

IS PSYCHOLOGY RELEVANT TO AESTHETICS? A SYMPOSIUM

INTRODUCTION

BENCE NANAY AND MURRAY SMITH

The symposium published here began life as a somewhat unusual ‘author meets critics’ session at the British Society of Aesthetics annual conference, at St Anne’s College, Oxford, on 16 September 2016 – unusual inasmuch as the focus was not on a single book, but on two books exploring different but related themes. In addition, rather than encompassing all the issues these two books address, the session focused on one general question that both books explore in some depth: is psychology relevant to aesthetics?

When George Dickie posed the very same question in 1962, he answered with a resounding ‘no’, and many others have taken and still hold a similar view. But a naturalistic approach to aesthetics, drawing on the knowledge and methods of the sciences and especially the cognitive sciences, has a long history and is experiencing a resurgence in contemporary aesthetics. Dickie, who was responding to an earlier wave of naturalism over the first half the twentieth century, concludes his essay with a kind of invitation and challenge: no one, he argues, has ‘made clear how any specific psychological information is relevant to [aesthetic] problems. Not only has this matter not been made clear in any specific instance, but no one appears to have any idea what sort of procedure should be followed to establish the relevance relation under discussion.’¹ The BSA ‘double-header’ panel took up Dickie’s invitation, exploring two distinctive, positive answers to the question he had posed.

Bence Nanay’s *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* explores various ways in which the philosophy of perception is a useful tool in relation to a number of questions in aesthetics, with special emphasis on the concept of attention.² Nanay argues that attention plays a crucial but underexplored role in a number

We can count ourselves lucky, at least three times over, in relation to the symposium published here. We were fortunate first of all, and above all, to find two expert and generous commentators in Sherri Irvin and Elisabeth Schellekens. Our next wave of luck came with the acceptance of the panel by the British Society of Aesthetics conference committee, chaired by David Davies and Dawn Wilson. Fortune favoured us a third time with the invitation to publish the papers from the symposium in *Estetika*; our thanks to Jakub Stejskal for shepherding the papers through the submission and editorial process, and to Hanne Appelqvist for giving her blessing to the plan as the incoming editor of the journal.

¹ George Dickie, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?’, *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962): 302.

² Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of aesthetic phenomena, including our engagement with art. In order to apply the conceptual apparatus of the philosophy of perception, including those parts of it concerned with attention, however, we need to be conversant with the psychological findings about attention and about perception and the mind in general. In other words, Nanay proposes an indirect use of psychology in aesthetics: aesthetics would benefit (and has historically benefited) from closer attention to the philosophy of perception. And the philosophy of perception we draw upon should be consistent with and informed by the empirical sciences of the mind, especially psychology. In short, the relevance of psychology for aesthetics is mediated by the philosophy of perception. Many case studies of such a methodology are given in his book, from the distinction between focused and distributed attention to debates about the cognitive penetrability of perception and cross-cultural variations in a range of perceptual phenomena.

Murray Smith's *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* aims to articulate a 'third cultural', naturalized aesthetics integrating humanistic methods with scientific ones, with a particular focus on aspects of emotional response to films and other aesthetic objects.³ Smith argues that we are best placed to understand and explain our experience of artworks – including our emotional responses to them – by exploring the interconnections among the three different types of evidence at our disposal in relation to mental phenomena in general: phenomenological, psychological, and neuroscientific evidence. This model of 'triangulation' is explicated by Smith by means of case studies on such 'art-affects' as suspense, empathy, the startle response, and the expression and perception of emotion in the face. In seeking to relate these distinct types of evidence to one another, Smith makes the case that we need to pay attention to both the personal and subpersonal levels of psychological description – to our acts and intentions and reactions *and* the psychophysiological systems that subserves them (the distinct visual pathways for action and object recognition, the body clock, the neural mirror system, the 'affect programmes' underpinning our basic emotions, and so on). And in parallel with Nanay, Smith argues that philosophical theorizing in relation to artistic creation and appreciation cannot proceed in isolation from psychological research. Insofar as the arts not only exploit but extend and stretch our ordinary perceptual, cognitive, and emotional capacities, affording us experiences that generally do not arise in ordinary settings, aesthetic theory must at once be attentive to the psychology of ordinary human behaviour, and work towards a psychology of specifically aesthetic behaviour.⁴ Triangulation, then, articulates the 'relevance relation' that Dickie

³ Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

seeks: psychology is relevant to aesthetics because aesthetic experience is a species of conscious mental activity, and such activity is best illuminated by seeking consilience among the three types of evidence available to us.

While the two books have somewhat different foci, both discuss aspects of Dickie's sceptical arguments concerning psychology and the aesthetic attitude,⁵ and both pay notable attention to film. Smith's book sets out its arguments about film in parallel with exploration of other media and artforms; Nanay's study ranges widely across the arts and other domains of aesthetic experience, while paying considerable attention to film. Both books orient themselves towards metaphysics and epistemology, broadly construed, rather than towards questions of value.⁶ Sherri Irvin and Elisabeth Schellekens each provide a commentary which reflects on aspects of both books, commentaries which – among other things – make salient the shared concerns and points of convergence between the two books, including a focus on aesthetic attention and experience, and (as Schellekens puts it) the 'metaphilosophy of aesthetics'.⁷ As Schellekens also notes, both books seek to establish 'generous frameworks of communication and reference' with the sciences and other branches of philosophy with which they engage, in contrast to the parallel but rather separate conversations of the past.⁸ To that extent, the ambition of both books is to create a space for an authentic third culture. Nanay and Smith each provide a response to the two commentaries, once again reflecting on the points of similarity and difference between their respective books, as well as responding to the comments of Irvin and Schellekens.

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⁴ In his interview with Hans Maes, Arthur Danto credits Richard Wollheim with recognizing the importance of this point. 'The Commonplace Raised to a Higher Power: A Conversation with Arthur C. Danto', in *Conversations on Art and Aesthetics*, by Hans Maes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 55.

⁵ Indeed Smith refers to Nanay's arguments in this regard: Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 31–32.

⁶ For more on this point, see Bence Nanay, 'Responses to Irvin and Schellekens', *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 123.

⁷ Elisabeth Schellekens, 'Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention', *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 111.

⁸ *Ibid.*

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AESTHETICS AS PHILOSOPHY OF PERCEPTION: A PRÉCIS

BENCE NANAY

My book *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*¹ had more than one goal. The most important of these was to draw attention to just how much progress could be made in various debates in aesthetics if we make more use of the arguments and conceptual apparatus of philosophy of perception. Aesthetics is about experiences – special kinds of experiences we care a lot about. So turning to philosophy of perception, the philosophical subdiscipline that is about experiences, is a natural move.

What do I mean by aesthetics here? The book is about aesthetics, not philosophy of art. Philosophy of art is a motley ensemble of debates and puzzles that have to do – one way or another – with art, some metaphysical, some ethical, linguistic, or epistemological. It would be fairly crazy to claim that philosophy of perception would have any kind of priority in solving problems in philosophy of art. But aesthetics is different from philosophy of art – as many philosophers of art are quick to emphasize. Aesthetics is not exclusively and not even primarily about artworks, it is also about our aesthetic engagement with nature and everyday scenes, for example.

And what do I mean by philosophy of perception? Philosophy of perception is about the perceptual domain and its relation to other parts of the mind. It is not exclusively about perception. So when I say that philosophy of perception can be a useful way of tackling problems in aesthetics, I am not assuming that aesthetic phenomena are exclusively or essentially perceptual. Crucially, no matter how narrowly we construe it, philosophy of perception is partly about phenomena like mental imagery and attention and both of these concepts play an important role in understanding various problems in aesthetics.

That is the second, narrower aim of the book: to use the concept of attention as an illustration of how and to what extent aesthetics can learn from philosophy of perception. What sets aesthetic engagement apart from other moments in our life is a difference in what we attend to and how we do so. Attention can have a huge impact on our experiences in general and on our aesthetic engagement more particularly. Attending to some irrelevant or distracting feature can completely derail our experience. And much of the point of talking about art,

¹ Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

music, literature, and other aesthetic phenomena is that it could get you to attend to features you have not attended to before and by doing so completely new and often very rewarding experiences open up. It is certainly the job of any critic to get the reader to attend to some features of the artwork that would lead to different, more interesting or more pleasurable experiences.

I use these considerations to argue that the kinds of features, or, as philosophers like to call them, properties, that play the most important role in aesthetics are what I call 'aesthetically relevant properties': if you attend to these properties, it makes an aesthetic difference. Putting 'aesthetically relevant properties' at the centre stage of aesthetics is a not so concealed way of trying to dethrone the old and venerable concept of 'aesthetic properties', which much of Western aesthetics has been focusing on for centuries, but even more so in the last half-century. Being beautiful is an aesthetic property as is being graceful or being ugly. Many have tried to give a clear-cut definition of aesthetic properties and many have failed. There is wide disagreement about some of the most basic questions concerning aesthetic properties (Are they evaluative? Are they perceived?). That is an embarrassment for the entire discipline of aesthetics. We really need a fresh start. And we can have a fresh start if we talk about 'aesthetically relevant properties' instead of 'aesthetic properties'. My pitch is that by shifting the emphasis from aesthetic properties to aesthetically relevant properties we can make progress in many old questions in aesthetics. The critic's job is not to tell us what aesthetic properties the work has. It is rather to draw your attention to new, unsuspected aesthetically relevant properties that can transform your experience. And contemporary art is blatantly not about aesthetic properties, but it is very often about making seemingly aesthetically irrelevant properties aesthetically relevant.

Finally, the third, even more narrow, aim of the book was to explore a very special way of exercising our attention. Vision science makes a distinction between focused and distributed attention: we can attend to just one object or to many objects at the same time. But the distributed versus focused distinction can be applied not only to attending to objects, but also to attending to properties. So there are four possibilities when it comes to attention: focused with regard to both objects and properties, distributed with regard to both objects and properties, distributed across objects, but focused on one property thereof and focused on one object, and distributed across many of the properties of this object. This latter way of exercising attention is what I take to be typical (but neither necessary nor sufficient) of some paradigmatic forms of aesthetic experience that have often been discussed not only by philosophers, but also by artists and writers in the last two hundred years in the West.

It is important to emphasize that the aesthetic experience I was trying to characterize in terms of attention focused on one object but distributed across the properties of this object is both geographically and historically very limited in scope. It is a typically Western phenomenon and one that arguably only began to become important a couple of centuries ago and that, to make an even more tentative claim, might be on its way out (as the smartphone generation is not too strong on distributed attention). So the aesthetic experiences, which I deliberately labelled ‘Proustian aesthetic experiences’, form a spatially and temporally highly specific phenomenon – not some kind of cultural universal. In fact, part of the motivation for writing the book was to point out how the way we exercise our attention changes over time, giving rise to very different perceptual and aesthetic experiences.

It is important to emphasize that the aim of this book is not to annex aesthetics to the empire of philosophy of perception. My aim, in spite of the deliberately provocative title of the book, was much more modest: I wanted and still want aesthetics to learn from philosophy of perception. And I also think that a fair chunk of the subject matter of aesthetics, but by no means all of it, is very closely related to that of philosophy of perception. This does not mean that aesthetics is about perception. It is also about all kinds of other exciting mental phenomena, like mental imagery, attention, emotions, beliefs, hopes, aspirations, and expectations. However, we have a lot of evidence from psychology and neuroscience that all these mental states influence perception – even the earliest stages of perceptual processing. So we can’t give a full account of perception without talking about all these mental states.

I use a fair amount of empirical findings throughout the book – from cross-cultural psychophysics findings about attention to neuroscientific evidence for top-down influences on the primary visual cortex. And neuroscience has been widely used in aesthetics, at least since the neuroaesthetics movement of the 1990s. I should emphasize that what I am doing is very different from these neuroaesthetics approaches (this is an important similarity between my book and Murray Smith’s *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*).² My aim is not finding out about some universal features of our engagement with art on the basis of neuroscience. I do not apply neuroscience to aesthetics directly – as it has often been pointed out, this can go wrong very easily. Instead, I use philosophy of perception, which is informed by recent findings in psychology and neuroscience, to shed light on old problems in aesthetics. So the link between neuroscience and aesthetics is mediated by philosophy of perception.

² Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

A perk of this approach is that what empirically grounded philosophy of perception should teach us is that looking for aesthetic universals – the hidden or more often not so hidden aim of neuroaesthetics – is futile given the top-down influences on our perception that make perception very different in different periods and different parts of the world. So using empirically informed philosophy of perception to enrich aesthetics forces us to take the cultural variations of our aesthetic engagement seriously, paving the way to a truly global aesthetics.

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FILM, ART, AND THE THIRD CULTURE: A PRÉCIS

MURRAY SMITH

Film, Art, and the the Third Culture – hereafter, *FACT*¹ – takes as its starting point a historical coincidence: at the time of the completion of the book, sixty years had passed since C. P. Snow's first published intervention on the topic of the 'two cultures', in 1956. Snow's arguments on this topic were to ignite a major intellectual debate across the next decade and beyond, highly visible in the public sphere on both sides of the Atlantic. A Cambridge physicist turned novelist and politician, Snow's career journey was integral to the view he advanced: that there was a pernicious, and worsening, divide between the 'cultures' of the natural sciences on the one hand, and the humanities ('literary intellectuals') on the other; and that the divide was harmful both intellectually and in terms of the practical relevance and benefits of academic research (an ancestor of what in Britain is now officially termed 'impact'). Snow did envisage, however, the possibility (and indeed existing pockets of) a 'third culture', in which scientists and humanists were 'on speaking terms'.² This vision of a third culture, I argue, mirrors in the public sphere the naturalistic tradition in philosophy – a tradition that, while consolidating itself under that label in the twentieth century, can be traced all the way back through the Enlightenment to Aristotle.

Naturalistically conceived, philosophy is closely aligned with science and empirical enquiry. Within the sphere of analytic philosophy, naturalism is a highly influential, indeed probably the dominant, approach to philosophy. It has exerted some influence on aesthetics, especially in recent years, but it has been less visible in aesthetics and the philosophy of art than, say, in the philosophies of mind, science, and even ethics. Chapter 1 of *FACT*, 'Aesthetics Naturalized', reviews some of the history and sets out the case for a naturalized aesthetics. *Theory construction*, as distinct from conceptual analysis, is fundamental to a naturalistic approach, I argue – where theory construction involves a constant interplay between conceptual clarification and empirical enquiry, in contrast to the strict separation of these two activities in (at least orthodox) conceptual analysis.

¹ Jerrold Levinson's poetically licensed acronym for my *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) – see his commentary on the book, 'FACT is a Fact of Both Art and Life', *Projections* 12 (2018): 60–70. Levinson's piece appears as part of a symposium comprising eleven commentaries on *FACT* along with my response.

² C. P. Snow, 'The Two Cultures: A Second Look' (1963), in *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71.

(It is interesting to note that Dickie, in writing of the ‘myth of the aesthetic attitude’ in another important essay published not long after he published ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?’, was in effect pursuing theory construction by holding the concept of the ‘aesthetic attitude’ to an empirical as well as conceptual standard. For that is exactly what is implied by the word ‘myth’; if the ‘aesthetic attitude’ is a myth, it is no more deserving of a place in our thinking about aesthetic experience than is miasma in our thinking about the transmission of disease.)³ Chapter 1 also introduces the idea of *thick explanation*. While thick description – a well-established method in the humanities – involves a richly contextualized description and interpretation of a human behaviour or practice, thick explanation involves the integration of the personal and subpersonal levels of description (rather than treating these as mutually exclusive or incompatible perspectives on the mind).

Chapter 2, ‘Triangulating Aesthetic Experience’, sets out an approach to aesthetic experience consistent with theory construction. The method of ‘triangulation’ involves the integration of the three kinds of evidence available to us in relation to the mind in general: phenomenological, psychological, and neurophysiological evidence. As Schellekens observes in her commentary on *FACT*, when combined these elements give us the kind of thick explanation limned in Chapter 1; and in doing so ‘[t]he door is thereby opened to admit, at least in a limited and principled fashion, the first-person perspective within a scientific approach to the mind.’⁴ In the context of the philosophy of mind, such triangulation occupies the middle ground between radical functionalism (which gives little or no weight to the significance of neural evidence) and neurofundamentalism (which holds that, in the long run at least, the brain will tell us everything there is to know about the mind). If the eliminativism of Patricia and Paul Churchland constitutes an example of the latter, some of the late Jerry Fodor’s sceptical writings on brain scanning provide an instance of the former. A further important feature of triangulation is that no one of the three forms of evidence is held to be more important than the others, each form of evidence, considered in isolation, having its limitations. Across the chapter, I explore and test the model of triangulation in relation to various films and a related range of aesthetic experiences, with case studies on suspense and empathy. While suspense and empathy certainly arise outside aesthetic contexts, they are

³ George Dickie, ‘The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964): 56–65.

⁴ Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 117; Elisabeth Schellekens, ‘Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 115.

pervasive enough within the arts that we might consider them *basic aesthetic emotions*.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the two types of evidence at stake in the model of triangulation which might seem most distant from one another and most in need of defence as elements of a single explanatory scheme: phenomenological and neuroscientific evidence. Chapter 3, 'The Engine of Reason and the Pit of Naturalism', considers in detail various neurosceptical arguments, from both the philosophy of mind and philosophical aesthetics. These arguments, and various responses to them, are considered in case studies on the startle response and affective mimicry, demonstrating the contribution made by neuroscientific findings (especially concerning mirror neurons) to these psychological and aesthetic phenomena. Chapter 4, 'Papaya, Pomegranates, and Green Tea', turns its attention to the burgeoning field of consciousness studies, and the complex history of debate about the nature of mind and conscious experience lying behind this contemporary trend. I explore the way consciousness has been represented in various traditions of film-making, and the ineliminable centrality of conscious *qualia* to aesthetic experience.

Chapters 1 through 4 constitute Part I of the book, 'Building the Third Culture'. Taken together, they aim to set out and defend the idea of a third culture, as well as a set of principles and methods through which such an intellectual culture can be realized. Part II of *FACT*, 'Science and Sentiment', sets these principles and methods in motion in relation to the affective and emotional life of cinema – the ways in which films both represent and elicit emotions – as well as sustaining the theory building of Part I.

Chapter 5, 'Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin?', explores the expression of emotion in film, through gesture, posture, the voice, and above all the face, against the backdrop of Darwin's *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (1872). Here I consider the vicissitudes of Darwin's evolutionary account of emotion, including the rehabilitation and refinement of a Darwinian perspective in the hands of contemporary psychologists such as Paul Ekman and Dacher Keltner. The chapter explores the treatment of emotional expression in a range of film-making traditions, as well as arguments in early and classical film theory concerning the (assumed or hoped for) universality of emotion in film, especially in the 'silent' era prior to the introduction of the 'talkies'. Chapter 6, 'What Difference Does It Make?', continues to explore contemporary research on, and theories of, emotion, with a particular emphasis on the role of culture in emotional experience. Rejecting the Hobson's choice – and the false dichotomy that stands behind it – between a narrowly biological account of emotion and a 'culturalist' perspective according to which biology plays no significant role, I defend

a *biocultural* view of emotion (and by extension, of aesthetic experience). The emotion of disgust, for example, may have evolved in the first instance as a barrier against contact with and ingestion of physically harmful substances (faeces, vomit, rotten food) which hardly vary across cultures. But the bodily systems supporting such 'core' disgust can also be recruited by our higher-order belief systems, such that we can experience disgust in relation to much more variable sociocultural acts and objects. (In a similar spirit, Nanay argues that 'the top-down influences on our perception that make perception very different in different periods and different parts of the world [...] force us to take the cultural variations of our aesthetic engagement seriously, paving the way to a truly global aesthetics')⁵

Chapter 7, 'Empathy, Expansionism, and the Extended Mind', focuses on empathy and a family of related affective states, continuing the exploration of such states begun in Chapters 2 and 3, and developed in the final section of Chapter 5. Here the emphasis is both 'downwards', in the direction of the neural mirroring systems which subtend aspects of empathy, and 'outwards' towards the environment – the world beyond the skin and the skull into which the mind extends itself, according to advocates of the theory of the extended mind. I argue that the overlapping practices and institutions of storytelling, depiction, and 'fictioning' (creating fictions) form a major aspect of the extended mind, greatly enhancing our ability to represent and reflect on the problems – many of them ethical – arising from interpersonal and larger social interactions. Elaborating further on the biocultural underpinning of the theory of emotion developed across Part II, I link these practices and institutions, and the idea of the extended mind more generally, with *niche construction*: the capacity of species to adapt environments to their needs (even as those species are subject to the pressures of natural selection, that is, to the pressure to adapt to the environment). Culture, one might argue, is nothing other than niche construction writ large.

Chapter 8, 'Feeling Prufish', pushes beyond the 'garden-variety' emotions (happiness, fear, anger, and the like) which form the basis of most discussions of emotion in both the philosophy of mind and philosophical aesthetics. A comprehensive theory of emotion in film and the arts more generally needs to account for both generic emotions, which often form the basis of specific genres of art – comedy and horror, for example – and the more peculiar blends of emotion to which individual works often give expression. To the extent that the theory presented achieves this, it also shows how any tension between the particularizing tendency of art and the generalizing impetus both of

⁵ Bence Nanay, 'Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception: A Précis', *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 94.

the sciences and of philosophy can be reconciled. A naturalistic account of the role of emotion in art is well placed to explain both the patterns and regularities in the world of aesthetics and the arts, as well as the particularities of individual works which at once emerge from and stand out against the backdrop of, such regularities.

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THE NATURE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE ROLE OF THE SCIENCES IN AESTHETIC THEORIZING: REMARKS ON THE WORK OF NANAY AND SMITH

SHERRI IRVIN

Bence Nanay, in *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*,¹ and Murray Smith, in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*,² have given us a pair of rich and interesting works about the relationships between aesthetics and the sciences of mind. Nanay's work focuses on perception and attention, while Smith's addresses the relations among experiential, psychological, and neuroscientific understandings of a wide range of aesthetically relevant phenomena, particularly as they occur in film. These books make a valuable contribution to a project that remains fledgling: that of taking seriously the relevance of the sciences to our conceptions and explanations of experiential phenomena in aesthetics and the philosophy of art.

I will focus on a specific issue from each of these works. Nanay offers an account of aesthetic experience that ties it closely to the concepts of focused and distributed attention that are invoked in the sciences of perception. While I agree with Nanay that attention should play a central role in accounts of aesthetic experience, I raise questions about his specific account of the relationship. With Smith, we zoom out to a broader issue, that of the mutual explanatory relationships among phenomenological, functional/cognitive, and neurophysiological observations in our aesthetic theorizing. Smith makes a strong claim that all three of these levels are essential and irreducible, and none is subsidiary to the others. I argue that given the current state of the science, we should not regard neurophysiological observations as being on a par with observations at the other two levels. I also raise some doubts about the prospect of neurophysiological data making an independent contribution to aesthetic theorizing, even once the science is far more advanced.

I am grateful to Bence Nanay and Murray Smith for the invitation to engage with their work, to Elisabeth Schellekens and the audience at the 2016 meeting of the British Society for Aesthetics for helpful discussion, and to Stephanie Holt for valuable research assistance.

¹ Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

² Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

I. NANAY ON AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND AESTHETIC ATTENTION

In *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, Nanay argues that careful attention to perception can help us to make progress on a broad range of questions in aesthetics. One of his central claims relies on a distinction in the psychology of perception between distributed attention and focused attention. If you look directly and intently at one object before you in the room, you are exhibiting focused attention. If you open up the field of your attention to encompass more of the scene before you, your attention is to that extent distributed. You'll notice that you can shift your attention in this way without moving your eyes.³

Nanay's claim is that in 'some paradigmatic instances of aesthetic experience, we attend in a distributed and at the same time focused manner: our attention is focused on one perceptual object, but it is distributed among a large number of this object's properties.'⁴ He goes on to define 'aesthetic attention' in this very way, as attention that 'is distributed with regards to properties but focused with regards to objects.'⁵

Nanay argues, drawing on the work of Arien Mack,⁶ that in our everyday practical activities, our attention tends to be distributed across many objects with limited attention to their particular properties, given our cognitive limitations.⁷ When our attention is focused on a particular object for a practical purpose, it tends to be focused on the properties that are relevant to that purpose.⁸ Attention that is focused with respect to an object but distributed across many of that object's properties, Nanay suggests, is special: it indicates a curiosity about the object that is not tied to a specific function or purpose, and this is plausibly understood as the disinterested aesthetic attitude that has often been referred to in aesthetic theory.⁹ Nanay supports this contention by appeal to studies showing that while untrained people looking at a photograph tend to direct their eyes to a focal subject, art experts distribute their attention rather equally across most regions of the photograph.¹⁰

I'm sympathetic to the claim that attention to one's perceptual inputs, and the objects that produce them, is central to many forms of aesthetic experience,

³ Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 21–27. See also Arien Mack, 'Is the Visual World a Grand Illusion? A Response', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 9 (2002): 102–10.

⁴ Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶ Mack, 'Is the Visual World a Grand Illusion?'

⁷ Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

¹⁰ Stine Vogt and Svein Magnussen, 'Expertise in Pictorial Perception: Eye-Movement Patterns and Visual Memory in Artists and Laymen', *Perception* 36 (2007): 91–100. See also Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 27.

and can be what distinguishes aesthetic from non-aesthetic experience. We take in and even respond behaviourally to many perceptual inputs that we don't particularly attend to, and reactivating our attention to these inputs gives a texture to our experience that might well be described as aesthetic. As I was writing this paragraph, I was sitting outside on my back patio. As I was thinking about how to frame my thoughts, I absently turned my eyes away from the computer and turned my head in the direction of the trees and shrubs surrounding me. I had a visual experience of them, but they were mostly residing in the background of my awareness, as I thought about what to say about aesthetic attention. But then at one moment I changed the tenor of my awareness, focusing directly on what I was seeing. I paid attention to the tangle of leaves and the many colours of green and noted the very slight movement of branches in a subtle breeze. This drew my attention to the sensation of air on my skin, and from there I opened my attention out to other bodily sensations, such as the pressure of my elbow against my hip and the expansion of my torso and shifts in fabric against my skin as I breathed. In attending directly to perceptual information I normally screen out, I had what I would describe as an aesthetic experience of being in that place at that time.¹¹

The experience I've described seems to share some features of what Nanay has in mind: my attention is distributed over a number of different properties and, indeed, over properties revealed by different sense modalities. Moreover, the distribution of my attention is not guided by any particular project or aim; the attitude I bring to the situation is one of openness to what is before me and a willingness to savour whatever is presented – where savouring does not necessarily imply enjoyment, but it does imply really tasting as opposed to just absently swallowing.

What my experience does not share with the kind that Nanay describes is focus with respect to objects. It ranges over visible aspects of natural objects and tactile and proprioceptively revealed properties and states of my own body. Moreover, where the attention is distributed, the distribution remains somewhat limited. There are many somatic states of my body, for instance, that do not draw my attention. And there is a further qualitative aspect of my experience that seems relevant to its aesthetic character, yet does not figure in Nanay's account. This is a certain kind of investment I have in the experience: I take an interest in the objects before me and the experience itself, rather than simply allowing my attention to range blankly or blandly over things.

¹¹ Sherri Irvin, 'The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (January 2008): 29–44.

Now, Nanay does not claim that his account applies to every form or instance of aesthetic experience. Nor need he suggest that his account exhausts every element of aesthetic experience. But when he says that 'aesthetic attention' is precisely the sort of attention that is focused with respect to objects and distributed with respect to properties, I think we can fairly ask why attention that is distributed with respect to both objects and properties is not aesthetic, or is less prone to being aesthetic.

Lest one think my example of aesthetic experience is idiosyncratic, here is a passage from Yi-Fu Tuan about what the appreciator of nature must do:

He needs to slip into old clothes so that he could feel free to stretch out on the hay beside the brook and bathe in a meld of physical sensations: the smell of the hay and of horse dung; the warmth of the ground, its hard and soft contours; the warmth of the sun tempered by breeze; the tickling of an ant making its way up the calf of his leg; the play of shifting leaf shadows on his face; the sound of water over the pebbles and boulders, the sound of cicadas and distant traffic.¹²

Thus, when it comes to aesthetic experience in natural environments and in everyday life, it seems attention will often range over many objects. Of course, Nanay is well aware of this phenomenon, and he says that when it comes to appreciation of a landscape, 'the "object of attention" is likely to be the entire landscape and not one tree or another.'¹³ But I worry that this move may trivialize somewhat the notion of attention that is focused with respect to its object.

When it comes to the distribution of attention across many properties of an object or objects, I wonder whether this is not characteristic of many non-aesthetic experiences. To follow what is happening in a football game, I may attend to many aspects of what is happening on the field: the positions, movements, postures, and facial expressions of many players at once, as they reveal the players' local effectiveness, intentions, and states of health and energy, the teams' underlying strategic aims, and so forth. I may also need to attend to factors like temperature and wind direction. Would shifting to an aesthetic experience of the same event necessarily involve distributing one's attention across even more of the event's properties, or might it rather involve simply attending to different properties, or perhaps even the same properties, but for a different purpose or with a different mindset?

I wonder, then, whether the issue is less the distribution of attention and more the kind of attitude or aim that is guiding this distribution. So, for instance, Robert

¹² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia: University Press, 1990), 92.

¹³ Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 25.

Stecker talks about attending to 'forms, qualities, or meaningful features of things, [...] for their own sake or for the sake of this very experience.'¹⁴ On a view like Stecker's, then, aesthetic experience is a matter less of the focus or distribution of attention and more of *which* properties one attends to and the *aim* with which one attends to them.

To be fair, I must emphasize that Nanay does not claim that what he has called aesthetic attention is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for aesthetic experience. But the considerations I've mentioned may put some pressure on the idea that this pattern of attention, more than others, is distinctively aesthetic.

That said, I do think there is something to the idea that many aesthetic experiences involve the distribution of attention across properties one does not normally attend to in the same combination in non-aesthetic experience. Both Nanay and Smith discuss the role of art and aesthetic experience in defamiliarizing things for us; Smith also mentions that defamiliarization involves reversing the habituation whereby things recede from conscious awareness.¹⁵ Some forms of distributed attention may involve precisely the kind of fresh eye and fresh mind that defamiliarization requires. Nanay's thought-provoking foray into the relationships among attention and aesthetic experience puts philosophers in a good position to examine these issues further.

II. SMITH ON THE ROLE OF NEUROSCIENCE IN AESTHETIC THEORIZING

Nanay's account relies on evidence derived from perceptual science at the functional and cognitive level: he notes, for instance, that art experts tend to visually scan much more of an image than non-experts, who focus mainly on a central theme.¹⁶ Smith, however, argues that neuroscience, too, has an irreducible contribution to make to explanations and theories in aesthetics. In *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, he defends the application to aesthetics of Owen Flanagan's 'triangulation' approach to the problem of consciousness in the philosophy of mind. In Smith's words:

we have evidence pertaining to our *experience* of mental phenomena, the *information* processed by the mind in relation to particular mental functions, and the *physical realization* of the mental. Having put these varieties of evidence on the table, we can then attempt to 'triangulate' the object of enquiry. Triangulation involves locating or

¹⁴ Robert Stecker, 'Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Value', *Philosophy Compass* 1 (2006): 4.

¹⁵ Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 205.

¹⁶ Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 27. See also Vogt and Magnussen, 'Expertise in Pictorial Perception'.

'fixing' the object in explanatory space by [...] projecting lines from each body of evidence, and following them to see where they intersect. Where any two, or all three, forms of evidence mesh in this way, so each of them is corroborated.¹⁷

Moreover, none of the levels is regarded as primary, and explanations and theories at each level are subject to revision depending on findings at the other two levels. Just as, by referring to evidence at all three levels, we can begin to triangulate to consciousness, whose nature often eludes explanation and even characterization at any particular level, we can do the same with aesthetic experience, which we might regard as a more specific instance of consciousness.¹⁸

Smith's central aims related to the triangulation approach are twofold: first, to defend the idea that psychology and, especially, neuroscience should be taken seriously by aesthetic theorists who have tended to focus more on the phenomenological; and, second, to defend against the idea that phenomenological inquiry could ever be reduced to psychological and neurophysiological inquiry. He holds, with Flanagan, that each of these three levels of explanation has an ineliminable role to play. 'The three types of evidence at our disposal,' Smith suggests, 'do not exist in a simple hierarchy, but rather in a tail-chasing form of interdependence.'¹⁹

I am drawn to Smith's naturalistic approach, and I especially like its anti-reductivist flavour. I find both the psychological and the emerging neuroscientific findings about art appreciation fascinating, and I see their interest as strongly tied to the experiential phenomena they may help explain. I want to raise some questions, though, about whether the neuroscientific evidence is really on a par with the other two forms of evidence, as opposed to being subservient to them.

My concerns are tentative, because the issue is confounded by the fact that currently, the neurophysiological findings that are appealed to in these debates tend to be pretty primitive. Someone might perform an fMRI and note that there is a particular pattern of activity in certain regions of the brain, but since our knowledge of the functional correlates of such patterns of activity is severely limited, observing these patterns tends to have limited explanatory value.²⁰ As Smith notes, neuroscientists sometimes dramatically overinterpret these results.

¹⁷ Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁰ See Maddalena Boccia et al., 'Where Does Brain Neural Activation in Aesthetic Responses to Visual Art Occur? Meta-Analytic Evidence from Neuroimaging Studies', *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 60 (2016): 65–71, for a recent meta-analysis of 47 fMRI studies, finding (somewhat unsurprisingly) that 'aesthetic-related neural responses to art recruit widely distributed networks in both hemispheres'.

Presumably, when neuroscience has advanced much further, we will have a better picture of the functional and experiential correlates of patterns of brain activity, and physiological evidence will play a more robust explanatory role. At present, however, I suggest that the neuroscience, though suggestive and perhaps weakly confirmatory of hypotheses at the functional and experiential levels, is necessarily subservient to them.

To see why, we'll consider an example of Flanagan's that Smith discusses – namely, that of auditory splitting.²¹ Splitting is the subject's ability, when presented with a different auditory input in each ear, to attend to one and screen out awareness of the other – or, at least, that is how subjects experience things phenomenologically. They describe having no awareness of processing the information from the channel they are not attending to, but studies show that they do in fact process it; it affects their performance on other tasks.²² As Smith notes, there are different hypotheses about what is happening. One hypothesis is that the information from the two channels is processed differently by the brain as it initially arrives; another hypothesis is that it is processed similarly at first but is later encoded differently in memory. On the latter hypothesis, subjects' reports that they did not hear the unattended channel reflect the fact that their memory of the information has been suppressed by the time they make the report.

Flanagan suggests that when neurophysiology is more advanced, brain studies may provide support for one or the other hypothesis.²³ If we could identify the brain activity associated with processing for each channel, we could look to see whether the activity is similar or different for the two channels. If it's different, we'd have support for the hypothesis that the initial processing is different; if the activity is similar, we'd have support for the hypothesis that the initial processing is the same but something different happens later.

I'll admit that the findings Flanagan describes would provide some support for the respective hypotheses. But it's important to notice just how weak that support is, and how readily overturned by further information at the functional level. If we find that two different-looking brain processes are happening, this may or may not mean that something different is happening functionally or cognitively. Two brain processes might look different physiologically but support mental processes that are functionally the same. The brain is well known to be plastic,

²¹ Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 63–69.

²² For a recent study and review of relevant results on priming effects of semantic content presented in the unattended auditory channel, see Jennifer Aydelott, Zahra Jamaluddin, and Stefanie Nixon Pearce, 'Semantic Processing of Unattended Speech in Dichotic Listening,' *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 138 (2015): 964–75.

²³ Owen Flanagan, *Consciousness Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 11.

such that an injury to one part can result in processes being relocated elsewhere. Perhaps the same process can be run in different locations even without an injury, for instance because it has been squeezed out due to some other task that is happening simultaneously. If the physiological difference isn't connected to any detectable functional/cognitive difference, then it seems to be a mere curiosity, not something that is explanatorily efficacious.

If there is a functional or cognitive difference connected to the physiological difference, on the other hand, it seems that a clever experimenter might be able to test for such a difference directly at the cognitive or functional level. Now, I don't mean to downplay the possibility that neurophysiology would inform the design of such tests, depending on the state of our knowledge about the functional correlates of brain activity. But I do mean to say that if there is no finding of difference at the experiential or functional/cognitive levels, the neurophysiological finding doesn't seem to tell us anything relevant to our understanding of aesthetic experience or artistic technique.

The same goes for a finding that the two auditory channels seem to be processed in the *same* way by the brain. If we see similar patterns of brain activity, it's natural to assume that the same thing is happening at the cognitive/functional level. But this assumption is defeasible: patterns of brain activity that appear similar may nonetheless be associated with quite different cognitive or functional processes, for instance, due to other things going on in the brain at the same time. If we find such cognitive or functional differences, this tells us that our judgement that the two patterns of brain activity were similar was too coarse-grained. Once again, then, observed brain activity is suggestive, but its importance remains to be confirmed at the functional and/or experiential levels.

The same is not true, I suggest, of evidence at the phenomenological and functional/cognitive levels. This is partly due to the nature of the supervenience relation: on the assumption that the phenomenological and the functional /cognitive supervene on the physiological, there can be no differences at the phenomenological and functional/cognitive levels that do not correspond to differences at the physiological base level, whereas the converse does not hold. But more deeply, I would suggest it's due to the fact that when it comes to art and aesthetic experience, the phenomenological is irreducibly not just one of the legitimate targets of our interest, but the primary one. Producing experiences in us that have a certain feel to them is the main business of art.

Of course, verbal descriptions of phenomenological experience can be misleading; they may gloss over subtle differences or fail to represent things that affected experience but were not fully present to consciousness. Smith discusses a number of fascinating examples of filmic techniques that involve suppressing

the audience member's awareness of some aspects of the film that are, in fact, crucial to producing a particular kind of aesthetic effect that does break into awareness: so, for instance, the film-maker may use music or lighting to mark a character with an emotional tone, so that the viewer feels that emotion every time the character is encountered without understanding why. But we do not need to descend to the physiological level to make sense of these cases: as Smith notes, artists know how to manipulate audience attention and exploit unique features of the perceptual system in order to produce distinctive aesthetic effects, and their knowledge is derived not from neurophysiology but from careful observation of how certain kinds of effects captured on film are productive of particular kinds of experience.²⁴

I do not mean to dismiss Smith's suggestion that all three levels should be taken seriously. I'm certainly not one of the 'neurosceptics' he discusses. I agree with many of his claims, such as the claim that neuroscience can 'broadly confirm hypotheses derived from everyday experience and folk theory' and contribute to 'the gradual accumulation and correction of detail'.²⁵ But the suggestion that the three levels exist in 'a tail-chasing form of interdependence'²⁶ strikes me as premature: the present coarse-grained state of much neuroscientific knowledge doesn't permit it to have a very robust explanatory role. It remains to be seen whether the apparent primacy of the experiential level will recede as the underlying neuroscience becomes more sophisticated.

While I have raised some critical thoughts about specific ideas defended by Nanay and Smith, we must acknowledge just how important their project is and how innovative their specific contributions are. Despite the rapid advances, over the past several decades, in psychological and physiological findings relevant to aesthetics, uptake by philosophers has been sharply limited. The appearance in close succession of two ambitious, book-length defences of empirically informed aesthetics promises to move the field forward significantly.

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²⁴ For example, Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 66–68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

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PSYCHOLOGIZING AESTHETIC ATTENTION

ELISABETH SCHELLEKENS

The main question driving the carefully crafted investigations developed in Bence Nanay's *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* and Murray Smith's *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* is one which, in its modern guise, has arisen at increasingly regular intervals in our discipline: Is empirical psychology – broadly conceived – relevant to philosophical aesthetics?¹ That is to say, can alternative approaches to art and aesthetic experience, including the methods yielding experimental, cognitive, and perceptual data about such experience, contribute to the ways in which philosophers examine aesthetic phenomena in a meaningful way.

If so, how? There are at least two reasons why it has been important to return to this question with such frequency. First, what we mean by 'psychology' continues to evolve at an impressive pace. At least in its most current understanding, when we first start hearing about 'naturalizing aesthetics' between fifteen and twenty years ago, the project found its most vocal proponents in the guise of so-called 'neuroaesthetics' and the work of scientists such as William Hirstein, V. S. Ramachandran, Robert Solso, Dahlia Zaidel, and Semir Zeki.² To many, empirical approaches of this kind gave a bad name to psychology as applied to aesthetics for some years to come, feeding into what was once described as a 'culture of mutual distrust' between the disciplines.³ Luckily, our conception of such lines of investigation into aesthetic phenomena has been considerably enriched since then, to include not only our basic neurology and Darwinian sexual selection theory, but our perception more broadly, including aspects central to the contemporary philosophy of mind and philosophy of emotions. The second reason why it is important to push this question to the forefront of our inquiries regularly is that every now and again

¹ Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

² See Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, 'The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (1999): 15–41; Robert Solso, *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Dahlia Zaidel, *Neuropsychology of Art: Neurological, Cognitive and Evolutionary Perspectives* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005); Semir Zeki, 'Art and the Brain', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (1999): 76–96; *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³ William Seeley, 'What Is the Cognitive Neuroscience of Art... And Why Should We Care?' *ASA Newsletter* 31, no. 2 (2011): 1.

our community produces excellent research which brings some of the most recent experimental information directly to bear on the questions that we care most about: how we experience art, what sets aesthetic experience apart from other kinds of experience, why art matters to us. Smith's and Nanay's books are highly valuable contributions not just to these concerns, but also to the metaphilosophy of aesthetics, that is to say, to how we as philosophers should think about the relations between these different approaches, and exactly which elements of our psychology can be fruitful to specific debates in philosophical aesthetics.

If the neuroaesthetics of the late 1990s supported a visualization of the philosophical and empirical projects as operating in parallel with one another – engaged on neighbouring trajectories but never actually intersecting – the conceptual picture which has emerged more recently, in great part thanks to research such as Nanay's and Smith's, clearly relies on more generous frameworks of communication and reference. Here, it might still make *some* sense to talk of the philosophical and empirical perspectives respectively as originating from different starting points and converging in a constructive manner, perhaps in a triangular structure such as the one Smith favours. Nonetheless, it seems more apparent than ever that if we continue on the current trajectory, even such a fairly minor differentiation should eventually cease to make sense, and talk of different approaches working together in any geometrical formation would itself become superfluous. What we will have, then, is just one inclusive thick explanation, resting on all the diverse elements that contribute to its explanatory power. It seems perhaps that a more accurate theme for this discussion is not so much whether psychology is *relevant* to aesthetics but, rather, in which respects psychology is *central* to it.

Anyone who reads either of these books stands to benefit from a broadening of their horizons, no matter how progressive we think ourselves to be with regards to this kind of research programme. Both offer the opportunity for us to rethink and revise the methodologies relevant to aesthetics and to resolve particular problems pertaining to our field. In practice at least, aesthetics knows no boundaries.

What I would like to do in these brief comments is to raise some questions with regard to what Nanay and Smith describe as that which is phenomenologically distinct about aesthetic experience. In this particular context such a concern is hardly peripheral to the overarching project since our ability to establish whether the aesthetic can resist the reductivism which accompanies most versions of naturalism and naturalization rests at least partly upon this question. In this process, I will point to some of the areas that call for further clarification or detail

should Nanay and Smith, as we have good reasons to believe, turn out to be right about their shared philosophical commitments.

I

Let us begin by reflecting on that which is said to be distinctive of aesthetic experience or aesthetic perception. According to the theory developed by Nanay, when we have an aesthetic experience of the paradigmatic kind, we have an experience ‘very similar to the experience of treating an object to be unique.’⁴ That is, looking at something aesthetically is similar to how we look when we encounter something for the first time. Nanay writes:

If we encounter an object that is unique, we don’t really know how to attend to it; which properties of it we should attend to and which ones we should ignore. We have no precedent of how to do this [...] So we have no blueprint to follow: we try out attending to all kinds of properties of the object – our attention is distributed.⁵

Nanay’s main aim here is not to capture a definition of aesthetic experience as such, but rather to point to how we must understand the role of attention in typical cases of aesthetic experience. His claim, then, is that aesthetic attention is *focused* on objects but *distributed* onto the various properties of that object.

Although I won’t address the topic of distributed attention directly here, one important aspect which Nanay takes to support his account of aesthetic perception is the so-called ‘lingering effect’ of aesthetically attending to something (through such distributed attention). An effect of this kind may occur, for example, when we have had an aesthetic experience in an art gallery. We engage with the pieces not simply by focusing on the exhibited objects but primarily by distributing our attention onto its various properties. As a result, according to Nanay, we tend not to be able to leave our aesthetic attention at the door of the gallery when we exit that space. Instead, the mode of perception may stay with us somehow, following and colouring our engagement with the world and its contents for some time. In other words, we can activate our aesthetic attention in the museum, but we may not be able to deactivate it quite as easily. Instead, it is gradually *tuned out*. As Nanay puts it, ‘after having spent a day in the museum, our experience of the banal scenes on leaving the museum tends to retain some kind of aesthetic character’⁶

Importantly, we can explain this aesthetic form of lingering not only by appealing to distributed attention, but also by emphasizing the role of so-called

⁴ Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

aesthetically *relevant* properties.⁷ The idea here is that aesthetic properties as such raise a whole host of conceptual, perceptual, metaphysical, and even programmatic problems, which can be avoided, Nanay suggests, by thinking in terms of relevance instead. So, while aesthetic properties cannot explain this lingering effect single-handedly, introducing the notion of aesthetically relevant properties gives us the tools to do so. Or so Nanay argues.

In some respects, I am sympathetic to the suggestion that a neatly delimited category of aesthetic properties is something of a red herring (if only for the extremely high expectations that positing such a notion involves for any theory aiming to explain not only what unites such an extremely diverse collection of qualities, but also their varying valence). That said, I worry about Nanay's conception of this lingering effect, what the real benefits of jeopardizing the broader notion of aesthetic properties consist of, and whether it really is the case that uniqueness in art is primarily a matter of the uniqueness of attention.

For one thing, I don't entirely recognize my own aesthetic phenomenology in the general description given. It seems to me that the lingering effect of art is both richer and more specific – in the sense that it is more targeted on an experience of the actual artwork – than Nanay's account may be able to allow for. When I leave the gallery or the museum, I may well not be able to 'deactivate' my aesthetic attention immediately, and may well carry an aesthetically tainted way of seeing the world along with me for an extra few minutes. But this does not seem to be exclusively – or even primarily – a matter of a strictly perceptual mode of attention. The lingering effect bears witness to the fact that it is the experience of perceiving a very specific work (or several very specific works) of art that 'stays with me', as it were, the phenomenological details of which colour my ensuing experience and enable me to pick up certain features I might otherwise not have noticed in the world beyond the artwork (or indeed put them in certain connections with one another). In other words, the lingering effect of engaging aesthetically with art stems largely from how such engagements affect other continuing mental states, such as the beliefs pertaining to states of affairs external to the work and our perception of it, including our moral beliefs and deliberations. If we discard too casually all reference to what it was we were looking at, and why we found it interesting or even captivating to begin with, we risk losing our focus on the more transformative kind of aesthetic experience which we tend to seek when we engage with art and in terms of which, I would argue, at least many cases of the lingering effect of art is best understood.

⁷ Ibid., 65.

So, rather than an activated mode of visual attention which is gradually phased out, it seems to me that it is first and foremost the elements of engaging with the work which I find the most enriching, such as the set of insights or emotions evoked, which stay with me qua perceiver. And this leads us straight to the question of aesthetic properties. For it is greatly in part due to the aesthetic value – most probably best conceived as a combination of reliably *aesthetic* properties, such as beauty or harmony, and properties that happen to be *aesthetically relevant* on a given occasion – and the role such value plays in aesthetically informed perceptual experience which directly influences the lingering perceptual effect of art, its duration and significance.

Surprisingly perhaps, the language with which Nanay describes the uniqueness of the aesthetic seems at times Kantian in spirit, such as when aesthetic experience is characterized as being ‘very much akin to encountering something for the very first time’.⁸ We find a strong element of the unexpected, the impossibility of predicting when aesthetic experience might occur, the delightful freedom of newness and lack of rules or principles, and more. But can all this richness and complexity be maintained purely at the level of perception? For Nanay’s project is not just one of bringing a psychologically informed philosophy of perception to bear on questions in aesthetics. It is also one of making the more general point that aesthetics is, in effect, a branch of the philosophy of perception. What is the price to pay for that view? Well, quite a high price, possibly, bearing in mind that a fair number of the concepts aesthetics tends to rely on, such as aesthetic properties, aesthetic objects and perhaps even subjects, may suddenly find themselves dispensable, replaced by simpler and thinner perceptual concepts: we would perhaps no longer be subjects of experience but *perceivers*, albeit it richly equipped, distributing our attention on all properties that might be aesthetically relevant.

II

In his *Film, Art, and The Third Culture*, Murray Smith – for whom the process of naturalizing aesthetics in a new way is central – specifically asks his readers:

[is there] a distinctive mental state which constitutes ‘aesthetic attention’ or the ‘aesthetic attitude’ – a form of consciousness systematically distinct from ordinary, ‘interested’ consciousness, characteristically prompted by artworks and other natural or artefactual aesthetic prompts?⁹

⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁹ Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 191.

The 'triangulating' method favoured combines (i) the phenomenological, (ii) the psychological, and (iii) the neurological levels of analysis into one thick explanation, and so, we are told: 'The door is thereby opened to admit [...] the first-person perspective within a scientific approach to the mind.'¹⁰

Smith's answer is that 'aesthetic experience arises when our perceptual, affective, and cognitive capacities are engaged in a way that goes beyond their normal functioning, and that such engagement prompts us to savour and reflect upon the resultant experiences.'¹¹ Further on, he writes: 'When [aesthetic] experiences go well, they are not merely had, but savoured. They become the object of a particular kind of self-consciousness.'¹² This special kind of self-consciousness known as aesthetic experience, this 'savouring' or 'retrospection', thus combines a whole host of states and abilities both in what we might call its production, its phenomenology, and in its aftermath. It is not only reflective and emotionally laden, it is also self-reflective and affectively enjoyed *as* reflection or retrospection. We have an experience and at the same time an experience of that experience: aesthetic experiences are enjoyed, felt, and retrospected upon in a special way qua objects of a special form of self-consciousness which is distinctive of aesthetic attention.

It seems both right and important to point out, as Smith does here, that there are important cognitive aspects of our aesthetic experiences which tend to be overlooked, and that conceiving of such experiences primarily as affective and fairly passive responses is fundamentally unhelpful not only to philosophical analysis but also to daily life. That said, the generous and inclusive spirit of Smith's triangulation and thick explanation raises questions of its own. Are we now not trying to fit too much into the account of what is supposed to be our distinctly aesthetic phenomenology? For if all aspects of the psychological, neurological, and phenomenological are potential contributors to our aesthetic explanations, by what means exactly do we assess the explanatory weight each of them might carry separately? The question relates directly to how we should balance the input or emphasis of either of the three corners in this triangular structure.

Smith surveys the basic concepts at the heart of the triangulation of the phenomenological including attention, consciousness, the degrees of consciousness of peripheral factors, self-consciousness, the unconscious, the 'cognitive' or 'adaptive' unconscious, and more. In spirit, such inclusivity is surely on the right track of providing a solid theory of aesthetic experience. And yet, at the same time, it opens up a new set of concerns. For, now that we are

¹⁰ Ibid., 197.

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹² Ibid., 91.

operating with a notion of the cognitive which embraces subconscious elements, where should we draw the line between those aspects which are directly relevant to aesthetic experience and those which are not? How could we know? Or, to put the point in Smith's own terms, how thick can a thick explanation become and still remain an explanation (of anything)?

Some of these questions are tied up with a methodological point one might want to press Nanay on too. For one might think that an important advantage of a method which seeks to incorporate the results of psychological investigations is precisely that our explanations are grounded in information, facts, evidence, or data which in some sense at least apply across aesthetic agents, regardless of all the purely personal, idiosyncratic qualities which can make us such unreliable aesthetic judges. But if aspects of our aesthetic experience are subconscious or subpersonal features of our micro-perceptual or phenomenological experience, have we really strengthened the foundations of our explanations or, to exaggerate a little perhaps, simply replaced them by some other explanatory features that are not obviously all that far-reaching either? Exactly what do we find behind the 'door [to] the first-person perspective within a scientific approach to the mind'? And this, of course, is directly connected with a broader concern about the reach of thick explanations in general: Is aesthetics now less about explaining aesthetic experience or aesthetic value and more about explaining phenomena with some aesthetic component? One possible answer here of course is that a distinction of this kind is merely nominal: what is an aesthetic experience if not an experience with some (more or less significant) aesthetic components? Be that as it may, the special savouring and introspection so aptly described by Smith reminds one of the probing questions which arise for anyone who seeks both to naturalize (and in that sense at least normalize) *and* to customize the aesthetic at the same time.

The theory outlined by Smith is reinforced by the many interesting examples of films incorporated into his arguments. Indeed, one of the strengths of Smith's naturalizing project is the intricate way in which he weaves his account into a detailed understanding of works such as Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* film series, demonstrating step by step how a theory informed 'by psychological, evolutionary, and neuroscientific research on the emotions' can affect our artistic experience.¹³ In a similar vein, Nanay's discussion of Paul Klee serves as a helpful point of reference connecting theory with practice. It is fair to say, then, that both *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* and *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* demonstrate significant advances on many previous attempts to marry research

¹³ Ibid., 165–66.

in philosophical aesthetics with approaches, models, and methodologies drawn from the empirical sciences, and both make for extremely refreshing reading in respect of the concept of aesthetic experience which is thus allowed for. One of the many things we stand to learn from Nanay's and Smith's work is that asking whether empirically informed psychology is relevant to philosophical aesthetics is now no longer so much a question to which we should return at regular intervals in philosophy, as one which should retain a permanent place on the drawing board.

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RESPONSES TO IRVIN AND SCHELLEKENS

BENCE NANAY

Responding to critics is not always a happy task. The book has been published. So, short of having all the existing copies pulped and writing a new book, not much can be changed. Typically, there are three kinds of responses to critical remarks: clarifications (if the critic got something wrong), concessions (if the author got something wrong), or some new directions for future research. It is a true mark of the quality of the two sets of comments on my book by Sherri Irvin and Elisabeth Schellekens that almost all of their comments open up exciting new directions for future research (some of which I have tried to undertake in some pieces I published since the publication of the book [thus the uncharacteristic and somewhat inelegant preponderance of self-references in this piece], but most of which are still to be undertaken).

But I have to start with a concession, albeit a somewhat unusual one. I think I might have made something of a marketing mistake when writing the book. As I explain in the *précis* above, my main aim with this book was to argue that the toolkit of philosophy of perception can be very useful in tackling problems in aesthetics. My secondary aim was to zoom in on the concept of attention and examine how aesthetics could benefit from taking this concept seriously (one important consequence of this would be a shift from talk about aesthetic properties to talk about aesthetically relevant properties).

It was my third, not at all central, aim to argue that a special way of exercising our attention, in a manner that focuses on an object but distributed among its properties, plays an important role in some instances of aesthetic experiences. The marketing mistake was to start the book with this third, relatively minor point since frontloading this material made it seem as if this tertiary aim of the book were the central one. It was not. But it is also understandable, given that I start the book with it, that readers would attribute more importance to this than I would have expected. This is not much of a concession – I still stand by my account of aesthetic attention, but if someone is not persuaded of the role this kind of attention plays in some of our aesthetic experiences, they have no reason not to take my other two, much broader, aims of the book seriously (the emphasis on attention and the general methodological proposal about using philosophy of perception).

Sherri Irvin opens her comments with a vivid and evocative description of an aesthetic experience she had on her patio. She describes her experience of

attending to ‘the tangle of leaves and the many colours of green’ and noticing ‘the very slight movement of branches in a subtle breeze’. She also felt a ‘sensation of air on [her] skin’ and also ‘the pressure of [her] elbow against [her] hip and the expansion of [her] torso and shifts in fabric against [her] skin as [she] breathed.’¹

This experience seems very similar to the kind of experience I wanted to capture in the book, but there is a major difference, which makes Irvin’s example a potential counterexample to my account. In her example, her attention is distributed among different properties – that fits my account very well. But her attention does not seem to be focused at all. Her attention is distributed across a variety of objects – the leaves, the branches, the air, the fabric. So this is a major difference from the ‘focused on one object, distributed across many properties’ account I have advocated. The leaves and the branches are clearly very different from the air or the fabric – they are even perceived in different sense modalities. Is this a counterexample to my account then?

I should say that I really like the vivid description of Irvin’s aesthetic experience and I believe that it is a very similar kind of experience as the one I was trying to capture in the book. And I would be very happy to acknowledge the difference between her aesthetic experience and the aesthetic experiences I was focusing on. While the book is about our aesthetic engagements with all kinds of things (of art, of nature, of everyday scenes), in introducing the idea of distributed attention, I was mainly concerned with the aesthetic experiences of artworks. And at least when it comes to artworks, the focused attention part of the experience is quite important, inasmuch as it captures an influential idea in the history of aesthetics concerning the unity of our experience of artworks.²

The general idea here is that engaging with an artwork entails taking it in as a single, integrated whole (this is a Kantian idea, which played an important role in Romanticism [for example, in the writings of Friedrich Schlegel], but it was also highly influential in twentieth-century Anglo-American aesthetics, for example, in Monroe Beardsley’s work).³ And while this might be an important aspect of our

¹ Sherri Irvin, ‘The Nature of Aesthetic Experience and the Role of the Sciences in Aesthetic Theorizing: Remarks on the Work of Nanay and Smith’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 102. See also her ‘The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience’, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (2008): 29–44, which is the best philosophical discussion of aesthetic experience of everyday scenes I know of.

² See also my ‘Aesthetic Attention’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22 (2015): 96–118; ‘Defamiliarization and the Unprompted (Not Innocent) Eye’, *nonsite.org*, no. 24 (2018): 1–17, <https://nonsite.org/article/defamiliarization-and-the-unprompted-not-innocent-eye>.

³ See Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981).

aesthetic engagement with works of art, this might not be so important when it comes to our aesthetic engagement with nature or with everyday scenes. It would be an exciting and novel project to explore the systematic differences between how our aesthetic attention is exercised in engaging with artworks on the one hand and with nature and everyday scenes on the other.

In the book, I made some preliminary remarks about how the attention's 'focusing on one object' is a bit more complicated in the case of our aesthetic experience of nature. When admiring a landscape, for example, the object we are focusing our attention on is not one tree or one bush, but the landscape – often a vast scene, which would make it a bit difficult to fully appreciate just in what sense this kind of aesthetic attention could be called 'focused'. So, when we have an aesthetic experience of a painting, in some sense our attention is focused on the perceived object in a way that it is not focused on the perceived object in the case of looking at a landscape.

Kant's (and Beardsley's) emphasis on the concept of formal unity would be applicable in both cases, but I agree with Irvin (and Schlegel) that this common denominator would paper over important differences. An important continuation of the project I started in the book would be to study the differences between aesthetic experiences of artworks on the one hand and of nature and everyday scenes on the other from the point of view of how focused our attention is (and what it focuses on if it is).⁴ And I take Irvin's vivid description of her aesthetic experience of an everyday scene on her patio to be a very good demonstration of something that *is* in common between these kinds of aesthetic experience of everyday scenes and the kinds of aesthetic experience I was talking about – namely, that our attention is distributed across many properties.

The main focus of Elisabeth Schellekens's commentary is my reliance on what I call the 'lingering effect' of aesthetic experiences. When you spend an entire day in the museum and you walk home afterwards, the drab bus stop may look to you like one of the pictures in the museum. And when leaving a good concert or movie, the ugly, grey, dirty streetscape can look positively beautiful. It seems that aesthetic experiences often do not stop when the contemplation of the object of the aesthetic experience stops. After leaving the concert hall or the cinema, one may still see the world differently. In the book, I explain this 'lingering effect' as a perceptual phenomenon: the way we exercise our perceptual attention is not something we can deliberately change from one moment to the other. And as a crucial characteristic of aesthetic experiences is the way our attention is

⁴ I scratch the surface of this vast project in 'Aesthetic Experience of Artworks and Everyday Scenes', *Monist* 101 (2018): 71–82.

exercised, what we should expect is that these experiences would only fade out slowly after the actual aesthetic engagement is over. We should expect that aesthetic experiences would have a lingering effect.

Schellekens objects to my explanation of this phenomenon – namely, that I explain the lingering effect as a perceptual and attentional effect and not as the effect of ‘mental states, such as the beliefs pertaining to states of affairs external to the work and our perception of it, including our moral beliefs and deliberations’ and ‘insights’.⁵

These remarks, again, point towards an interesting potential future research project. We can gain insights and acquire moral beliefs from artworks – no question about this.⁶ But I was talking about a different, much less intellectual phenomenon. Art often teaches us about morality and the human condition, but, to use the famous Ad Reinhardt bon mot, it is also true that ‘art teaches us how to see.’⁷ In general, we should not ignore the strong perceptual (and, I would add, attentional) effect of engaging with artworks.

Here, in support of my claim, is a longish quote from Marcel Proust:

Since I had seen such things depicted in water-colours by Elstir, I sought to find again in reality, I cherished, as though for their poetic beauty, the broken gestures of the knives still lying across one another, the swollen convexity of a discarded napkin upon which the sun would patch a scrap of yellow velvet, the half-empty glass which thus shewed to greater advantage the noble sweep of its curved sides, and, in the heart of its translucent crystal, clear as frozen daylight, a dreg of wine, dusky but sparkling with reflected lights, the displacement of solid objects, the transmutation of liquids by the effect of light and shade, the shifting colour of the plums which passed from green to blue and from blue to golden yellow in the half-plundered dish, the chairs, like a group of old ladies, that came twice daily to take their places round the white cloth spread on the table as on an altar at which were celebrated the rites of the palate, where in the hollows of oyster-shells a few drops of lustral water had gathered as in tiny holy water stoups of stone; I tried to find beauty there where I had never imagined before that it could exist, in the most ordinary things, in the profundities of ‘still life’.⁸

Marcel sees the world differently after having seen the Elstir watercolours. This effect does not come from insights or moral beliefs. It comes from perceptual and attentional differences. Proust himself emphasizes the importance of attention in this perceptual shift in the quote above.

⁵ Elisabeth Schellekens, ‘Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 113, 114.

⁶ See, for example, my ‘Philosophy versus Literature: Against the Discontinuity Thesis’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71 (2013): 349–60.

⁷ Ad Reinhardt, ‘How to Look at Things through a Wine-Glass’, *PM*, 7 July 1946.

⁸ Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Vintage, 1970), 325.

But this is not supposed to be an appeal to authority in response to Schellekens's objection (although I can't think of a better authority on this topic than Proust). The new research direction that Schellekens's comment points to is about how the perceptual 'lingering effect' and the more cerebral effects of engaging with works of art interact.⁹ This is also what I take to be in the background of Schellekens's more 'big-picture' worry about my approach – namely, that it reduces the subject of aesthetic engagement to a 'perceiver'.

One of the reasons why I take the concept of attention to be so important in aesthetics is because our perceptual experience depends heavily on what we are attending to and how we do so. And given that our attention depends on what we know and believe (but also on our expectations, hopes, and aspirations), this means that our perceptual experiences (and, a fortiori, our perceptual aesthetic experiences) very much depend on our higher-order mental states.¹⁰ Another important mediator of these top-down influences on our perceptual aesthetic experiences, something I only talk about in passing in the book but that I have been exploring since, is mental imagery. Our perceptual experience very much depends on the mental imagery we use to fill in the gaps of the scene in front of us and mental imagery depends on our background beliefs, knowledge, and expectations.¹¹ Our aesthetic engagement is complex. But so is perceptual experience. Both can and very often do depend heavily on higher-level mental states. I don't think we should worry about thinking of the aesthetic subject as a perceiver. A lot goes into being a perceiver.¹²

My final response is to a remark Schellekens makes passingly about how aesthetic value might be the combination of aesthetic properties and aesthetically relevant properties (and how the lingering effect might depend on this combination). I deliberately avoided discussing aesthetic value in the book and I will continue to do so here. This has to do with a fourth aim of the book, which is more of a public relations manoeuvre, not so much a bona fide philosophical aim.

Philosophical disciplines are often divided between what is described as 'value theory' on the one hand and 'metaphysics and epistemology, broadly construed'

⁹ I say more on this in 'Aesthetic Experience of Artworks and Everyday Scenes', but definitely not enough.

¹⁰ See also my 'Cognitive Penetration and the Gallery of Indiscernibles', *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, no. 1527 (2015): 1–3, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01527.Nanay 2015a.

¹¹ Bence Nanay, 'Perception and the Arts', in *Art and Philosophy*, ed. Christy Mag Uidhir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); *Seeing Things You Don't See* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹² See also my 'Against Aesthetic Judgment', in *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment*, ed. Jennifer McMahon (London: Routledge, 2018), 52–65.

on the other. Value theory is supposed to encompass ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics (among others). Metaphysics and epistemology, broadly construed is supposed to encompass philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and philosophy of science (besides, obviously, metaphysics and epistemology). These categories are used a lot in job ads and in classifications of philosophy papers, so a lot depends on which bag aesthetics is put into.

And I see no reason why aesthetics would belong to the value-theory bag and not the metaphysics and epistemology, broadly construed bag. Much of aesthetics is about experiences, perception, emotions, attention, and imagination, all of which are part of philosophy of mind (even if you are sceptical about the emphasis of my book on philosophy of perception). And philosophy of mind is, in turn, part of metaphysics and epistemology, broadly construed. So I do not see why aesthetic value would need to be taken to be a central concept in aesthetics. Some of our experiences are valenced. Some of our experiences matter to us a lot. These are claims about experiences, not about value (whatever that concept means).

But those who are more on the 'value-theory' end of things might want to know how aesthetic value fits into my picture of aesthetics. Even if it is not a central concept in my view, given its importance in the history of aesthetics, I need to say something about it. And I think that on this point, Schellekens is exactly right. Thinking of aesthetic value as a combination of aesthetic properties and aesthetically relevant properties seems to be on the right track. And working out the exact connection between the three concepts of aesthetic value, aesthetic properties, and aesthetically relevant properties would be a very promising new direction for future research. Another way of putting this is that the standard relation between aesthetic properties and aesthetic value is put in new perspective by the introduction of the third relatum, that of aesthetically relevant properties – properties that are such that if we attend to them, this makes an aesthetic difference.

I said above that critics are supposed to talk about aesthetically relevant properties and not aesthetic properties. If a critic says that a painting is beautiful or graceful, she is not doing her job right. She should draw our attention to properties that we have not noticed that are such that when we notice them, it transforms our experience. And I think that this is by and large true. But I did add in the book briefly that it is part of the critic's job to talk about the relation between aesthetically relevant properties and aesthetic properties – about how an aesthetically relevant property realizes aesthetic properties. But a lot more would need to be done to work out how exactly aesthetically relevant properties combine with aesthetic properties to yield aesthetic value.

I would like to thank Sherri and Elisabeth again for comments that are not only perceptive and often charitable, but, and this is something that can be said of very few response pieces, open up new directions for future research in at least three domains: the relation between aesthetic experiences of art and of everyday scenes, the relation between perceptual and cognitive effects of engagement with works of art, and the relation between aesthetically relevant properties and aesthetic properties.

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PROUST WASN'T A NEUROSCIENTIST

MURRAY SMITH

My response falls into two parts. In the first part, I begin by addressing the concerns raised by Sherri Irvin regarding the role of neuroscience within the model of triangulation advanced by *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* (hereafter: *FACT*). This leads me through a variety of considerations, including the distinction between *explanandum* and *explanans*, the nature of the supervenience relation holding between neural states on the one hand and psychological and phenomenological states on the other, and the methodological or epistemological character of triangulation. In unpacking the latter claim, I draw a comparison between biological motion and the biological – or, better, biocultural – cognition that a naturalistic approach to the mind points us towards. In the second part of my response, I pick up on Elisabeth Schellekens's focus on the phenomenology of aesthetic experience, and my particular conception of it. I seek to allay Schellekens's worry that my account of aesthetic experience encompasses 'too much' by emphasizing again the importance of the *explanandum–explanans* distinction, and relatedly, by stressing the distinction between the *content* of aesthetic experience and the *explanation* of such experience. I stress the differences between the explanatory goals of the theorist with the creative and aesthetic goals of the artist (while acknowledging that theorists need to observe a principle of explanatory relevance, lest their theories become 'bloated' in the way Schellekens fears). I conclude by arguing that a naturalized aesthetics is able to accommodate the particularity of specific artworks and of individual appreciators, and that such accommodation is not in tension with the tradition of scientific psychology.

I

In her commentary, Sherri Irvin recognizes the centrality of the triangulation model to the project advanced in *FACT* – the effort to coordinate evidence from introspection and phenomenal reflection, psychology, and neuroscience in the study of the mind in general, and in relation to aesthetics and aesthetic experience in particular. In commenting on the model and the book, Irvin points to a number of ways in which we share common ground. In agreement with both Irvin and Elisabeth Schellekens – and indeed, I believe, with Nanay – I take the clarification and explanation of aesthetic experience to be central to the enterprise of philosophical aesthetics. Irvin also notes the 'anti-reductivist flavour'

of *FACT*, notwithstanding the seriousness with which I take (neuro)science.¹ One way in which this is manifest, as Irvin points out,² is in my concern with the overreaching and 'overinterpretation' widespread in cognitive neuroscience, where bold claims and speculative edifices are built on the basis of preliminary and often very limited neural evidence. The most sustained critique of this tendency is to be found in Chapter 2 of *FACT*, where I coin the expression 'neural behaviourism' to describe and refer to that strain of neuroscience which treats neurophysiological evidence as if it spoke for itself – as if it were meaningful *without* being intermapped onto evidence from experience and psychological theory.

But Irvin has doubts about the level of confidence that I place in neuroscience (or at least the neuroscience currently available to us): the findings of contemporary neuroscience, she states, 'tend to be pretty primitive' and 'coarse-grained'.³ More specifically and more fundamentally, Irvin challenges my view that there is an 'interdependence' among the three types or levels of evidence which makes it impossible to hierarchize their significance. She argues that, at least with respect to aesthetic experience, there is an asymmetry among the levels which makes phenomenological evidence – the evidence of experience itself – the most significant kind of evidence available to us. She holds this because 'when it comes to art and aesthetic experience, the phenomenological is irreducibly not just one of the legitimate targets of our interest, but the primary one'.⁴ Irvin also contends that, so long as we hold that mental properties supervene on neural properties, psychological evidence takes priority over neural evidence. I'll return to the topic of supervenience shortly. But the immediate point to take stock of is that, on Irvin's view, in contrast to mine, there is a clear hierarchy among the three types of evidence constitutive of triangulation, in which phenomenology is at the top and neurophysiology at the bottom (neural evidence is 'subservient' to the other kinds of evidence).⁵

Note, however, that there appears to be a strong and a weak version of Irvin's objection to the role of neuroscience in aesthetics. Certain passages in her commentary imply that the problem is (or might be) that neuroscience is too young as a science either to make much of a contribution, or for us to know whether it might make such a contribution, to our understanding of aesthetic experience:

¹ Sherri Irvin, 'The Nature of Aesthetic Experience and the Role of the Sciences in Aesthetic Theorizing: Remarks on the Work of Nanay and Smith', *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 105.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 105, 107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

the suggestion that the three levels exist in 'a tail-chasing form of interdependence' strikes me as premature: the present coarse-grained state of much neuroscientific knowledge doesn't permit it to have a very robust explanatory role. It remains to be seen whether the apparent primacy of the experiential level will recede as the underlying neuroscience becomes more sophisticated.⁶

Other passages imply a stronger, more conceptual objection, based on the fact that both our experiences and our psychological capacities supervene on neural states and processes. Given this, Irvin argues, 'the prospect of neurophysiological data making an independent contribution to aesthetic theorizing, even once the science is far more advanced', is in doubt.⁷

Here it is important to introduce two rejoinders to the strong version of Irvin's objection. The first concerns the peculiar status and role of experiential evidence in the model of triangulation advanced by *FACT*. Such experience, I argue, plays a dual role in theories of aesthetic experience: it functions as both *explanandum* and *explanans*.⁸ How can that be? As Irvin stresses, our aesthetic experience – whether of artworks, natural phenomena, or the facets of everyday experience – is the very thing which theories of aesthetic experience seek to *explain*. But I contend that, additionally, what we have to say about aesthetic experience – the way it feels to us; the way we characterize it – plays a role in our *explanations* of such experience. This is one of the peculiarities of the science of mind which marks it off from all other domains of science, where the pursuit of the 'view from nowhere' is an appropriate governing ideal. That ideal of course has an important place in the cognitive sciences as well. But unless we take the stance that the 'view from somewhere' – the data of first-person experience – is entirely epiphenomenal, experiential evidence is bound to figure in our explanations, even if such evidence is defeasible.

To take one example from *FACT*: according to the orthodox theory of suspense, suspense arises when, in engaging with an unfolding sequence of events, we hope for certain outcomes, fear for others, and, crucially, lack knowledge of the outcome. But this gives rise to the problem of 'anomalous suspense'⁹ – the apparent experience of suspense in contexts where we do know the outcome of the narrative in question (either because it is a well-known real-world narrative or because of repeated engagements with specific fictional narratives). Various solutions to this problem are possible, some of which hold that the emotion we

⁶ Ibid., 108.

⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁸ Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 62.

⁹ Richard Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

experience in such contexts really is suspense. But if we wish to defend the idea that suspense *is* or *can be* experienced where we already know the outcome of a narrative, experiential evidence will be relevant. Thus when my body tightens up at the prospect of the hijacking of the flight depicted in *United 93*, and it feels to me like I am experiencing suspense in relation to that possible event, that counts as one form of evidence in favour of the hypothesis that I am experiencing suspense.

We need to be careful here with regard to what the evidence of experience is evidence of – what exactly is the *explanandum*? There are two candidates: our experience itself and the psychological capacity associated with the experience. Can our experience be evidence of our experience? There is something worryingly circular about that thought. Our experience (qua experience) just is constitutive of what we want to explain, and in that sense we can't be wrong about our experience. But we can be mistaken about the psychological skill or capacity the exercise of which creates the experience. As I note in *FACT*, our ordinary experience gives us the impression that our visual system affords us a uniformly coloured and detailed visual field. But as research on peripheral vision and on inattention and change blindness shows, it doesn't! Christopher Chabris and Dan Simons refer to this phenomenon as the 'illusion of attention'. They note that 'we vividly experience some aspects of our world, particularly those that are the focus of our attention. But this rich experience inevitably leads to the erroneous belief that we process *all* of the detailed information around us.' So our visual experience is characterized by this illusion, and such experience gives rise to mistaken beliefs about our visual capacities.¹⁰ (The same may be true of suspense; our experience of what feels like suspense in anomalous cases, like those noted above, may be misleading; the jury is out.) Thus it is cogent to think of our visual experience as evidence for our capacities or skills – misleading evidence, as it turns out in this case – in a way that it isn't cogent to think of experience as evidence of experience.

My second response to the strong version of Irvin's objection focuses on the role of supervenience. Irvin and I are in agreement 'that the phenomenological and the functional/cognitive supervene on the physiological'.¹¹ But we differ on the significance of this relationship. While I grant that there is an ontological hierarchy among the levels in the triangulation model,¹² I insist on two further points. First, that the more basic level of neurophysiology in the ontological

¹⁰ Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 61, 235nn11–13; Christopher Chabris and Dan Simons, *The Invisible Gorilla: And Other Ways Our Intuition Deceives Us* (London: HarperCollins, 2010), 7.

¹¹ Irvin, 'Nature of Aesthetic Experience', 107.

¹² Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 234n6.

hierarchy should not lead us to make any fallacious inferences about the (ir)reality of psychological states or conscious experiences: the ontological hierarchy gives us no reason to think that the mind in general or consciousness in particular are any less real than the brain states on which they supervene. Although Irvin does not address this point, I am confident that here, too, we are in agreement.

Where there is a difference, if not a disagreement, between us concerns the nature of triangulation. At least by implication, Irvin treats triangulation as an ontological claim; that is what the supervenience relation describes. But I frame triangulation in *methodological* terms: 'no item within these bodies of evidence is insulated from revision or rejection – so elimination of even long-established, cherished beliefs and theories is certainly possible. In addition, no straightforward methodological hierarchy among the three levels of analysis is established: no one of the three types of evidence necessarily overrules the others.'¹³ The idea here is that, in our search for an understanding of the mind and of aesthetic experience, we can begin with evidence of any type – experiential, functional, neural – as all of them will (or at least can) lead us into the space of explanation, where any given piece of evidence may intersect with any other. I grant that, given supervenience, differences at the base level of the brain may not manifest in differences at the supervening level of the mind; but of course they can and often do, and that is all that is necessary to 'license' attention to neural evidence from a methodological point of view. The example of mirror neurons is telling in this respect: mirror neurons were initially discovered by accident when the neuroscientists involved were running experiments designed to test for a quite different set of hypotheses about brain function in macaque monkeys.¹⁴ But once this unexpected and anomalous neural data was on the table, hypotheses about the functional and experiential states it might be underpinning could be (and were) framed. Note that this is precisely why I don't claim that 'neurophysiological data [makes] an *independent* contribution to aesthetic theorizing',¹⁵ but rather that it exists in a relation of *interdependence* with functional and experiential states. This interdependence claim cuts both ways as far as neuroscience is concerned – neural evidence is given a significant role, but it degenerates into meaningless 'neurobabble' if cut loose from experiential and functional evidence and interpretation.

One might also make this methodological point in epistemological terms: triangulation bears on how we gain knowledge of the mind – how we discover its mechanisms, processes, and other characteristics. It leaves the ontological

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64–65.

¹⁵ Irvin, 'Nature of Aesthetic Experience', 100 (my emphasis).

hierarchy, described by the supervenience relation, intact. Ontologically, a tiger is a tiger because of its genetic make-up; but we get to *know* if a tiger is a tiger by looking at its observable features and behaviour. What cuts ice epistemically may be ontologically blunt.

What more can be said in support of the methodological and epistemological value of triangulation in general and the neural level of evidence embedded within it in particular? In a striking passage which resonates strongly with those trends in contemporary philosophy of mind which accord substantial weight to the body and the brain – such as embodied and 4EA accounts of the mind – Darwin recorded the following thought in one of his notebooks:

To study Metaphysic, as they have always been studied, appears to me to be like puzzling at Astronomy without Mechanics. – Experience shows the problem of the mind cannot be solved by attacking the citadel itself. – The mind is a function of the body. – We must bring some stable foundation to argue from.¹⁶

We might consider Darwin's idea here in connection with the literature on *biological motion*. It is now well established within perceptual psychology that our minds are adapted to detecting the distinctive contours and rhythms of biological motion, as it is manifest in the movement of humans and other animal species. Among the possible forms of motion, biological motion is quite distinctive, and quite different from the artificial, technologically enhanced forms of motion we humans have invented. (Of course, it is a racing certainty that some future technologies will emulate biological motion, for various purposes.) And the distinctiveness of biological motion is ineluctably tied up with – one might even say constituted by – the bodily forms of animals. Darwin is inviting us to make the leap and accept that the mind, just as surely if rather more subtly, is tied up with the form of the body and the brain (the brain being nothing other than a particularly intricate part of the body): 'The mind is a function of the body.' John Searle, Patricia and Paul Churchland, and a great many other contemporary philosophers of mind would agree. Searle, for example, has argued that 'the brain is a biological organ, like any other, and consciousness is as much a biological process as digestion or photosynthesis.'¹⁷ The mind cannot be understood without an understanding of its architecture, and the architecture of the mind depends

¹⁶ Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836–1844: Geology, Transmutation of Species, Metaphysical Enquiries*, ed. Paul H. Barrett et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Notebook N, 564; quoted in Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 57, 64.

¹⁷ John R. Searle, 'Consciousness and the Philosophers', review of *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, by David J. Chalmers, *New York Review of Books*, 6 March 1997, 50.

at least in part on the architecture of the brain (or the brain-and-body). We can speak not only of biological motion, but of *biological cognition*.

On this view, the brain is the vehicle of biology, the organ that evolved in the human species in such a way as to create a behavioural and cognitive gulf between *Homo sapiens* and all other species. But we should not take talk of biological cognition to exclude culture as another shaping force in human cognition. As I argue in Chapter 6, phylogenetically speaking, culture emerged from our biology and then developed as an additional domain in which human cognition is forged, in tandem with underlying biological processes; according to one version of this view, human evolution has occurred through ‘gene-meme co-evolution’.¹⁸ From an ontogenetic and development point of view, the psychology we are left with must be understood in *biocultural* terms; talk of ‘biological cognition’ is not intended to deny or obscure the importance of culture in cognition.¹⁹ Culturally shaped cognition is to biological cognition as artefactual motion is to biological motion: both artefactual motion and cultural cognition build on affordances in their respective domains, for movement in the physical world and thought in the space of reasons and cognition.

II

Schellekens, like Irvin, puts the nature of aesthetic experience at the centre of her response, recognizing the significance of the issue to both *FACT* and *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*. She notes that both books are concerned with what is ‘phenomenologically distinct about aesthetic experience’;²⁰ arguing that this is a litmus test for any naturalistic account, since (Schellekens contends) naturalism tends to be reductive, erasing the very distinctiveness that it must capture and explain in order to succeed. Irvin, as we have seen, remarks on the efforts I make to resist such reduction, giving rise to the ‘anti-reductivist’ aroma of *FACT*. Schellekens captures my characterization of aesthetic experience very effectively, drawing on the term *retrospection* to evoke both the idea of ‘savouring’ rather than merely having an experience, and to point to the *complex temporality* and *reflexive intentionality* implied by this conception of aesthetic experience. ‘This “savouring” or “retrospection”’, Schellekens writes,

¹⁸ Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Consider, for example, the case of sociomoral disgust alluded to in my ‘*Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Précis*’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 98.

²⁰ Elisabeth Schellekens, ‘Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 111, also 114.

combines a whole host of states and abilities both in what we might call its production, its phenomenology, and its aftermath. It is not only reflective and emotionally laden, it is also self-reflective and affectively enjoyed *as* reflection or retrospection. We have an experience and at the same time an experience of that experience: aesthetic experiences are enjoyed, felt, and retrospected upon in a special way qua objects of a special form of self-consciousness which is distinctive of aesthetic attention.²¹

In her commentary, Irvin sounds a note of dissent – or least notes an important qualification – on this topic, to the effect that ‘savouring does not necessarily imply enjoyment, but it does imply really tasting as opposed to just absently swallowing.’²² While the pleasurable character of aesthetic experiences of which Schellekens writes – such experiences are ‘enjoyed’ – appears to have a kind of normative weight, neutral or negative aesthetic experiences are surely not only possible, but part of the landscape of actual aesthetic experience. True, we ought to seek positive aesthetic experiences, but often enough they fail or disappoint. Likewise, we ought to seek the right and the good – but things don’t always work out that way. ‘Disvalue’ is an aspect of both ethics and aesthetics.²³ So what is basic to aesthetic experience in this respect is keen and self-conscious attention to the quality of the experience, however pleasurable or otherwise the experience turns out to be.

Schellekens’s description, taken alongside Irvin’s qualification, pinpoints the *kind* of aesthetic experience I strive to theorize in *FACT*.²⁴ But Schellekens worries, if I can pursue the metaphor introduced by Irvin, that all may not be well underneath the aroma and the flavour of the account. The description of the phenomenon to be explained – aesthetic experience – may be attractive; the naturalistic theory advanced to explain it is greeted more cautiously. Schellekens worries in particular that I am ‘trying to fit too much into the account of what is supposed to be our distinctly aesthetic phenomenology’.²⁵ I take it that

²¹ Ibid. 115. Chapter 7 emphasizes the retrospective dimension of aesthetic experience, especially as it bears on empathy (Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 196–97). There may also be a connection between the retrospective aspect of aesthetic experience and the ‘lingering effect’ of such experience, as discussed by Nanay and Schellekens. See Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16–17; Schellekens, ‘Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention’, 112–14; Bence Nanay, ‘Responses to Irvin and Schellekens’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): 120–22.

²² Irvin, ‘Nature of Aesthetic Experience’, 102.

²³ On this point, see my review of *Aesthetic Pursuits: Essays in the Philosophy of Art*, by Jerrold Levinson, *Philosophy* 93 (2018): 467–69.

²⁴ Paisley Livingston has queried whether the conception of aesthetic experience explored in *FACT* is, in fact, too narrow and too demanding. See Paisley Livingston, ‘Questions about Aesthetic Experience’, *Projections* 12 (2018): 71–75; and my response, ‘*Film, Art, and the Third Culture* – A Response’, *Projections* 12 (2018), 116–19.

²⁵ Schellekens, ‘Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention’, 115.

Schellekens's worry here arises from the very 'thickness' of the thick explanation that, as we have seen, she rightly adduces goes hand in hand with the methodology of triangulation. If everything from neural networks and mental modules to selection pressures and evolutionary niches to affect programs and extended minds goes into the theoretical mix, what hope is there that the intricate structure of retrospection is going to survive, let alone be discerned and explained?

Here again it is important to hang on to the *explanandum–explanans* distinction. Those items which seem most alien to descriptions and explanations of aesthetic experience, including neuroscientific evidence, reference to subpersonal mechanisms and processes, as well as the adaptive unconscious and implicit bias, play their role in the engine room of explanation. They bear upon what Schellekens refers to in the quotation above as the 'production' of aesthetic experience. Generally speaking, none of these factors shows up in our conscious experience, even if their consequences do; and so none is part of the content of aesthetic experience. 'Exactly what do we find behind the "door [to] the first-person perspective within a scientific approach to the mind"?' asks Schellekens.²⁶ We find, exactly, the contents of experience – what is available, with all its fallibility and fragility, to introspection and phenomenological reflection. The point is 'simply' that, to reiterate one of my responses to Irvin, such aesthetic experience is not only the *target of explanation*, but – conceived in functional terms, as a distinctive kind of capacity – one type of evidence that we can marshal within the *explanation of* that very target phenomenon (see p. 128). It is easy to understand how, given this dual role, it might seem like I am cluttering up the space of aesthetic experience itself with a lot of apparatus that doesn't belong there. That is why the *explanandum–explanans* distinction is so vital.

Relating my exploration of Edgar Reisz's *Heimat* (1984–2013) to Nanay's treatment of certain works by Paul Klee, Schellekens suggests that these analyses may 'affect' our experience of the artworks concerned.²⁷ With regard to *FACT*, however, *affecting* the appreciator's experience is not my primary goal. That's the job, in the first instance, of the artist by means of the artwork, and, in the second, of the critic through their criticism of the work. As a theorist, I would substitute the word 'explain' for 'affect'; explanation, once again, is the name of the game in theory construction. I insist upon drawing firm lines between three roles we can play in relation to artworks, and the distinct activities that playing these roles entail: *making* artworks is distinct from *appreciating* them, and both are distinct from *explaining* them. That is not to deny that there are points of connection and similarity, nor that the same individual can occupy these different roles with

²⁶ Ibid., 116, citing Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 117.

²⁷ Schellekens, 'Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention', 116.

respect to the same artwork at different times, nor that at a very abstract level, all three activities might be absorbed into some super-category (of all phenomena related to the aesthetic).

The distinct activities of making, appreciating, and explaining also relate to Irvin's sceptical attitude to the relevance of neuroscience, when she argues:

we do not need to descend to the physiological level to make sense of [various examples examined in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*]: as Smith notes, artists know how to manipulate audience attention and exploit unique features of the perceptual system in order to produce distinctive aesthetic effects, and their knowledge is derived not from neurophysiology but from careful observation of how certain kinds of effects captured on film are productive of particular kinds of experience.²⁸

As far as the activity of the artist is concerned, I agree. That is why, *pace* Jonah Lehrer, Proust was *not* a neuroscientist.²⁹ Lehrer makes the case that many of the discoveries of cognitive neuroscience – for example, with respect to memory, language, and visual perception – were prefigured in the work of artists such as Marcel Proust, Gertrude Stein, and Paul Cézanne. I have no objection to the rhetorical conceit of Lehrer's title: that artists can convey in artistic form an understanding of aspects of the human mind, and that psychology often confirms the wisdom of the arts. But we need to be wary of conflating the very different kinds of enquiry and knowledge afforded by the arts and sciences. Proust illuminated the mind, but his path to that illumination wasn't via the scientific study of the brain (as Lehrer well knows, of course). The theorist is engaged in a different activity, and that is why drawing on the findings of neuroscience – if not actually doing some neuroscience – take on a relevance and justification for the theorist which they lack for the artist.

So Proust wasn't a neuroscientist in the sense that he didn't need to draw upon neuroscience (or any scientific psychology) in order to create his works; nor do we need to appeal to neuroscience or scientific psychology in order to appreciate them. But if we want to *theorize* and *explain* why Proust's techniques and novels work as they do – and especially if we want to generate thick explanations – then neuroscience (and scientific psychology in general) will be a useful resource. Nonetheless, multilevel theories such as the one advanced in *FACT* do face a problem of *explanatory bloat* – if we can move sideways into context, as the advocates of thick description urge, and downwards into the physical structures subvening mental states and processes, as I contend by defending a parallel notion of thick explanation, then where do we draw the line for what is to count as explanatorily relevant?

²⁸ Irvin, 'Nature of Aesthetic Experience', 108.

²⁹ Jonah Lehrer, *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011).

The problem of explanatory bloat calls for a principle of explanatory *relevance*. I can't offer one here; but I can suggest the outline of such a principle through an example from *FACT*. There I make the case that in shaping our responses to the antagonist in *Saboteur* (1942), through the mechanism of affective mimicry, 'an aspect of the biology of emotions is enlisted [by Hitchcock] in a cultural and political cause.'³⁰ And I offer this up as a prime case of thick explanation. But not, I hope, an indigestibly thick explanation. The explanation cuts a path across the biological and cultural levels, identifying a particular set of causal factors: Hitchcock intuitively understood – he was no more a neuroscientist than Proust – through his experience as a film-maker, how the expressions and movements of performers affected audiences, as is evident from both his film-making practice and his reflections on his craft in interviews. And he was alert to the various constraints and pressures his films were subject to (including those of the Production Code Administration, the Second World War, and more broadly, the Hollywood system).

Schellekens also suggests that questions 'arise for anyone who seeks both to naturalize (and in that sense at least normalize) *and* to customize the aesthetic at the same time.'³¹ Earlier in the same passage she suggests that the alignment of naturalized aesthetics with scientific psychology might be taken as an advantage, insofar as its 'explanations are grounded in information, facts, evidence, or data which in some sense at least apply across aesthetic agents, regardless of all the purely personal, idiosyncratic qualities which can make us such unreliable aesthetic judges.'³² Schellekens's remarks on this topic resonate with the focus of Chapter 8, which seeks to reconcile the traditional emphasis on the particularity of art with the impetus towards generalization characteristic of scientific and philosophical theorizing. There I argue that the incompatibility between art and these explanatory enterprises is more perceived than real: a naturalistic theory of art can reveal those recurrent patterns, widespread practices and shared experiences which are manifest in the aesthetic universe, while setting into relief the unique and particular aspects of individual artworks and other aesthetic objects. (Note that Nanay explores the presumed 'uniqueness' of artworks, the 'completely new and often very rewarding experiences' that they afford,³³ and the implications of such uniqueness for aesthetic evaluation, in Chapter 6 of *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*. He concludes, similarly, that the explanatory resources available in

³⁰ Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 146.

³¹ Schellekens, 'Psychologizing Aesthetic Attention', 116.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Nanay, 'Précis', 92.

the philosophy of perception and vision science can shed light on uniqueness in the aesthetic domain.)

The same principle applies to the idiosyncrasy of individuals. Scientific psychology doesn't deny that individuals vary in a myriad of ways; indeed some branches of psychology – like personality psychology – focus on this very fact. Human variability – individual and cultural – is a feature of human existence which, one way or another, any scientific approach to human behaviour has to take into account. And so this recognition must have a place within a naturalized aesthetics. It is true that, when we assess the design features of an artwork, we are seeking to understand how the work draws on certain human capacities and existing knowledge in order to create a certain kind of experience. But it is no strike against the theory to admit that, where particular perceivers lack the appropriate background knowledge, or the perceptual or cognitive or emotional capacities, or the right disposition to engage with the work, then the qualia the work is designed to elicit will not emerge and the experience will not be had. In fact any other conclusion would be inconsistent with the scientific temper of naturalistic philosophy, since the background knowledge, the mental capacities, and the appropriate disposition are all causal preconditions for the work to work as it has been designed to work.³⁴ Both Nanay, in *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Perception*, and Todd Berliner, in his recent *Hollywood Aesthetic*, make the point by appealing to *expertise*.³⁵ Nanay draws on evidence to show that while the visual attention of experts ranges across the entire composition of a depiction, untrained viewers tend to restrict their attention to a focal object.³⁶ Berliner, meanwhile, notes that the ability of a viewer to appreciate properly and to find aesthetic pleasure in a film hinges on their level of expertise with the kind of film in question.³⁷ In a tradition like Hollywood film-making, where seeking a wide audience is central to the practice, making works which accommodate viewers possessing different degrees of expertise is an important skill. But the crucial point here, emerging from these arguments on expertise made by Nanay and Berliner, is that there is no tension between naturalism and the recognition of variability of response across individuals and groups.

³⁴ Nanay is similarly emphatic that engaging with the discoveries of the empirical sciences of mind – which is to say, adopting a naturalistic stance – compels us to take cultural variation in aesthetics seriously (ibid., x). In this sense, naturalism is not only compatible with the recognition of variation; where the evidence is there, it pushes us in that direction.

³⁵ Todd Berliner, *Hollywood Aesthetic: Pleasure in American Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁶ Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 26–27.

³⁷ Berliner, *Hollywood Aesthetic*, 192.

Throughout this response, I've sought to defend the naturalistic but non-reductive tenor of *FACT*, by showing how a serious and principled engagement with neuroscience (and other sciences) need not compromise the distinctiveness of the aesthetic phenomena – above all, aesthetic experience – that all four participants in this symposium prize and seek to understand. I am not sure that I can completely disentangle the elements of clarification, concession, and creativity that Nanay distinguishes in his response. But I am confident of the value of all three elements, and thank Irvin and Schellekens for so effectively generating them with their thoughtful, challenging, and illuminating commentaries.

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