AESTHETIC ATTENTION: A PROPOSAL TO PAY IT MORE ATTENTION

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Whether it is consciously focusing on a painting's intricate layers of pigment or spontaneously being drawn to new layers of voices in a choral performance, attention appears essential to aesthetic experience. It is surprising, then, that the actual nature of attention is little discussed in aesthetic theory. Conversely, attention is currently one of the most vibrantly discussed topics in the philosophy of perception and in cognitive science. My aim is to demonstrate the need for and the value of aestheticians considering such philosophical accounts in order to establish a clear understanding of 'aesthetic attention'. I assess the existing aesthetic candidates against Wayne Wu's characterization of attention as 'selection for a task'. Finding that these candidates lack full explanatory force, I make the novel proposal that aesthetic attention is best characterized as 'selecting for the sake of selection'. Finally, I suggest that both aesthetics and, more broadly, the philosophy of attention would benefit from paying aesthetic attention more attention.

Paying attention appears essential to experiencing visual arts, music, and the aesthetic in nature and even the everyday. Be it Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*, Allegri's *Miserere*, Aurora Australis, or an egg cup, we need, in some way, to attend to these things in order to have an aesthetic experience of them. Although often assuming, even appealing to, its role, the actual nature of attention is little discussed in aesthetic theory, and where it is discussed it appears to be assumed to be, or reducible to, a basic, ordinary, or common understanding of attention. But in broader philosophy, particularly, the philosophy of perception, and also in cognitive science, explanatory accounts of attention do not seem basic nor commonly understood. Even our ordinary understanding of attention does not appear to be a single basic kind. I suggest that aestheticians should consider these accounts of attention in order to establish a full understanding of *aesthetic attention*. This consideration has the potential to work both ways. If aesthetic attention is indeed just attention paid to the aesthetic in experience, then aesthetic theory might be informed by the philosophy of attention. Alternately, if the philosophy of attention does not capture the proper characterization of aesthetic attention, then aesthetic theory might challenge or contribute to the philosophy of perception on attention.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the need for, and to motivate the value of, such cross-consideration between accounts of attention in the philosophy of perception and in cognitive science on the one hand and aesthetic theory on the other. Here I focus on attention in aesthetic experience, asking, What is aesthetic attention? To begin, I set out the existing accounts of

aesthetic attention found in aesthetic theory. I reveal that they fail to give an explanation of what it *is*, and that a basic kind of attention is taken for granted. I then consider the general metaphysical question from the broader philosophy of attention: what is attention? The answer to this question aims to describe the conceptual understanding of attention which underpins both philosophical theory and empirical investigations of the mind, particularly perception. It follows that a general metaphysical understanding of attention might similarly underpin aesthetic attention, that is, describe what it *is*. To determine if this is the case, I examine Wayne Wu's account that characterizes attention as 'selection for a task'. In turn, I ask: if aesthetic attention is to be understood as 'selection for a task', what is the relevant task? I offer an assessment of this using existing candidates from aesthetic theory. As a result, I propose that aesthetic attention is best characterized as 'selecting for the sake of selection'.

Finally, I explore some initial implications of my proposal. I address an existing alternative account of aesthetic attention that similarly appeals to the philosophy of attention, demonstrating that it is readily compatible with my characterization. I go on to indicate how my proposal might be further developed beyond aesthetic experience to account for the role of attention in aesthetic appreciation and in aesthetics and philosophy of art in general. In addition to advancing aesthetic theory, my characterization of aesthetic attention challenges Wu's appeal to 'selection for a task' as a complete account of attention. As such, I suggest that developing a full understanding of aesthetic attention will help form a better general understanding of attention in the philosophy of perception and in cognitive science.

I. THE EXISTING AESTHETIC THEORY OF AESTHETIC ATTENTION

Attention is potentially involved in various ways across the field of aesthetics and the philosophy of art. For instance, different ways of attending might be employed in the experience, judgement, or interpretation of art and the aesthetic. Or the attention employed to determine if an object is a work of art might differ from that employed to appreciate it aesthetically. Nevertheless, current aesthetic theory appears to be only concerned with attention involved in aesthetic experience. For that reason, my focus is on what will be referred to here as aesthetic attention in aesthetic experience.[1] In general, aesthetic experience is

[1] The use of the term 'aesthetic attention' here does not presuppose that there is a special kind of attention; it only presupposes that attending of some kind is involved in aesthetic experience. Although it will be only applied to the attending involved in aesthetic experience in this instance, the term 'aesthetic attention' might also rightly be applied to other ways of attending in aesthetics and philosophy of art. It should not be assumed, however, that it is generalizable across these other applications.

accepted to be a particular kind of perception and discussion of it centres on what feature(s) determine such an experience to be *aesthetic*. There are two main approaches. One is described as internalism, where the relevant feature is internal to the experience had by the subject. Examples of this include a certain *aesthetic* feeling or affect. Historically, this has been pleasure, associated with forming a certain *aesthetic* frame of mind, originally understood in terms of disinterestedness, and later as an aesthetic attitude; but more generally it is an appeal to certain phenomenal features that constitute an aesthetic experience. The other approach is described as externalism, where the relevant feature is external to the subject of experience. This approach does not deny that there are subjective aesthetic affects; rather, it describes features primarily of the object of experience. Although there continue to be proponents of both views, there is an observable shift in aesthetic theory from generally accepting internalism in the early/mid-twentieth century to the present preference for externalism.[2]

In the context of these two main approaches to explaining aesthetic experience, there emerge two identifiable ways that aesthetic attention is understood (explicitly or implicitly) by existing aesthetic theory. One way is feature-focused, which is distinguished by attending to aesthetic features (associated with externalism); the other way is an attitude theory, where a particular aesthetic attitude forms the mode or kind of attention (associated with internalism). Tracking the trend towards externalism, current aesthetic theory generally favours feature-focused accounts over attitude theories of aesthetic attention. Nevertheless, these two ways of understanding aesthetic attention are not necessarily in direct opposition nor incompatible with each other. Moreover, they are not meant to exhaust the conditions and nature of aesthetic experience; that is, aesthetic experience need not be merely equivalent or reducible to aesthetic attention. Conversely, the aesthetic attention found to be essential to aesthetic experience might not be essential to every sort of engagement with art/artifice within the scope of the philosophy of art.[3] Barring one exception that I shall address at the end of this paper, the existing accounts of aesthetic attention that I describe from aesthetic theory make no obvious appeal to the general philosophical accounts of attention.

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2 This general picture is set out, for instance, in James Shelley, 'The Concept of the Aesthetic', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, winter 2017 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/aesthetic-concept/.

3 Although theories of aesthetic experience and the philosophy of art share a great deal of overlap, I suggest that they differ in scope. For one discussion of this, see Noël Carroll, 'Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory', in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20–40.

I.1. FEATURE-FOCUSED ACCOUNTS OF AESTHETIC ATTENTION

Feature-focused accounts of aesthetic attention are usually taken to be the most plausible and generally applied. Such accounts assume that attention is basic across experience. By basic I mean that it is a single kind or mode that is understood primitively or has a shared ordinary sense, and thus requires no further explanation. So, what distinguishes attention as aesthetic is the features of the experience which are selected, or focused upon, in attending to it, and not a particular mode, kind, or way of attending. For instance, regarding art, specifically music, Jerrold Levinson writes: 'aesthetic attention is roughly attention directed to an object's form and content and to the relationship between them. That is to characterize aesthetic attention in terms of *what attention is focused on*.'[4] Similarly, on Noël Carroll's content-oriented account of aesthetic experience of art, he advances form, expressive or aesthetic properties, and the interactions of these features as the candidate features when attending to artworks.[5] In her defence of the aesthetic in everyday experience, Sherri Irvin writes that 'our everyday lives have an aesthetic character that is thoroughgoing and available at every moment, should we choose to attend to it'.[6] These characterizations apply a general sense of attention to the aesthetic case. Specifically, according to this sort of view, we use our attention to focus on certain aesthetic features in experience. For Levinson and, similarly, for Carroll, it is the formal features and content of art objects; for Irvin, it is the aesthetic character of the everyday. In turn, what differentiates these accounts is the particular features that are attended to. Nevertheless, having assumed the basicness of attention, any further explanation in aesthetic theory is only interested in what may count as aesthetic features; as such, these theoretical features are logically consequent to attention, rather than forming an explanation of what attention *is*.

In general, the appeal to certain features is to ensure that aesthetic experience focuses on the aesthetic aspects of objects. To have, for instance, an aesthetic experience of *Blue Poles* I attend to its blue splotches, and not to the reverse of the linen canvas or its controversial price tag;[7] similarly, I attend to an egg cup's

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4 Jerrold Levinson, 'The Aesthetic Appreciation of Music', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (2009): 418. Emphasis in original.

5 See Noël Carroll, 'Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content', in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 89.

6 Sherri Irvin, 'The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Everyday Experience', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (2008): 30.

7 *Blue Poles* was controversially acquired for a then record A$1.3 million by the National Gallery of Australia, requiring Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's approval in 1973. See Anthony White, 'Jackson Pollock: Before Blue Poles', National Gallery of Australia website, https://nga.gov.au/Pollock/.

pleasing curve, and not to its capacity to accommodate my freshly boiled egg. One response to this might be that this over-emphasizes the role of the object of experience in aesthetic experience. Although maintaining a relationship with objects, and being a feature-focused account of sorts, it has long been argued that the relevant feature that determines aesthetic experience is a certain aesthetic affect or feeling, and we attend to the cause of that (subjective) feeling (rather than any particular formal features of the object). Traditionally, the appropriate feeling has been pleasure; but, if taken as a necessary condition of aesthetic experience, pleasure fails to account for disgust and other difficult feelings rightly understood as aesthetic.[8] Further, there seems to be a case for the possibility of affectless aesthetic experience, which undermines aesthetic affect as *the* feature of aesthetic experience.[9]

A more demanding response to feature-focused accounts is that there are no features that are specially aesthetic; instead, there are features that, under certain circumstances, count as aesthetic. It might be counter-argued that there exist some features in the world which are purely aesthetic, perhaps artworks, by definition, possess them. Even if this holds, the moderate claim is that there are at least some features in the world which under certain circumstances are rightly understood as aesthetic, and under other circumstances are rightly understood as not aesthetic. Feature-focused accounts, then, need to account for features that require being attended to under certain circumstances for them to be understood as aesthetic. Take the egg-cup example again: it features only one curve to which I can attend; what appears aesthetically relevant, then, is that I attend to the pleasing form of that curve and not its function in serving my breakfast. Similarly, when I attend to *Blue Poles*' splotches it can be to aesthetically relate them to the artwork's composition, or, alternately, to serve the function of colour matching my carpet with the splotches' distinct shade of blue. From these descriptions it seems that the nature or mode of attending distinguishes the aesthetic from other sorts of experience. Thus, attending to certain features might be necessary for an aesthetic experience, but it is not sufficient because merely focusing on these features cannot guarantee the experience is aesthetic. Instead, it might be thought that there are differing modes of attention and that aesthetic attention is the particular, perhaps special, mode of attending required for aesthetic experience.

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8 See Caroline Korsmeyer, 'Terrible Beauties', in Kieran, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, 51–63.

9 For a more detailed criticism of 'affect-orientated' accounts of aesthetic experience, see Carroll, 'Aesthetic Experience', 71–76.

I.2. ATTITUDE THEORIES OF AESTHETIC ATTENTION

Attitude theories offer an account of a mode of attending for aesthetic experience. Although undergoing much debate as a central idea in aesthetics during the early to mid-twentieth century, attitude theories appear to have now mostly fallen out of favour.[10] Such theories suggest that aesthetic attention is a special mode of attending, a certain state of mind. Such a state is meant to be achieved by forming a certain attitude in order to have a proper aesthetic experience. This is meant to distinguish aesthetic experience from other types of experience, especially where the relevant features of experience may not distinguish it as aesthetic. The relevant attitude is often cast as disinterestedness.[11] Originally formalized by Immanuel Kant,[12] the historical understanding of disinterested pleasure is that it arises from the proper contemplation of genuine beauty, and is distinguished from the interested pleasures associated with desire.[13] Kant contrasts the disinterested satisfaction of beauty with the interested gratification of the agreeable.[14] Subsequently, disinterestedness is understood as experiencing – perhaps, attending to – the aesthetic for its own sake, and not being motivated by personal or pragmatic reasons. For example, Jerome Stolnitz defines 'aesthetic attitude' as 'disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone'; where disinterestedness is 'no concern for any ulterior purpose'.[15] Defined as such, this aesthetic attitude is meant to give rise to a particular disinterested aesthetic experience, as distinct from other interested or purposeful experience. A hope of

[10] Iseminger has recently aimed to 're-inflate' the broader 'aesthetic state of mind' with its distinct phenomenology, of which aesthetic attitude may be thought a sub-species, but should not be thought of as equivalent. See Gary Iseminger, 'The Aesthetic State of Mind', in Kieran, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, 98–110.

[11] Another version of an attitude theory is Edward Bullough, '"Psychical Distance" as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle', *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912): 7–118.

[12] Shaftesbury is attributed with introducing the idea of disinterestedness in aesthetic experience. See Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (1711; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 191, 320; Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Significance of Lord Shaftesbury in Modern Aesthetic Theory', *Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1961): 97–113. Nevertheless, Kant is generally accepted as offering the first formal account of it. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of The Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (1790; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness"', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (1961): 131–43. See also Nick Zangwill, 'Aesthetic Judgment', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, fall 2014 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/aesthetic-judgment/, especially section '2.5 Disinterestedness'.

[13] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 90–91 (AA 5:204–5).

[14] Ibid., 92 (AA 5:205–6).

[15] Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston: Haughton Mifflin, 1960), 35–6.

this sort of position is that by excluding the personal, idiosyncratic, mere likings of interested experience, shareable aesthetic experience might be possible (not just coincidental claims of *what it is like for me*). This, in part, is thought to form grounds for at least comparable aesthetic judgements, if not justifiable and generalizable ones.

Significantly, attitude theories claim that they are describing a special – aesthetic – mode of attention, which presumably sets it apart from a basic, ordinary mode of attention. But in his attempt to dismiss the aesthetic attitude as a myth, George Dickie complains:

> what initially appears to be a perceptual distinction – listening in a certain way (interestedly or disinterestedly) – turns out to be a motivational or an intentional distinction […]. There is only one way to *listen* to (to attend to) music, although the listening may be more or less attentive and there may be a variety of motives, intentions, and reasons for doing so and a variety of ways of being distracted from the music.[16]

On Dickie's account there is only a single, basic, mode of attention, and any variations in attention are a matter of degree of attentiveness, the idea being that I might approach things with a variety of attitudes; for instance, my attitude to the *Miserere* might either be disinterested, that is, to experience it 'for its own sake', or interested pride for my friend who is performing in it. However, the nature or mode of attention paid to the *Miserere* is not constituted by these disinterested, or indeed interested, attitudes. Consider what it may be like to attend to the *Miserere*: over the fourteen-minute or so performance, my attention shifts throughout, focusing on the harmonies, being drawn to a dominant choral line. It is not clear that an attitude determines or even tracks attention during such an experience. So, like Dickie, I argue that the 'aesthetic attitude' describes a motivational mental state and not the nature of attention itself. Attitude theories cannot assume to be describing a special mode of attention simply by establishing an aesthetic attitude; they need to show how the attitude determines and tracks attention in order to properly experience the aesthetic. The particular nature of this special attending needs to be clearly distinguished.

Dickie rightly shows that attitude theories mistakenly conflate an attitude with attention. Yet it does not follow that such theories are irreparably undermined. Unlike Dickie's description of those he is criticizing, I do not hold that an aesthetic attitude must be equivalent to aesthetic attention.[17] Instead,

[16] George Dickie, 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964): 58.

[17] For a defence of the aesthetic attitude on these terms, see Gary Kemp, 'The Aesthetic Attitude', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (1999): 392–99.

I suggest that a reasonable theory would hold that an aesthetic attitude is a logically prior mental state for aesthetic experience. Describing this in terms of disinterestedness, we would say that an attitude of disinterest is formed prior to attending to an object. Thus, any appeal to disinterestedness should be understood to refer to a certain mental state required for aesthetic attention not a special mode of attending. As such, if the aesthetic attitude is to be dismissed as a myth, it cannot be because it is taken to be equivalent to aesthetic attention. My point is that what motivates our attention or any considerations as to how we should mentally prepare to properly attend to the aesthetic is not an explanation of what aesthetic attention *is*. For instance, whether my motivation for experiencing the Aurora Australis is scientific or aesthetic, I still attend to the green-blue streaked night sky. Attitude theories need to demonstrate how being motivated in these ways constitutes a special mode of attending. On existing accounts, however, these theories are merely applying a special attitude to attending. Thus, as already seen explicitly with the feature-focused accounts, attitude theories implicitly assume a single kind or mode of attention that is primitive or has a shared ordinary sense, requiring no further explanation.

I.3. THE NEED FOR AN ACCOUNT OF AESTHETIC ATTENTION

It is now clear from my analysis that, as they stand, feature-focused accounts and attitude theories both (in one way or another) appeal to a basic, ordinary sense of attention that is assumed to be primitive and theoretically neutral. Since feature-focused accounts are logically consequent and attitude theories are logically prior to attention, they are readily compatible; that is, the aesthetic attitude might be the appropriate preparatory mental state under which is it possible to attend to the relevant aesthetic features in experience. For instance, by forming an aesthetic attitude I attend to *Blue Poles*' splotches in relation to their aesthetic, formal composition; or such an attitude opens me up to being aesthetically pleased by the egg cup's curve, not just its function. Nevertheless, as I have shown separately, aesthetic features and aesthetic attitudes are insufficient to explain 'aesthetic attention', so there is no obvious reason why when taken together they explain what attention is. I submit that any aesthetic theory that did combine a feature-focused account with an attitude theory would minimally have to establish an account of attention that filled the gap between them or accept a basic sense of attention. Wittingly or not, the existing accounts take for granted that attention is basic to experience. It may be countered that these accounts rightly take its being basic for granted, a pre-theoretic, ordinary sense is sufficient for its application in aesthetics; but in

broader philosophy assumed basicness of attention has been found to be problematic. I now turn to the philosophy of attention to set out this problem.

II. PHILOSOPHY OF ATTENTION

Taken as a whole, philosophical interest in attention has various aspects, including its role in perception and cognition, its properties, and its mechanism. With contemporary philosophical accounts being informed by research in psychology and neuroscience, they consider attention's relation to phenomenology, agency, and consciousness. Here I am interested in what is cast as the metaphysical question, that is, what is attention? As I have already indicated, answers to this question aim to describe the conceptual underpinnings of theoretical and empirical approaches to attention. Historically, philosophical accounts suggest that we generally agree on what attention is. The origin of this claimed agreement is generally traced back to the psychology of William James, who famously stated:

> Everyone knows what attention is. It is taking possession of the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seems several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration of consciousness are of its essence. It implies a withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others.[18]

But subsequent pessimism has arisen regarding the possibility of a singular satisfactory, let alone generally agreed, answer to the question. Thus, on closer inspection of the field, details of such explanations diverge to display theoretical idiosyncrasies, especially when considered across the different fields that are interested in attention.[19] This raises the problem that there is currently no basic, theoretically neutral, shared sense of attention.

The central difficulty arises directly out of ordinary usage of attention. Caroline Dicey Jennings suggests that the ordinary sense (compatible with the dictionary sense) of attention is 'the act of mental selection'.[20] She pinpoints the current contention between theories to be over the adequate explanation of this act.[21] There are two distinct characteristics of what is ordinarily understood as the act of attending. One is that the act is spontaneous or automatic, that is, *to draw*

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18 William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (1890; New York: Cosimo Classics, 2013), 403.

19 For a survey of these accounts, and the tracking of this movement from agreement in James to diverging accounts to the pessimistic denial of any answer to the metaphysical question, see Wayne Wu, *Attention* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3–7 and throughout, or Christopher Mole, 'Attention', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, fall 2013 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/attention/.

20 Carolyn Dicey Jennings, 'The Subject of Attention', *Synthese* 189 (2012): 536.

21 Ibid., 536–37.

our attention. The other is that the act is intentional or controlled, that is, *to focus our attention*.[22] A plausible theory of attention needs to adequately account for both of these characteristics. As suggested by the resulting divergence in accounts, this proves theoretically challenging. In turn, the advantages and disadvantages of competing theories are often measured by their adequacy (or inadequacy) to encompass both automatic and controlled attention. Therefore, it follows that a plausible theory of aesthetic attention must also (explicitly or implicitly) account for these two characteristics of attention.[23] To demonstrate this, I shall first set out an existing theory of general attention with which to consider the aesthetic case.

II.1. WAYNE WU'S CHARACTERIZATION OF ATTENTION: 'SELECTION FOR A TASK'

One philosophical theory that argues that it can plausibly account for automatic and controlled attention is defended by Wayne Wu. Although it is a recent, and thus largely untested and relatively unestablished, theory in the field, I have several reasons for choosing Wu's account of attention. Firstly, Wu aims directly at the metaphysical question of attention I am interested in. Alternative accounts that primarily address other questions such as the function, properties, and mechanism of attention, along with its relation with consciousness are thus ruled out. Secondly, and relatedly, the earliest established accounts are generally directed at the metaphysical question, but as Christopher Mole observes, they are problematically too quick to explain attention in terms of its processes.[24] As such, the discussion of function and mechanism, which became the focus of the subsequent twentieth-century psychological and neuroscientific empirical research, overtakes the metaphysical grounding of attention.[25] Nevertheless,

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22 Alternately described in the literature as voluntary and involuntary attending. See Mole, 'Attention'.

23 I accept that there are other descriptive dichotomies and points requiring explanation in the literature on attention. However, for my purpose of motivating the benefit of engaging with the philosophy of attention, it is sufficient to show that aesthetic theories need to encompass automatic and controlled attention. I suspect investigations into these other aspects would simply provide further support for my claim.

24 In the historical context of the metaphysical problem that F. H. Bradley has with James, Mole writes: 'the psychologist's project of accounting for attention got under way without squaring up to the fundamental question of whether the metaphysics of attention is such that it can be explained by the identification of its constituent process.' Christopher Mole, *Attention Is Cognitive Unison: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.

25 Mole suggests: 'the metaphysics of the psychology of attention has been more or less dormant for the century since philosophy and psychology split […]. The two disciplines have been talking, but for the last century they have not been talking about attention.' Mole, *Attention Is Cognitive Unison*, vi. See also Wu, *Attention*, 3–5.

along with Mole and others,[26] Wu marks a revived interest in this question, especially as a unified theory of attention. Thus, while Wu is highly sensitive and responsive to the most recent research in cognitive science, he offers a clear metaphysical framework for a philosophical and empirical understanding of attention.

Thirdly, Wu's account shares common features and focus with his near contemporaries across the current central debate; thus, it is not obviously a radical nor intellectually ignorant position. In turn, my appeal to Wu's account will make my analysis fit with and responsive to the broad contemporary discussion of attention. Fourthly, for my purposes Wu offers a simple formal characterization upon which the aesthetic case can be straightforwardly assessed. Potentially appropriate alternative candidates might be found more plausible or philosophically robust, but most appear to require much more technical setting out to clearly apply here.[27] Finally, I accept that it might still be taken as a controversial choice but it is unlikely that an uncontroversial one exists. Notwithstanding this, let us recall that my aim is to motivate aesthetic theory to engage with the philosophy of attention in order to fully understand aesthetic attention, not to defend nor advocate any particular metaphysical theory of attention. In such a role, Wu's account seems no less suitable than any other.

Wu characterizes attention as 'selection for a task or action'. He has in mind a broad philosophical sense of action which refers to both the physical and the mental, as well as to certain psychological states.[28] Specifically, he states his full claim as follows:

(N) If S attends to X, then S selects X for performing an action A.[29]

As an illustration of and a motivation to support this claim, he writes:

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[26] Mole, *Attention Is Cognitive Unison*. Another recent unified metaphysical theory of attention is in Sebastian Watzl, *Structuring Mind: The Nature of Attention and How It Shapes Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[27] For comparison, Mole's much more complex characterization of attention is 'the agent performs τ attentively just in case there is some task υ that the agent understands to be a way of performing τ, and just in case the agent is performing υ on the basis of that understanding, and performing υ in such a way that the set of cognitive resources that the agent can, with understanding, bring to bear in the service of υ does not contain resources that are occupied with activity that doesn't serve τ.' Christopher Mole, 'Metaphysics of Attention', in *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays*, ed. Christopher Mole, Declan Smithies, and Wayne Wu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 67.

[28] Wu, *Attention*, 81.

[29] Ibid., 90.

> wherever one finds attention, one also seems to find selection for action. Thus, I attend to a conversation so as to verbally shadow it, to listen to it, or to prepare a response; I attend to an object to catch it, to follow it, or to get away from it; I shift attention around to locate an object, to find a hiding place, to locate the shortest path to my destination; I attend to a line of thought to figure out what is right, to locate a solution, to prepare an answer; I attend to a memory to recall what is important, to enjoy a fantastical image, to guide my shopping. Here, selective attention to some target is for the purpose of performing a task, and this performance implies selection for action. This suggests that (N) is plausible.[30]

Significantly, Wu stresses that attention selects for 'the purpose of performing a task'.

With the aim of capturing all instances of attention (or at least as many as possible), Wu's use of 'task' appears purposefully broad and non-specific, making it potentially slippery. Yet out of his application of the term emerge three identifiable features. Thus, according to Wu, a task is as follows. One, it is goal-orientated – it is to achieve some outcome, attain a goal; for instance, attending to a conversation will attain the goal 'to listen to it'. Two, it is action-guiding – a task guides how to attend to something or what is to be attended to; for instance, 'to recall' requires attending to 'a memory'. Three, the relevant task is distinct from or beyond the act of attending itself, that is, the 'target' of attention is not the task in attentional selection; for instance, to 'shift attention around' is not a task; rather, the relevant task is 'to find a hiding place'. Thus, a task is not a mere attentional act, what Jennings describes as one that 'is directed by a subject, where a subject is that to which we attribute such capacities as consciously experiencing, knowing, thinking, planning, and perceiving'.[31] Instead, a relevant task for attention is goal-orientated and action-guiding, where the subject performs something beyond the cognitive direction of attending. Notedly, this understanding of task or action appears consistent with others within the philosophical literature.[32]

As I have suggested, the plausibility of a theory of attention can be assessed in so far as it accounts for controlled and automatic attention. Obviously, then, Wu's characterization accounts for controlled attention because in forming the intention to perform a task (A), an agent necessarily *focuses on* the object (X) to perform that task. Taking his example of attending to an object, we would say that controlled attention is when we intentionally focus on the object to 'catch it', say, a cricketer fielding a cricket ball. But how it accounts for automatic attention

30 Ibid., 90–91.

31 Dicey Jennings, 'Subject of Attention', 573.

32 This can be seen, for instance, in Mole's characterization quoted in note 27 above. Moreover, Jennings also holds it as the standard view in order to argue against it.

is less obvious. Wu claims that in the automatic case where an agent's goal-oriented action is disrupted, that is, *drawn to* a new object (X), the relevant attentional action (A) becomes automatic too, causing a shift in the agent's goal.[33] Consider again his object example, where automatic attention is accounted for when we are unintentionally drawn to an object 'to get away from it', say, a bushwalker being surprised by a snake on the track and quickly reversing direction. Nevertheless, it is not clear that automatic attention is always (or merely) the disruption of an agent's goal.

It seems feasible that there exists at least a case where there is no obvious attended goal to disrupt but automatic attention still occurs; perhaps daydreaming is an example. If so, Jennings subject-directed selection account of attention better captures this sense of automatic attention because it maintains the subject's role without demanding that it be goal-orientated.[34] Also, on Wu's description, he appears to deny that the goal can be simply attending, which is the case in certain meditative states. I shall press this point when considering the aesthetic case, especially regarding my proposal in Section IV. Now I consider what might count as aesthetic attention on Wu's terms.

III. ASSESSING AESTHETIC ATTENTION AS SELECTION FOR A TASK

So how should we understand aesthetic attention in light of Wu's characterization? In particular, if aesthetic attention is 'selection for a task', what is the relevant task? To answer this question I now consider candidates from the existing aesthetic theory and assess them in terms of how well they account for automatic and controlled attention. The most obvious task for aesthetic attention is to have an aesthetic experience. Adopting the form that Wu defends:

> If S attends to X, then S selects X *to have an aesthetic experience*.

For example, if I attend to the *Miserere*, then I select the *Miserere* for an aesthetic experience. This is undoubtedly true. But, unfortunately, this characterization is so thin that it does not advance an explanation of aesthetic attention. It just restates what requires characterizing – that is, aesthetic attention is attention in aesthetic experience – without explaining what that is. It offers no limitations on or requirements of the subject (S) or object (X) of such an experience, nor does it pick out a particular role, or task, of attention within aesthetic experience. Even though attention is central and significant to aesthetic experience, it is

[33] Wu, *Attention*, 92–93.

[34] Dicey Jennings, 'Subject of Attention', 537.

overstatement to hold that all aesthetic experience amounts to aesthetic attention or that they are merely equivalent to each other; aesthetic attention is clearly a necessary condition of aesthetic experience, but it is not (obviously) a sufficient one. I am making no attempt to argue for a particular understanding of aesthetic experience here. There might be a narrow sense or particular instance where aesthetic attention is equivalent to aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, this alone would not capture all (arguably legitimate) cases of aesthetic experience. Yet no case of aesthetic experience is completely devoid of attention.

So, to consider alternative candidates, let us recast the discussed accounts of aesthetic attention in terms of a task. First, I turn to feature-focused accounts.

III.1. THE TASK IN FEATURE-FOCUSED ACCOUNTS: 'AESTHETIC FEATURES'

From the feature-focused accounts that focus on the aesthetically relevant features of an object, the obvious task is to select the aesthetic features. As Wu frames it:

> If S attends to X, then S selects X *for the task of selecting the aesthetic features*.

These accounts, too, limit the object of attention (X) to aesthetic features. Thus:

> If S attends to the *aesthetic features*, then S selects the *aesthetic features for the task of selecting the aesthetic features*.

For example, I attend to *Blue Poles*' blue splotches, to select the blue splotches. For illustrative purposes, this is an example of a simple (perhaps too simple) feature, but I hold that complex and interrelated aesthetic features would work the same way. For instance, I attend to the complex combined vocal harmony of a chord or chord progression in the *Miserere*, rather than simply the bass note or bass progression. Also, keep in mind that this characterization is not to be conflated with full-bodied aesthetic experience; it is simply aiming to capture the nature of aesthetic attention, which is limited by our attentional capacity. As is consistent with the aim of feature-focused accounts, the role of attention is to select the aesthetically relevant features for aesthetic experience. Yet this framing implies that aesthetic attention is completely controlled, that is, attention is the intentional focusing upon certain features, making any features that we are automatically drawn to not to be attended to *aesthetically*. But, spontaneity – say, to unexpectedly spot protruding glass shards amongst *Blue Poles'* splotches, or

suddenly hearing a previously unattended layer of voices in the *Miserere* – appears to pervade aesthetic experience. So, just like the general theories of attention, a full account of aesthetic attention needs to encompass automatic attention in aesthetic experience as well.

Since feature-focused accounts do not appear to fully account for both automatic and controlled attention, let us now consider another alternative by recasting attitude theories.

III.2. THE TASK IN ATTITUDE THEORY: 'TO RESPOND AESTHETICALLY'

As I have demonstrated, attitude theories describe a preparatory mental state for attending, and this makes determining what to cast as the relevant task less straightforward. Since an aesthetic attitude prepares us for aesthetic attention, in this case it limits the subject (S) to have such an attitude. But having an aesthetic attitude cannot also be the task for attending aesthetically, otherwise we would only attend to the mental state logically prior to aesthetic experience. This attitude is to ensure that we have an appropriate response, which is an aesthetic one characterized by taking something for its own sake. The task, then, is *to respond aesthetically*, as opposed to, say, self-interestedly or instrumentally. An instrumental response might be, for example, that I shed a tear at the *Miserere* to impress someone I am romantically interested in, or that I am pleased when my egg makes a snug fit in my egg cup for ease of eating. So, where the subject holds an aesthetic attitude, again following Wu:

> If S, *having an aesthetic attitude*, attends to X, then S, *having an aesthetic attitude*, selects X *for the task of responding aesthetically*.

For example, if I attend to the Aurora Australis with an aesthetic attitude, then I select the Aurora Australis to have an aesthetic response. This permits the appropriate spontaneity, that is, automatic attention in aesthetic experience – say, glimpsing a wisp of pink in the Aurora Australis's blue-green, or finding unexpected pleasure in observing the curve of an egg cup. Unfortunately, attitude theories lack the resources to account for controlled attention regarding the aesthetic. This is because they provide no guidance to the object of attention (X), determining no features or aspects of it which are relevant to aesthetic experience. As such, attitude theories are still prone to my original worry that they have problems picking out the relevant aesthetic features of experience. Like feature-focused accounts, then, the recast attitude theories do not properly encompass both automatic and controlled attention, and similarly do not offer a full account of aesthetic attention.

III.3. A COMBINED THEORY?

My analysis reveals that when considered under Wu's characterization an account of aesthetic attention not only needs to properly account for the task (A), but also for what is selected (X). This is to ensure that such an account encompasses both automatic and controlled attention. Feature-focused accounts clearly offer an account of what is selected (X), yet simply assume that this is the task (A), whereas attitude theories characterize the task (A) without limiting or specifying what is selected (X). A subsequent proposal might be to take these two accounts together, as follows:

> If S, *having an aesthetic attitude*, attends to the *aesthetic features*, then S, *having an aesthetic attitude*, selects the *aesthetic features for the task of responding aesthetically*.

The main problem with this is that it relies on us also accepting the complete theoretical baggage both of feature-focused accounts and of attitude theories. Although displaying compatibility, a happy marriage of these two positions would require carefully addressing their further individual difficulties, nuances, and most significantly their complaints against each other. For instance, the current dominant view of externalism denies that aesthetic experience requires any particular psychological preparatory state; at its strongest it holds that there is no such thing as 'aesthetic attitude'. This sort of view also holds that there is no non-problematic 'aesthetic response' and, at its strongest, that aesthetic experience need not elicit a particular response.[35]

A much more attractive option would be a stand-alone account of aesthetic attention, which captures the important aspects of these positions, while, hopefully, avoiding their problems. In turn, ideally such an account of aesthetic attention would be applicable across theories of aesthetic experience.

IV. A PROPOSAL FOR CHARACTERIZING AESTHETIC ATTENTION

Despite their current failings, I suggest that the recast accounts of aesthetic attention do illuminate a particularity of attending aesthetically, which is not obviously included in Wu's general account of attention as 'selection for a task'. Importantly, recall that in Wu's account the relevant task for attention is goal-orientated and action-guiding, where the subject performs something beyond the cognitive direction of attending. In illustrating support for this, he stresses what is selected (X) is for the purpose of performing the task (A), where X and A appear to be always distinct. For instance, from Wu's examples: 'I attend to an

[35] Such complaints are discussed, for example, by Carroll, 'Aesthetic Experience', 71–76.

object to catch it, to follow it, or to get away from it.' Catching, following, or getting away from an object are in no way equivalent to selecting that object. By contrast, the candidates for aesthetic attention all hold that the selecting is in some way the task. As my examples have shown, the *Miserere* is selected for the aesthetic experience of the *Miserere*; *Blue Poles*' splotches are selected in order to select *Blue Poles*' splotches; and with an aesthetic attitude the Aurora Australis is selected, to respond to the Aurora Australis. In each case, a certain experience, feature, or attitudinal response is selected for the sake of its selection. Aesthetic attention itself is not distinct from the task, that is, attending is the purpose of attending aesthetically.

IV.1. PROPOSAL: 'SELECTING FOR THE SAKE OF SELECTION'

For these reasons, I propose that aesthetic attention is best characterized as selecting 'for the sake of selection'. Since Wu accepts a broad philosophical sense of action, he would possibly not rule out 'for the sake of selection' as a valid task. However, as it stands his account does not explicitly rule in such a self-referential task. Recall from Section II.1, that, according to his account, a task has three identifiable features; that is, it is goal-orientated, action-guiding, and goes beyond the mere attentional act, the mere selecting of an object. He does not, then, obviously account for or describe such a task where 'selective attention to some target' *is* 'the purpose of the task'. But, as is evident from my analysis, in aesthetic experience the attentional act is mere selecting, which, unlike Wu's notion of a task, has no ulterior goal or action. As such, my proposed characterization of aesthetic attention as 'selecting for the sake of selection' poses a challenge to Wu's general account. Putting this aside to focus on the aesthetic case, let us apply the characterization of aesthetic attention to Wu's framing:

If S attends to X, then S selects X *for the sake of selection*.

To be clear, in contrast to the existing accounts from aesthetic theory, the proposed 'selecting for the sake of selection' does not require an 'aesthetic attitude' for such a selection, nor does it prescribe which features are to be selected. Thus, I suggest that this characterization avoids the insufficiencies of the existing aesthetic alternatives, yet captures the aspects of aesthetic experience that they are aiming to ensure. As such, it is readily compatible with internalist and externalist theories of aesthetic experience.

Importantly, my proposed characterization of aesthetic attention encompasses both automatic and controlled attention. It captures possibly the most significant sense of automatic attention, that is, where our attention is unexpectedly drawn

and held for no other purpose than attending. For example, on a long Antarctic night that pulls in a clear and cold flash of green quickly and completely draws me away from reading scientific instruments just to attend to the Aurora Australis; or, whilst wandering through the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), amongst the Cubism and Minimalism, the Abstract Impressionist angled splotches of blue catch my eye and I am drawn to *Blue Poles*. I argue that automatic attention without, as Stolnitz puts it, 'ulterior purpose' is common and inherently aesthetic. And it is noticeably distinct from the action-related examples – such as, to escape, locate objects, or resolve puzzles – that are given by Wu. Similarly, with controlled attention, we can focus on things for no other purpose than attending, that is, selecting for the sake of their selection. Take again the Aurora Australis: mid-winter I set up my deckchair on the Tasmanian south coast simply to attend to it, purposefully focusing on the Aurora Australis for the sake of focusing on it; or I head straight to the NGA modern and contemporary collection to sit focused on *Blue Poles* just to focus on it. Moreover, my characterization accommodates the complex relation between automatic and controlled attention seen in aesthetic experience. For example, I purposefully focus on a performance of the *Miserere*, selecting it for the sake of its selection; over the fourteen minutes or so of its performance, my attention shifts throughout, I focus on certain harmonies, I am suddenly drawn to another layer of voices, and then, I find myself fiddling with my concert programme, realizing that I am no longer paying attention at all.

Additionally, my proposed characterization of aesthetic attention as selecting for the sake of selection satisfies the aesthetic aims of feature-focused accounts and attitude theories. From feature-focused accounts the aim is to ensure that the experience is of the aesthetically relevant. These accounts approach this by limiting experience to the aesthetic features. I hold that an aesthetic feature is rightly understood as one that is selected for its own sake. For example, I select *Blue Poles*' splotches for the sake of selecting them or I select an egg cup's curve for the sake of selecting it. Aesthetic features can also be collectively selected in attending to the composition of an object. This may be too broad an understanding for some feature-focused accounts in that it encompasses ordinary objects that these theories wish to exclude. Still, I take it to properly delimit the aesthetic features that Irvin argues for in everyday experience. In a similar way, we cannot select the relevant features for the sake of selecting them if we are motivated for interested or instrumental reasons. To do so would require a different task, one that aimed to fulfil a distinct purpose other than attention itself. For example, I select the *Miserere* for the sake of selecting the *Miserere* rather than for the purpose of pleasing my romantic interest; or I select the Aurora

Australis for the sake of selecting Aurora Australis rather than for the purpose of measuring its visible spectrum. Thus, characterizing aesthetic attention as a self-referential task satisfies the attitude theories' aim to distinguish the aesthetic from other experience, specifically from everyday goal-orientated, action-guiding experience.

IV.2. ADDRESSING POTENTIAL CRITICISMS

One complaint against my characterization might be that it does too little in characterizing aesthetic attention as aesthetic, specifically, that it is not uniquely aesthetic. It does not distinguish the attending in aesthetic experience from other experiences where 'selecting for the sake of selection' might be the relevant attentional task. For example, as I implied above, it may equally apply to certain meditative states that focus on attending to the present for the sake of attending to it. Without committing myself to any view, I suggest that my characterization of attention might open up interesting possibilities of what properly counts as aesthetic or has an aesthetic aspect. But also, as I have already mentioned, aesthetic attention is only a necessary condition not a sufficient condition of aesthetic experience, nor should they be assumed to be equivalent; the variety of aesthetic experience is not merely attending aesthetically. For instance, Levinson characterizes aesthetic experience as a combination of aesthetic attention and aesthetic satisfaction.[36] So, the correct understanding of attention need not be uniquely applied to the aesthetic case, since other factors rightly contribute to a full explanation of aesthetic experience. Moreover, because my characterization is meant to be largely (aesthetic) theory neutral to make it readily applicable across theories of aesthetic experience, it benefits from being broadly encompassing in this way.

Another complaint might be that my characterization does too much in characterizing aesthetic attention. In this case it is thought to imply an evaluative sense of 'for its own sake' to aesthetic experience.[37] The idea appears to be that choosing to select something for its own sake is (already) to value it, or evaluate it to be worthy of being valued, for its own sake. It appears to follow, then, that to 'select for the sake of selection' is to value or evaluate the worth of what is selected for its own sake. I take this to confuse the role of aesthetic attention in aesthetic experience with the role of value in aesthetic experience. To value what we

[36] Levinson, 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Music', 418.

[37] I thank Victor Durà-Vilà both for pointing out the controversy around 'for the sake of' in aesthetic theory, particularly between Noël Carroll and Robert Stecker, and for the preview of his 'Attending to Works of Art for Their Own Sake in Art Evaluation and Analysis: Carroll and Stecker on Aesthetic Experience', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2016): 83–99.

attend to for its own sake might be a way to evaluate aesthetic experience. Also, what we value may in some way direct what we attend to, that is, we select what we value. Nevertheless, in the same way that the aesthetic attitude is demonstrated to be logically prior to attending, and thus distinct from aesthetic attention, this valuing must be too. This is especially clear where valuing is equated with such an attitude, but also holds where value (aesthetic or otherwise) is understood as distinct from any aesthetic attitude. For example, my scientific valuing of the Aurora Australis might motivate me to set up my instruments to observe it, but it is my (controlled or automatic) selection of its blue-green streaks for the sake of selecting its blue-green streaks which determines that I am actually attending to it aesthetically. Any resulting aesthetic value, then, is consequent to and distinct from the attention itself. Thus, the characterization of 'for the sake of selection' is a non-evaluative condition of aesthetic experience.

A final worry might be that, although I novelly locate aesthetic attention in 'for the sake of selection', my account simply rehearses the traditional (perhaps outmoded) strategy of self-reflexive aesthetic selection. This suggests that my proposal is simply a new version of the old view of disinterestedness understood as experiencing the aesthetic 'for its own sake'. Like disinterestedness, my characterization does appeal to a sense of aesthetic attention being an end in itself, which is in contrast to a means – or in Wu's terms 'for a task'. Yet, unlike disinterestedness, 'selecting for the sake of selection' is not a motivational state; it is not an attitude theory. As such, it does not prescribe the logically prior mental state for aesthetic experience. This makes my characterization of aesthetic attention compatible with disinterestedness but it is not itself disinterested. This means that it not only successfully resists Dickie's complaint but also captures the recognized phenomenon of aesthetic attention without being laden with dense, often problematic, theoretical commitments about the subject of experience. It readily describes both the conscious intention and the spontaneous response of subjects to the aesthetic.

V. ALTERNATIVES AND COMPLEXITIES

Having set out my characterization of aesthetic attention as 'selecting for the sake of selection', I now explore some initial implications of my proposal. Here I indicate how my proposal might be further developed beyond aesthetic experience to account for the role of attention in aesthetic appreciation, as well as in aesthetics and the philosophy of art in general. But first I shall address an existing alternative account of aesthetic attention that similarly appeals to the philosophy of attention.

V.1. NANAY'S ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT OF AESTHETIC ATTENTION

While demonstrating that current aesthetic theory generally assumes or reduces aesthetic attention to a basic or ordinary sense, without considering broader philosophical accounts of attention, I mentioned that there is an exception. Bence Nanay is a recent advocate of aesthetics generally benefitting from an active engagement with the philosophy of perception.[38] In particular, he offers a view on aesthetic attention that directly appeals to the philosophical discussion of attention. Specifically, he employs the accepted distinction between attention focused on a particular part, for example, of the visual field, and attention distributed across the field of view.[39] Nanay suggests that the focused versus distributed distinction, which is traditionally applied to 'entities' (or objects), equally applies to properties (of objects).[40] In turn, he defines aesthetic attention as 'where our attention is distributed with regards to properties but focused with regards to objects'.[41] Ordinary attention is usually understood as distributed regarding objects, and thus cognitive capacity limits the number of properties possibly attended to. Conversely, according to Nanay's characterization of aesthetic attention being focused regarding objects, it is possible to attend to a large number of properties, which, for him, marks it out as a special – aesthetic – way of attending.[42] This, he argues, revives a kind of aesthetic disinterest that can resist Dickie's complaints about types of attending,[43] while better accounting for a certain aesthetic experience.[44]

Without attempting to give an analysis of Nanay's account, here I suggest how my proposal stands in relation to it. Obviously, our explanations of aesthetic attention appeal to different distinctions from the philosophy of attention and perceptual psychology. I appeal to the controlled versus automatic attention distinction, whereas Nanay appeals to the focused versus distributed attention distinction. Also, our explanations have different scopes. While I offer a general, theoretically neutral, account of aesthetic attention, which has the potential to be a necessary condition of any theoretical account of aesthetic experience, Nanay isolates a narrow or particular sense of aesthetic experience that he defines as (or reduces to)

38 Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
39 Bence Nanay, 'Aesthetic Attention', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22 (2015): 105.
40 Ibid., 106.
41 Ibid., 107.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 104–5, 108–9.
44 Ibid., 101–2.

a particular way of attending.[45] In turn, my general non-reductive account describes attending (aesthetically) to the object in general, whereas Nanay's account describes a particular way of attending (aesthetically) to the properties of the object. Nevertheless, these two accounts are readily compatible. Taking general aesthetic attention as 'selection for the sake of selection' describes attending to the object. It follows that the object can also be focused on in such a way that distributed attention is paid to the properties of that object. Controlled and automatic attention can legitimately be seen on the level of both object and properties. For instance, the object *Blue Poles* is 'selected for the sake of selection' for the purpose of either focusing on it or being drawn to it in the gallery; and distributed attention of *Blue Poles*' properties involves focusing on the blue splotches, being drawn to the glass shards, and so forth.

V.2. ATTENTION IN AESTHETIC APPRECIATION AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

To motivate aesthetic theory's consideration of the broader philosophy of attention, I have focused on aesthetic attention in aesthetic experience; nevertheless, this does not exhaust the possible ways that attention might be understood in relation to aesthetics and the philosophy of art. In turn, other aspects of the discussion of attention in the philosophy of perception and in cognitive science might offer additional resources to explain these different and arguably more complex aesthetic processes. Take, for instance, aesthetic appreciation as described by Levinson:

> The notion of *appreciation* is a complex one. To appreciate something arguably involves, on the one hand, perceiving, cognizing, or otherwise experiencing it, where such experience may involve the imagination, and on the other hand, deriving satisfaction from it or regarding it positively. In other words, appreciating something implies both having an adequate experience of the thing, one that qualifies as acquaintance with it, and as a consequence of that experience, being pleased by or taking a favourable view of it. Briefly, in appreciating something one is experiencing it in a way one finds intrinsically rewarding.[46]

According to Levinson, what makes appreciation 'aesthetic' is appreciating 'its […] form and content, rather than […] its instrumentality in relation to external purposes', making the object (specifically, for him, music) itself – its intrinsic features and internal purposes – the focus of aesthetic appreciation.[47]

For the sake of demonstrating further possible cross-considerations of aesthetic theory and the philosophy of attention, let us accept Levinson's basic

45 Ibid., 96.
46 Levinson, 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Music', 415.
47 Ibid., 416.

claim that aesthetic appreciation of an object is a certain combination of aesthetic experience and intrinsic reward. It is attained by a complex process of developing an understanding of, and a relationship with, the object. Concerning art objects, this might include acquiring knowledge of the art world, artistic technique, along with repeated and sustained acquaintance with the object itself. On this view, my proposed characterization of aesthetic attention as 'selecting for the sake of selection' continues to be a plausible necessary condition of the aesthetic experience required to develop aesthetic appreciation of the object. However, it might not sufficiently explain all aspects of attention required in such a process. In particular, appreciation introduces certain aesthetic aims, which might constitute aesthetic attentional tasks as seen in Wu's characterization of attention. For instance, in developing my aesthetic appreciation of *Blue Poles*, I learn that there are glass shards imbedded in the top right corner, and thus I intentionally attend to the glass shards. Employing such an intention in attending is described by the philosophy of attention as 'top-down' attention, that is, where a 'non-perceptual psychological state' directs attention, primarily understood as the intention to attend.[48] In contrast to automatic and controlled attention which relates to how attention is directed across a process, top-down and bottom-up attention distinguishes how attention is initiated.[49] Thus, aesthetic appreciation appears to demand a more complex picture of attention; tentatively, it is one in which a certain aesthetic task or intention might initiate attention, and 'selecting for the sake of selection' describes the process of attending.

VI. PAYING AESTHETIC ATTENTION MORE ATTENTION

Overall, then, my answer to the question What is aesthetic attention? is 'selecting for the sake of selection'. My proposed characterization results from directly engaging with the broader philosophy of attention. Like the broader philosophical discussion of attention, I have demonstrated that aesthetic theories minimally have to make explicit how to understand automaticity and control in relation to aesthetic attention. Thus, it has the advantage over the existing understanding that emerges from aesthetic theory because it does not assume that attention is basic, and it accounts for both automatic and controlled attention in aesthetic experience. Even if my particular positive proposal fails to convince, aestheticians should by now at least be convinced that they should not assume

[48] Bottom-up attention is defined as not involving a non-perceptual psychological state. See Wu, *Attention*, 30, 34.

[49] Ibid., 33, 34. Wu discusses the relationship between top-down/bottom-up and controlled/automatic attention on pp. 34–38. There he suggests that there is no genuine case of bottom-up attention, and that there is instead only automatic attention occurring as a result of interruption during a top-down process (pp. 37–38).

the basicness of attention. Alternately, as Nanay's account attests, other distinctions or elements from the philosophy of attention must be accounted for too. For that reason, along with my tentative discussion of the more complex aesthetic appreciation, a full account of aesthetic attention would benefit from further investigation, specifically in relation to the advances in accounts of attention which are found in the philosophy of perception and in cognitive science.

Although concentrating on motivating aesthetic theory's engagement with the broader philosophy of attention, my analysis also indicates that aesthetic theory can inform general accounts of attention in the philosophy of perception. By making a case for selective attending being the aim of aesthetic attention, Wu's emphatically goal-orientated action-guiding account now appears incomplete. His account of attention as 'selection for a task', understood as an ulterior goal to the attending, does not clearly conceptually frame aesthetic attention. In turn, the general appeal to attaining a task or action to answer the metaphysical question What is attention? risks falling short in the aesthetic case. In contrast, my proposed characterization potentially forms a framework for further rich philosophical and empirical investigation. This sort of consideration of the aesthetic is likely to be of benefit in addressing other questions about attention; including its function (what is it for?), its mechanism (how does it work?), and its relation to consciousness phenomenon (what is it like?). This is a task for aestheticians, philosophers of perception, and cognitive scientists alike. Both fields would benefit from paying aesthetic attention more attention.

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