want to point out that, according to the very article from which Stolnitz borrows his framework, they may well be. Furthermore, there remain the yet unresolved issues regarding, first, whether it really is fusing which accounts for Stolnitz’s desire to rescue some of the practical in aesthetic experience and, second, what exactly fusion amounts to.

I hope to have shown that we have some reason to view 2A-style aesthetic attitude theories as serious contenders for understanding aesthetic phenomena. They are especially attractive candidates for theorizing about our ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences. The
shortcomings that were identified by Leddy and Saito were based on misunderstandings, or else overcome by some tinkering. Still, there is a better account waiting on the sidelines. I base this largely off of recent work by Bence Nanay, who borrows insights from perceptual psychology to lend credence to the much-maligned aesthetic attitude. Unlike the views of Stolnitz and Brand, this alternative account does not require the presence of two separate types of attention in order to account for those aesthetic experiences which are practically-loaded. Consequently, it does not require the mysterious fusing process.

Nanay’s project is similar to that of Stolnitz and Brand’s. He is interested in “[singling] out an important aspect of some paradigmatic cases of aesthetic experience: the way we exercise our attention”. Nanay is quick to carefully limit his argument’s scope. Aesthetic experiences are enormously varied, ranging from “experiences of overwhelming beauty…of strong emotions…of strong identification with a fictional character…and so on”. His subsequent claims are meant to track a relevant feature of only those aesthetic experiences which Nanay takes to be paradigmatic: those that are “devoid of practical utility…with [an] emphasis on [formal qualities such as] curves and angles. And also the seeing of something familiar in a new light, with fresh eyes”. Despite his focus on the sorts of supposedly paradigmatic aesthetic experiences which cast shadows on everyday aesthetic phenomena, it should be noted that Nanay recognizes many of the aesthetic insights illustrated over the course of this thesis. For instance, he assumes all of the following: that some aesthetic experiences are fleeting and not overwhelming, that some aesthetic experiences are not of ‘beauty’ as traditionally understood, that we do not have complete control over our aesthetic experiences, and that they

---

307 Nanay, 96.  
308 Ibid.  
309 Nanay, 98.  
310 Nanay, 100.  
311 Ibid.
are to a certain extent dependent on factors besides just the object, such as the conditions of viewing,\textsuperscript{312} that we are capable of aesthetically experiencing many things besides artworks,\textsuperscript{313} and, furthermore, besides objects of perceptual experience.\textsuperscript{314}

Nanay begins, like Stolnitz, by acknowledging that different ways of attending to our environment result in radically different perceptual experiences. Nanay’s crucial move is the application of the “old and, within perceptual psychology, mainstream distinction between focused and distributed attention” to aesthetic experience.\textsuperscript{315} Briefly, the distinction is between attention marked by nearly or totally exclusive focus on a particular part of a visual scene and attention distributed among various parts.\textsuperscript{316} In addition to this distinction, Nanay adds another “conceptual one about what it is we are attending to: to entities or to properties”.\textsuperscript{317} Consider the difference between attending to the vase in your living room, an entity, and now its green colour, a property of an entity. Just as attending to entities can be focused or distributed, so can attending to properties.\textsuperscript{318} Next, imagine attending to a single object, such as a painting. My attention can be focused on just the colors of the painting, a single property. Alternatively, it can be distributed among various properties of the painting, including not just the colors but also the lines and shapes. The following passage illustrates the consequences of the above considerations:

\begin{quote}
[T]he two cross-cutting distinctions (between focused versus distributed attention with regards to objects and between focused versus distributed attention with regards to properties) give us
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{312} Nanay, 101.
\textsuperscript{313} Nanay, 102.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{317} Nanay, 106.
\textsuperscript{318} Ibid.
four different ways in which we can exercise our attention. Our attention can be:

(i) Distributed with regards to objects and focused with regards to properties,

(ii) Distributed with regards to objects and distributed with regards to properties,

(iii) Focused with regards to objects and focused with regards to properties,

(iv) Focused with regards to objects and distributed with regards to properties.

An example of (i) is the way we exercise our attention in visual search experiments or in tasks where we need to sort through a pile of red and blue socks. In these cases, we are attending to lots of objects, but only to one property of these objects (in this example, their colour). In the case of (ii) our attention is all over the place: it is not fixated either on an object or on any given property: it wanders aimlessly. I take this to be a fairly common way of attending: this is what you are likely to do when you have to wait at the doctor’s office and you forgot to bring anything to read. Another fairly common way of attending is (iii), where we are focusing on a specific property of a specific object: the performance of most perceptually guided actions presupposes attention of this kind (Hayhoe and Ballard, 2005). Finally, (iv), which seems much less common to me, is an experience where our attention is focused and distributed at the same time: it is focused inasmuch as we are attending to one object only. But it is distributed across the properties of this object.319

According to Nanay, it is this fourth kind of attending that deserves the title of ‘aesthetic attention’. Our usual form of attention is distributed with regards to objects. Furthermore, due to the limited nature of our attention, we are more likely to attend to a small number of properties.320 Aesthetic attention is therefore ‘special’ insofar as it focuses on a single object but is expansive with regards to its properties.

319 Nanay, 107-108.
While Nanay is hesitant to equate his aesthetic attention with disinterestedness, if disinterestedness is to mean a complete lack of interest in the object of experience, he nevertheless thinks that something of the Kantian framework is preserved. According to Nanay, “[p]ractical interest in an object…could be described as attention focused on a limited number of its features – the ones we are interested in from a practical point of view. It is only when we are free from practical interests that we have a chance to experience the object in an aesthetic manner…Thus, we can say that aesthetic interest is not really disinterest but rather distributed interest”. At first blush, it seems as though Nanay’s account has the potential for reproducing the stereotypical assumptions about aesthetic attitude theory that this thesis has aimed to fight off, namely, that it can only account for extraordinary formalist-leaning aesthetic experience cut off from the concrete and practical aspects of our lives. Nevertheless, Nanay’s argument proves useful for advancing my project and providing a plausible alternative to the Stolnitzean 2A view. This involves widening Nanay’s aesthetic attention to include not just distributed attention to the perceptually given properties of an object, but also a whole host of other phenomenologically given properties of the object-as-experienced. Nanay is explicit in his assumption that one can have an aesthetic experience of objects that are not perceptually given. Yet, his account is rooted firmly in perceptual psychology, and so goes no further. I propose that we can understand aesthetic attention as involving focused attention with regards to a “sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object” and distributed attention with regards to that object’s perceptual and phenomenal properties. This phenomenological addition is meant to capture the way in which aesthetic experience is often accompanied by an openness on the part of the subject to be variously effected by the object, to allow her mind to wander imaginatively through associations that spring out of the work.

321 Nanay, 109.
322 Ibid.
323 Beardsley, “Experience, 5.
Notice how close this brings us to Bullough’s and Leddy’s views. Bullough was interested in maintaining both the ‘objective’, so perceptual, features of the object of experience and the ‘subjective’, so phenomenal, features. The perceptual properties of the fog are crucial to the aesthetic experience, but so is the fear that is supposed to be bracketed and then re-inserted. Leddy’s position runs along similar phenomenological lines. When Leddy says that his position requires beginning “with conscious experience and then analyzing the structure of that experience”, we are to understand that as including the associations that pervade some of our aesthetic experiences.324 The same goes for Leddy’s characterization of Bullough’s psychical distancing view as one based on “imaginative perception”, which is supposed to allow “focus on the symbolic or content-oriented aspects of the object perceived”.325 We also saw a similar claim in Alison’s description of the aesthetic attitude. He writes, “That state of mind…is most favourable to the emotions of taste…in which the attention is…to leave us open to all the impressions, which the objects that are before us can produce”.326

It is worth noting that this is not wholly out of step with some of the psychological literature Nanay cites. For instance, Chun, Golomb, and Turk-Browne’s “A Taxonomy of External and Internal Attention” (2011) remarks that attention is now the organizing concept behind a wide variety of psychological work, applying “to almost all cognitive operations beyond perception”.327 In arriving at a taxonomy to organize the work on attention, the authors propose a “distinction between selecting information coming through the senses and information that is already represented in the mind, recalled from long-term memory or being maintained by working memory”.328 This latter type of selecting is called internal attention, as opposed to

324 Leddy, 129.
325 Leddy, 131-132.
326 Alison, 10-11.
328 Chun, Golomb, & Turk-Browne, 76.
external, and “refers to the selection and modulation of internally generated information, such as the contents of working memory, long-term memory, task sets, or response selection”. While I am far from being able to present an account of internal attention that is empirically backed and fit for my philosophical purposes, I hope that what has been cited above lends some credence to the idea that extending Nanay’s perceptual insights into the cognitive domain is not far-fetched.

The addition of this phenomenological bent to Nanay’s psycho-aesthetic insights has several benefits. First, it preserves Nanay’s attempt at specifying a kind of attention which we have reason to think is unique and often indicative of aesthetic experience. Nanay writes that his formulation of aesthetic attention cannot guarantee an aesthetic experience. It might be necessary but it is not sufficient. Attending in a way that is focused with regards to an object but distributed with regards to properties can lead to experiences of a non-aesthetic variety. Still, the phenomenologically-enriched version of Nanay’s aesthetic attention provides an attractive framework from which to continue attempts to understand the aesthetic dimensions of our lives, everyday and otherwise. A second benefit is that it widens the scope of Nanay’s original position. While I think it prudent to concede, with Nanay, that the large variation in aesthetic experiences might not be captured entirely by any framework on offer right now, including aesthetic attitude theory, my proposed revision to his aesthetic attention makes it better fit for the task. By extending the ‘focused with regard to the object, distributed with regard to its properties’ model to include properties that are not necessarily perceptually available, we avoid damning aesthetic attitude theory to the limited role of accounting for incredibly specific kinds of aesthetic experience. A third and related benefit is the simplicity that the account affords us. Borrowing the insights of perceptual psychology and phenomenology-based aesthetic theories eliminates the need for explaining the mysterious fusing activity of 2A accounts. Instead of accounting for moral or practical associations by arguing for some merging process between two separate kinds of

329 Chun, Golomb, & Turk-Browne, 77.
attention, we can posit a unique aesthetic attention. Furthermore, we can do this while maintaining a difference between aesthetic attention and practical attention. Again, the latter, for Nanay, “could be described as attention focused on a limited number of [the object’s] features”.\(^{330}\) Given the distributed nature of aesthetic attention, those same features can show up in our aesthetic experience as well. The difference is that now they appear in a more nuanced way, being delicately balanced against other perceptually- and phenomenologically-given features of the object. Such balance might be difficult to achieve. It will depend on the object, the association, the conditions of the experience, and the aesthetic abilities of the subject. But this is just the same story we were given by Bullough, the story that inspired the Stolnitzean view. The difference now is that we have a single kind of attention, one capable of carrying the theoretical load without positing any fusing process in need of explanation.

### 4.3 The Aesthetic Attitude, a Myth?

Having looked at a number of aesthetic attitude theories on offer, we are now well-situated to deal with a major factor in the framework’s decline in reputation: George Dickie’s highly influential piece “The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude”. Gary Kemp was correct when he wrote that “Dickie’s objection to…the theory is simple, and, if cogent, devastating”.\(^{331}\) While history seems to suggest that Dickie’s objections were accepted by the philosophical community, taking this for granted would be grossly misleading. There are a number of resources from which the aesthetic attitude theorist can draw in order to combat the prevailing assumption that Dickie’s project was successful.\(^{332}\) If this thesis is to make any positive contribution to the aesthetic attitude theory, it should present a way to meet Dickie’s challenge.

---

\(^{330}\) Nanay, 109.

\(^{331}\) Kemp, 393.

Dickie begins by distinguishing between strong and weak versions of the aesthetic attitude. Strong versions, like Bullough’s psychical distancing, argue for a special kind of action required on the part of the percipient. Weak versions, like that found in Stolnitz, require “an ordinary kind of action (attending) done in a certain way (disinterestedly)”. Dickie proceeds to tackle both versions along similar lines. To the Bullough-style attitude theorist who claims we undertake the activity of distancing when experiencing an object aesthetically, Dickie remarks, “I do not recall committing any such special actions or of being induced into any special state, and I have no reason to suspect that I am atypical in this respect”. Dickie anticipates that the distance-theorist will reply by pointing to the ways the aesthetic experience differs from others. He takes potential distance-theorist rejoinders to look like these: “But are you not usually oblivious to noises and sights other than those of the play or to the marks on the wall around the painting?” and “But surely you put the play (painting, sunset) ‘out of gear’ with your practical interests?” Dickie is happy to answer ‘yes’ to both questions. The trouble for the aesthetic attitude theorist is that both questions seem to reduce to a check on whether the percipient is paying any attention to the artwork, the landscape, or the kitchen cabinets. In Dickie’s words: “[These questions seem] to me to be a very odd way of asking (by employing the technical metaphor "out of gear") if I attended to the play rather than thought about my wife or wondered how they managed to move the scenery about. Why not ask me straight out if I paid attention?” The suggestion is that the distance-theorist introduces an unnecessary philosophical construction in the form of the aesthetic attitude, all for the purpose of inquiring as to whether or not the percipient was paying attention to whatever was supposed to be the object of an aesthetic experience.

---

335 Ibid.
336 Ibid.
The attack on the Stolnitz-style weak version is similar. Dickie begins with the claim that appeal to disinterested attention only makes sense if there is an interested attention to contrast it with.\textsuperscript{337} Keeping this contrast in mind is crucial for Dickie because it exposes the weak version as based not on a perceptual distinction between different kinds listening or viewing, for instance, but between the motivation or intention behind the perceiving.\textsuperscript{338} The result of this way of understanding the disinterested/interested distinction is that we end up with nothing but a more convoluted way of describing some percipients’ waning attention, or lack thereof. Considering the case of Jones who “listens to a piece of music for the purpose of being able to analyze and describe it on an examination the next day and Smith [who] listens to the same music with no such ulterior purpose”, Dickie concludes that, while there is a difference in motive, there is no difference in the kind of attention. “There is only one way to listen to (to attend to) music,” Dickie writes, “although the listening may be more or less attentive and there may be a variety of motives, intentions, and reasons for doing so and a variety of ways of being distracted from the music”.\textsuperscript{339} The same goes for the viewer of a painting who proceeds to associate the artwork with his grandfather. Dickie has a simple diagnosis for all of the trouble associations caused for Stolnitz: “What attitude-aestheticians are calling attention to is the occurrence of irrelevant associations which distract the viewer from the painting or whatever. But distraction is not a special kind of attention, it is a kind of inattention.”\textsuperscript{340} Similarly, attending to the biographical aspects of a poem and its creator is just one way of making a conscious decision about which parts of the poem to pay attention to and which to ignore.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{337} Dickie, “Myth”, 58. We saw this same contrast made when discussing Peg Brand’s work in Chapter Three.
\textsuperscript{338} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{341} Dickie, “Myth”, 60.
The most fruitful argumentative avenue for the aesthetic attitude theorist is to deny the claim that there is just one kind of attention with varying degrees of distraction. Kemp makes this point when he writes:

“It seems straightforward that there can be cases of full attention to a work of art which is not the sort of attention exercised in aesthetic experience. There is a distinction to be drawn amongst cases of full undistracted attention to the work of art that is too evident simply to be denied, which must therefore be accommodated or reconstructed in some way or other.”

Consider the cases of Jones and Smith again. Jones listens to a piece of music with an ulterior, academic purpose. Smith listens without such a purpose. Kemp thinks it odd that Dickie takes Jones’ listening as a case of distraction. If Jones is doing his homework correctly, he is certainly attending to the music, perhaps with more focus than Smith. Jones’ listening might be “a diversion from the potential aesthetic experience but not a diversion from the music”. It seems false that that there is only one way to attend, insofar as that is meant to be a “substantive psychological claim”. As examples, Kemp cites listening to music “for modulations— as opposed not only to listening more generally for enjoyment but as opposed to listening for changes of metre or rhythm...[or] searching a Jackson Pollock for faces”. Of course, Dickie can concede that the attention is the same. His claim was just that what distinguishes Jones from Smith is a motivational or intentional factor. Does it follow from this that the aesthetic attitude is a myth? Kemp thinks not. According to him, it is enough that the theory posit the motivational/intentional distinction. It does not matter that the theory flounders as a perceptual distinction, for it still makes an important contribution by distinguishing pragmatically motivated attention from “close attention which is not so motivated”.

342 Kemp, 393.
343 Ibid.
344 Kemp, 394.
345 Ibid.
346 Kemp, 394.
I am sympathetic to the claim that there is an intentional component to some applications of the aesthetic attitude, as in phenomenological accounts like Leddy’s. Surely Kemp is correct when he writes that “not all experiential distinctions are pure perceptual distinctions”.

Nevertheless, Nanay’s work shows that Kemp prematurely acquiesces to Dickie’s conclusion that there is no relevant perceptual distinction to be made. After all, Nanay’s whole argument is premised on the recognition that there are at least four different ways of attending. Nanay correctly identifies the key assumption in Dickie: “that there is one kind of attention: [it] can have different motives and it can be stronger or weaker but we cannot talk about different types”.

For all the simplicity of Dickie’s original criticism, Nanay does him one better with regard to there only being one type of attention: “[T]his is just a false claim. There are a number of ways of attending (overt/covert, endogenous/exogenous, focused/distributed, etc…)”. So, while Kemp may be correct in arguing that the aesthetic attitude theory survives as a motivational/intentional distinction, such measures are not necessary to fight off Dickie’s influential but ultimately misguided criticisms.

347 Kemp, 395.
348 Nanay, 104-105.
349 Nanay, 105.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: A New Hurrah

I began this thesis by characterizing my work as lending a hand in the fight against an art-centric aesthetics. The ‘artwork’ is an important aesthetic explanandum, but it should not limit the field. There is a plethora of natural, theoretical, and everyday objects that are worthy of aesthetic study. Occasionally, aesthetic theorizing about these sorts of objects provides a check on frameworks that exhibit an ignorance of anything but the artwork. I will have considered my work a success if the reader previously closed off to the possibility of aesthetics beyond the artwork finds him or herself doubting that commitment. I will have also considered my work a success if the already aesthetically-liberal reader finds him or herself having aesthetic experiences of objects they did not think they could find beautiful.

The above project was made doubly difficult due to my insistence that the everyday aesthetician look to the unfashionable aesthetic attitude theory for a fruitful way of backing her aesthetic commitments. Consequently, the goal of the thesis became two-pronged. First, convince the reader that there exists a plausible theoretical framework for understanding aesthetic experience as extending beyond art. Second, convince the reader that my chosen framework, aesthetic attitude theory, is not inadequate to the task as some of the literature, everyday and otherwise, would have one believe.

The first order of business was to gain an understanding of the historical trajectory of aesthetic attitude theory, and this was achieved over the course of Chapter Two. We saw the birth of the concept in eighteenth century British philosophers looking to oppose the sort of ethical egoism made popular by Hobbes. Intent on combating views rooted in self-interest, Shaftesbury introduced the notion of disinterestedness as a driving force behind his moral and aesthetic position. Disinterestedness proceeds to evolve over the course of the century, coming to mean a
lack of interest in reward or punishment, the achievement of goals, and the acquisition of knowledge. By the time we reach Kant, disinterestedness is already indicative of a state of mind in fundamental opposition to moral, political, practical, and intellectual attitudes. Kant refines the view by specifying the conditions and characteristics of aesthetic judgment. Among these is the still-operative disinterestedness, which in Kant appears as a lack of care or delight in the existence of the object of experience. A crucial addition in the Kantian iteration of the aesthetic attitude is the distinction between aesthetic judgments of beauty, which are characteristically disinterested, and aesthetic judgments of the agreeable, which create or perpetuate desire and inclination for the object of experience. It is perhaps on the basis of the mistaken assumption that agreeable experiences cannot be legitimately aesthetic that everyday phenomena end up excluded from aesthetic theorizing. In Bullough we saw a number of important developments. One example is the extent to which Bullough makes room for subjective affections in the act of psychically distancing. Equally significant is the claim that any object of experience whatsoever can be psychically distanced. Finally, Bullough’s discussion of the beautiful, the poetical, and the agreeable lends credence to the view that, at best, this distinction marks degrees of intensity in aesthetic pleasure, not differences in kind. Jerome Stolnitz is presented as our most recent flag-bearer. While his account does not stray too far from Kant or Bullough, it is notable for its use of ‘attention’ as the operative psychological mechanism behind aesthetic experiences. The distinction between interested and disinterested attention proves essential in the discussions of later chapters, as does the idea of practical considerations ‘fusing’ with aesthetic ones.

Having established a background in the aesthetic attitude theory, I turned to an examination of its role in the everyday aesthetics literature. The work of Thomas Leddy was especially useful in this regard. My Chapter Three includes an exegesis of Leddy’s everyday aesthetic theory, one of the best and most recent on offer. Over the course of this examination, I took the opportunity to write about the dialectical relationship between the everyday and the
artwork, between our inspiring environment and the artists that make use of that inspiration. Explaining Leddy’s theory also necessitated detours through the views of several other influential philosophers. Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological method proved to be interestingly similar, if not identical, to the sort of psychical activities indicative of views like Bullough’s. Monroe Beardsley’s work on aesthetic experience pushes us to question just how promiscuous we can be in considering something a legitimate aesthetic object, while Paul Ziff provides good reasons for thinking that the limits of artworks are not the limits of the aesthetic. Allen Carlson provides us with yet another useful metaphor to describe what it is we are doing when we select an object of aesthetic experience or, in Carlson’s terms, compose it. This despite Carlson’s insistence that some materials are not appropriate to compose with, a view we deemed too conservative in the same way Beardsley’s was. Finally, Leddy’s work affords us our first opportunity to deal with potential problems in positing an aesthetic attitude. While enough of a fan of aesthetic attitude theories to provide explicit endorsements of the view, Leddy nevertheless thinks it too phenomenologically burdensome to account for ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences. It does not seem correct to say that all of our aesthetic experiences involve some significant and phenomenologically-felt shift in attitude. In George Dickie’s words, “I do not recall committing any such special actions or of being induced into any special state, and I have no reason to suspect that I am atypical in this respect”.\footnote{Dickie, “Myth”, 57.} A second worry comes by way of Yuriko Saito, who thinks that some ordinary everyday aesthetic experiences are inextricably tied to practical considerations. Consequently, aesthetic attitude theory is doomed to a limited role since its defining characteristic is the existence of an attitude thought to be in competition with the practical.

I turned to addressing those concerns in Chapter Four. Leddy’s issues with the aesthetic attitude theory were deflected mostly by reference to Bullough’s psychical distance. A closer
reading of Bullough demonstrates that the view is flexible enough to dodge Leddy’s complaint that the aesthetic attitude is too phenomenologically burdensome to account for some everyday aesthetic experiences. Psychical distance can account for low-level and lower sense aesthetic experiences just as easily as it can for sublime and rapturous experiences of storms and artworks. However, the problem of reconciling the aesthetic attitude with Saito’s ordinary, everyday, practically-loaded aesthetic experiences remained. Bullough’s account would not do, for it was all too explicit in the need to bracket the practical. We found a way around this problem by appealing to Jerome Stolnitz and Peggy Brand, both of whom argued that switching between interested and disinterested forms of attention could be relevant or even fruitful for aesthetic experience. Uncomfortable with settling for a view that requires us to continue locating the aesthetic attitude with disinterestedness, I introduced the work of Bence Nanay. Nanay argues that certain distinctions in perceptual psychology form the basis for a plausible construal of the aesthetic attitude. I proposed extending this account beyond the perceptual domain, into portions of experiences that are better described as cognitive or phenomenological. On such an account, there is no need to posit a switching to and from a non-aesthetic attitude in order to gain the aesthetic benefits of practical or moral or intellectual considerations. Instead, the aesthetic attitude is just the one that already allows such considerations to play a role in experience, at least to some degree.

In making a case for everyday aesthetic experiences, I hope to have also suggested a direction towards a new hurrah for the aesthetic attitude theory. This is a theory worth defending, despite what the table-of-contents of various anthologies might suggest. Part of its appeal is just how natural it makes accounting for everyday aesthetic phenomena look. If we take seriously the thought that anything whatever can be the object of an aesthetic experience, as I have tried to show, then we should strongly consider the thesis that it is some sort of attitude or activity that we engage in that makes these objects worthy of our attention. After all, they are so worthy. Sherri
Irvin remarks that if our aesthetic lives are to be restricted to encounters with art, many of us live those lives impoverished. She takes this to be false, as do I. In fact, our aesthetic lives are immensely rich. It is only when we let this richness pervade our philosophizing that we might begin to take Dewey’s challenge seriously and really do aesthetics “in the raw”.

351 Irvin, 29-30.
References


