

## Book forum

### On Bence Nanay's

#### *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception*

(Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. xvii+214)

With contributions by Bence Nanay, Paolo D'Angelo,  
Nicholas Silins, Jakub Stejskal

### Précis of the book

Bence Nanay (University of Antwerp, University of Cambridge)

My book *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception* had more than one goals. The most important of these was to draw attention to just how much progress there 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 aesthetic 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 moments 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, 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 failed. There is wide disagreement about some of the most basic questions concerning aesthetic properties (Are they evaluative? Are they perceived? Etc.). That this 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 vs. focussed 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 regards to both objects and properties, distributed with regards 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 are often 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 is, 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 very 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. 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 been often 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.

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 time 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.

Finally, Italian readers of this journal may have noticed that the dedication of my book is in Italian. It says: "Dedicato alla cara, lieta, familiare memoria di Richard Wollheim". Quite a few Italian speakers asked me about this – including one of the authors commenting on my book below. This is an in-joke, a take on the dedication of Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964). I talked a lot about the somewhat odd dedication of this film and about book dedications in general with my teacher, mentor and friend, Richard Woll-

heim on one of our long evenings on the terrace of the Café Roma in Berkeley. That's when I decided that if and when I write a book about aesthetics, I would use this dedication. I didn't know that the book I would write would be so Wollheimian in spirit that its dedication would become more than an in-joke.

**A comment on Bence Nanay's *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception***

Paolo D'Angelo (Università Roma Tre)

The view of Aesthetics expressed by the title of this book may not sound new to Italian scholars working in this field. Throughout the last three decades, some Italian philosophers have stressed the impossibility to conceive aesthetics as (only) a philosophy of art. Starting from Emilio Garroni, who argued against any conception of aesthetics as "special philosophy", i.e. a philosophy concerning exclusively the fine arts, other scholars have sought a renewed "Baumgartian" foundation of aesthetics as a general philosophy of sensibility, among them Maurizio Ferraris in his *Estetica razionale*. Similar approaches are to be found also in recent "continental" aesthetics, for instance in Germany, where Wolfgang Iser has made a plea in favor of an "aesthetics beyond aesthetics" referring to Aristotle's theory of sensibility, while Gernot Böhme developed an "atmospheric" idea of perception, where art is nothing more than one field of aesthetics between many others.

On the contrary, Nanay's book shows a marked polemical charge against the mainstream of analytic aesthetics, where the dominant conception of aesthetics still is that of a philosophy of art, as they clearly reveal titles like *Philosophy of art. A contemporary introduction* by Noël Carroll or *Philosophies of art. An essay in differences* by Peter Kivy. A seminal work like Danto's *The transfiguration of the commonplace* is, among other things, a *plaidoyer* against general aesthetics and an apology for philosophy of (contemporary) art.

Nevertheless, Nanay's book deserves paramount importance not only for the debate in English-speaking countries, but also for our present debate in Italy. It focuses on philosophy of perception in order to develop a stimulating theory of Aesthetics, where a pivotal role is played by the concept of attention. If perception differs from sensibility, it is exactly because perception requires attention. There are,

however, many types of attention, and one crucial distinction is that between focused and distributed attention. By combining the distinction provided by perceptual psychology with a conceptual one, stressing the fact that we can attend to entities or to properties, Nanay is able to establish a quadruple distinction between different types of attention:

1. distributed with regards to objects and focused with regards to properties.
2. Distributed with regards to objects and distributed with regards to properties.
3. Focused with regards to objects and focused with regards to properties.
4. Focused with regards to objects and distributed with regards to properties.

This last type of attention is what Nanay calls *aesthetic* attention:

Aesthetic attention does not equal lack of attention. It equals distributed attention among a variety of properties, which is nonetheless focused on the same object. Thus, we can say that aesthetic interest is not really disinterest but rather distributed interest. (Nanay 2016: 26)

As this passage clarifies, Nanay's emphasis on the concept of attention implies a criticism against the notion of aesthetic experience. "Is the characterization of aesthetic experience the holy grail of aesthetics?", provocatively asks Nanay, while answering that "aesthetics as a discipline has paid too much attention to capturing this fleeting experience [...]. Many other kinds of experience are equally important within the context of aesthetics" (Nanay 2016: 17-8). In this respect, Nanay's theory shares some of the worries raised by analytic aestheticians towards aesthetic experience (although he himself finds Dickie's critique of aesthetic experience too simplistic). One can wonder, however, if Nanay's theory really succeed in avoiding the appeal to the concept of aesthetic experience (he speaks of aesthetic experience several times; see, for instance, Nanay 2016: 35, and the whole chapter 8). We shall return to this point.

*Aesthetics as philosophy of perception* opens up with a dedication to Richard Wollheim (there is a little mystery here, for the dedication is in Italian!), and Nanay proves to be indeed an excellent student of Wollheim in chapter 3, devoted to picture perception. The perception of pictures is in fact a field in which the distinction between focused

and distributed attention reveals itself immediately useful: aesthetic perception of pictures requires twofold attention, because in order to perceive a picture *qua* picture we must attend to the picture's surface and at the same time to the depicted scene – what Nanay calls “design-scene properties”, therefore employing distributed attention. “When we appreciate picture aesthetically our attention is distributed across the properties of the surface and the properties of the depicted scene *simultaneously*” (Nanay 2016: 46, my italic). Of course, it is possible that we attend to the depicted object only. But it is also possible that we attend to both the surface and the depicted scene concomitantly, and when it happens “we are in the realm of the aesthetic appreciation of pictures” (Nanay 2016: 47). This appreciation, again, is not necessarily an aesthetic experience in Nanay's eyes, as he writes that “expert art critics are clearly capable of attributing design-scene properties at will. But this will not guarantee an aesthetic experience” (Nanay 2016: 62). Yet this statement seems to contradict the previously established view.

Design-scene properties are a particular case of what Nanay calls aesthetic relevant properties (in short: AERP). The central point in the discussion of AERP (chapter 3) is that they are different from Aesthetic properties in the sense theorized by Sibley (in short: AEP). Nanay is skeptical about the importance of AEP in aesthetics. If these properties actually play an important role in key debates on Aesthetics, why then are these central concepts left undefined? “Many of the classic question about aesthetic properties can be raised in a much more straightforward and productive manner about aesthetically relevant properties” (Nanay 2016: 70-1). AERP, in Nanay's mind, are properties that bring about an aesthetic difference (one could ask, though, whether there is any difference between claiming this and saying that they bring about a difference in our aesthetic experience, given that Nanay himself speaks of changes “in the valence of one's experience”, Nanay 2016: 72). AERP 1) are not necessarily evaluative, 2) are both perceptual and non-perceptual, 3) are not properties that aesthetic properties supervene on. Concerning this third assumption one can note that in the following chapter, Nanay seems to share a different view with regard to semi-formalist properties (see Nanay 2016: 99). The usefulness of AERP is clear in relation to conceptual art. Conceptual works do possess qualities that are not AEP (they can't be perceived), but which are at the same time AERP. For instance the fact that Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning drawing* was produced

by erasing a De Kooning drawing is an aesthetically relevant property of this work, but not an observable property (so it is in no way an AEP). A further example may be given by Walton (1970): the fact of knowing that a work "x" belongs to a certain "category of art" influences our aesthetic evaluation.

In chapter 4 Nanay takes a stand against pure formalism, that is classic formalism, which is best symbolized by Clive Bell (or, nowadays, by Nick Zangwill). Formalism assumes that only formal properties, that is properties of the picture's surface, or plastic volumes in the case of sculpture, can be AERP. Despite the fact that this view is untenable, formalism "does manage to capture some important aspects of our engagement with works of art" (Nanay 2016: 97). Between formalism and antiformalism, however, the truth lies in the middle, and Nanay argues in favor of a "semi-formalist" position, based on the concept of "semi-formalist properties". Semi-formalist properties are properties of the picture that depend constitutively on the picture's formal properties, but are more inclusive than mere formal properties, encompassing both formal properties and non-perceptual properties. Design-scene properties, for instance, are semi-formal properties. In this way, semi-formalism inherits at least some of the right intuitions inspiring formalism (for instance, the fact that two paintings may represent the same subject, the first being a masterpiece, the second a daub), without sharing its limits. Debating semi-formal properties Nanay lingers on some considerations on music, which is interesting in a book whose examples are usually taken from painting or, for what concerns last chapter, from literature and film, as we will later see. According to Nanay some emotional properties of music will count as semi-formal:

we can zoom in on a special case of semi-formal properties in the case of music that would be the structural equivalent of design-scene properties in this context: properties that depend constitutively on both formal properties (i.e. tone, pitch, and timbre), and the emotions. (Nanay 2016: 114)

A familiar claim in aesthetics concerns the uniqueness of both our experience of the work of art and our aesthetic experience in general. It is worth noting talking about uniqueness Nanay himself feels the need to mention aesthetic experience, thus confirming that it is really difficult to do without this concept (see Nanay 2016: 123-7): "The real question is how we experience objects when we have an aesthetic



experience so that this gives rise to a feeling of uniqueness". Nanay's answer calls distributed attention to the fore again: when we have an aesthetic experience we see the object of the experience as if we were encountering it for the first time. But when we encounter an object for the first time, we pay attention to all of its properties, because we don't know which of these are to be relevant: our attention is distributed. In this way, *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception* provides an answer to the old statement made by Kant in § 8 of the *Critique of judgement*, when Kant says that "in Ansehung der logischen Quantität sind alle Geschmackurteile einzelne Urteile" implying that "this rose is beautiful" is an aesthetic judgement, whereas "the roses in general are beautiful" can be only a logic judgement, not an aesthetic one.

But is this kind of attention – i.e. distributed attention – a cultural universal? Or does it vary through different ages and lands? In other words: does vision have an history? After carefully reviewing arguments *pro* (Wölfflin, Riegl, Benjamin) and *contra* (Gombrich, Danto) the idea that vision has undergone substantial changes over the centuries, Nanay in chapter 7 of his book accepts a compromise. Retinal processes and perceptual contents don't change through history; yet perceptual phenomenology and visual attention do: in other words, they have a history. Using the concept of experience once more, Nanay explains:

I take the history of vision claim to be about perceptual phenomenology: about what it is like to see something – about our experiences. This is the interpretation Riegl, Wölfflin, and Benjamin were interested in and this is the only interpretation that cannot be dismissed as either trivially false or ill-formulated. (Nanay 2016: 144)

In particular, it is possible to demonstrate that twofold attention, including the capacity to discern design-scene properties only emerged in the history of western culture in a certain historical moment: in Nanay's opinion in the sixteenth century. Artistic phenomena like bravura brushstrokes in the late paintings by Tiziano, or Arcimboldo's portraits, or the anthropomorphic landscapes all appeared during the sixteenth century and can serve as a proof that our way of looking at pictures notably changed. Before that century, according to Nanay, there was no care for design-scene properties, as evidenced by Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura*: here composition at-

tains only to represented objects and not to pictorial surface. This point seems to me particularly questionable, for Alberti is a great theorist of linear perspective, and it is very difficult to deny that perspective representation doesn't require the perception of design-scene properties.

The eighth and last chapter of the book is devoted to those aesthetic phenomena that activate a focused rather than a distributed kind of attention. Examples of this in the aesthetic domain include identification, narrative fiction, emotional catharsis. In particular, what Nanay examines are the so-called "vicarious experiences", such as engagement with characters in fiction. The book discusses some current explanations of this type of engagement: 1) identification as imagining oneself in someone else's situation, 2) as sympathy, 3) as direct perception, 4) as mirror neurons activation. Nanay has an easy time in demonstrating that these explanations currently provided fail to explain many relevant situations; in particular they turn out to be especially weak when confronted with epistemic asymmetry scenarios (i.e. when the spectator knows things the character in fiction doesn't know: the core reason of suspense). The book ends in showing a very beautiful example of interaction between identification (that is, focused attention) and distributed attentions in the filmic works of Abbas Kiarostami.

In conclusion, let us go back to the fundamental assumption of this passionate and rewarding analysis of Aesthetics, that is the two concepts of focused and distributed attention. Can having a focused and a distributed attention at the same time towards an object *x* and its properties be enough to say that we are having an aesthetic attention towards *x*? Many counterexamples can be found. Consider, for instance, the attitude a botanist has when she examines a plant specimen in order to establish to what species of plant it belongs to; or think about the attitude of a graphologist when she looks at a calligraphy in order to decide if the letter was written by a certain writer; or, again, imagine a doctor examining an x-ray in order to detect the traces of a tumor. Though these three cases comprise a type of attention that is quite similar to that of a person passionately looking at a picture, they all involve something that the aesthetic case lacks. Indeed, both the botanist, the graphologist and the doctor are looking for a goal that is external to their object – respectively, a botanical classification, an authorship, a diagnosis. Compared with the aesthetic observer, however, they all miss something: the appreciation of the

object aimed at a special kind of satisfaction. The distinction on which *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception* relies is thus a very important attainment for aesthetic theory, but it is hard to think that we could ever build an entire aesthetic theory on this basis alone, and without any consideration of aesthetic assessment. Perhaps, indeed, the mysterious entity Nanay does not want to know about – aesthetic experience – is nothing but a combination of these two ingredients: attention and evaluation.

## Bibliography

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## *On Aesthetics as philosophy of perception\**

Nicholas Silins (Cornell University)

My aim here is to question some of the details of Nanay's discussion, trying to keep an eye on how apparently small problems might make a big difference to the ambitious aims of his book. I'll focus on his discussion of aesthetically relevant properties and on his theme of how the philosophy of perception can reconfigure debates in aesthetics.

### *1. Aesthetically relevant properties and the fate of formalism*

Nanay recommends that we reframe many debates about aesthetic properties as debates about "aesthetically relevant properties". But I don't think that Nanay has adequately pinned down his new notion, and in any case, insofar as he has pinned it down, I don't think it can do what he wants it to do.

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\* Thanks to the participants in an APA session on Nanay's book, and especially to Dominic Lopes for organizing it. Thanks also to Susanna Siegel for comments on a previous draft.

According to Nanay, the aesthetically relevant properties of an object are those such that *attending to them makes an aesthetic difference* (Nanay 2016: 67, 71). For example, if attending to a work's property of being made of a certain material makes an aesthetic difference, then being made of that material will be an aesthetically relevant property of a work.

First, a comment: while it is tempting to think only about which properties OF an artwork are aesthetically relevant, I suspect it is better to think about which properties are aesthetically relevant FOR an artwork. Think about when an artwork essentially involves an illusion, perhaps as when the cut of Lucio Fontana slash painting is backed with dark gauze, creating an inaccurate visual impression of a dark spatial expanse behind the canvas. To appreciate such a work, it might be essential that you attend to a property the illusion gets your perception to *misattribute* to the work (or elsewhere).

Second, Nanay's gloss is only as helpful as the notion of an "aesthetic difference" it uses, but we need a better grip on the latter. Here is Nanay's start:

if attending to a property of a particular changes the *valence* of one's experience of that particular, it is an aesthetically relevant property [...] if attending to P makes me appreciate my experience more (or less), P is an aesthetically relevant property. (Nanay 2016: 72-3)

I don't think this works. The suggestion certainly doesn't fit with the examples Nanay gives elsewhere:

aesthetically relevant properties may alter our general aesthetic evaluations of the artwork, strengthen or weaken our identification with a fictional character, trigger an aesthetic experience of a Prussian [sic] nature, make us appreciate a narrative twist, and so on. (Nanay 2016: 67)

In many of these cases, attending to an aesthetically relevant property needn't go along with a difference in appreciation of our own experience. For example, I might come to identify with a character just a little bit less, or increase my understanding of a narrative a little bit more, without this affecting how much I appreciate my own experience. In such cases, we have aesthetically relevant properties that do not make an aesthetic difference in the suggested sense.

There are also many cases of making an aesthetic difference in Nanay's suggested sense that do not go along with aesthetically rele-

vant properties. Consider how our various pet peeves and pet predilections can affect our engagement with art. For example, when a doting father looks at a painting made by his daughter, and attends to its property of having been made by his daughter, his appreciation of his experience of her work might go up. But this would not enough to make the property of being made by his daughter an aesthetically relevant property in any useful sense.

We seem to need something quite different from Nanay's current gloss of "aesthetic difference". I leave open how he might proceed.

I'll now assess whether aesthetically relevant properties can play the roles they are meant to play, given the way Nanay has introduced them. According to his chapter 5, we can use them to formulate and adjudicate debates about the range of properties that matter for the evaluation of artworks, for example in the case of formalism. Given the way he has characterized aesthetically relevant properties, I think they cannot play this role.

The core problem comes from the unconstrained way that Nanay has introduced the notion of making an aesthetic difference, allowing our idiosyncrasies to easily make a property aesthetically relevant. For example, if you are a consistent and committed formalist, you might be such that only formal properties make an aesthetic difference for you. But if you are a consistent and committed opponent of formalism, you might be such that not only formal properties make an aesthetic difference for you. It is uncontroversial true that non-formal properties make an aesthetic difference for someone, and so are aesthetically relevant in the suggested sense, but that shouldn't be enough to refute formalism right away. There is room for a substantive debate about whether only formal properties matter for aesthetic evaluation, I just don't see how we can usefully constrain that debate with Nanay's notion of aesthetically relevant properties.

To see the problem in a different context, consider debates about potential interactions between moral appraisal and aesthetic evaluation. For some audiences, attending to Roman Polanski's moral or immoral properties make an enormous difference to the valence of their experiences of his films, and so supply aesthetically relevant properties in spades. But that is not enough to settle the question of whether moral considerations ever matter for aesthetic evaluation.

At a minimum, if Nanay is to reconfigure debates about aesthetic evaluation in terms of aesthetically relevant properties, he presumably should use some normative variant of the notion in terms of what

*should* make or *may* make or *appropriately* makes an aesthetic difference. But I am not yet clear on how exactly to reconfigure classic debates in those terms, nor on what we will gain if we do so.

## 2. *Aesthetics and cognitive penetration*

I'll now zoom out to Nanay's overarching theme of interconnections between aesthetics and the philosophy of perception. I'll start with the cognitive penetrability of perception, where your perception is somehow importantly shaped by your expectations or other cognitive states (more soon on exactly how).

According to Nanay, claims about the cognitive penetrability of perception have many ramifications for aesthetics. In particular, he thinks that they destroy a Ruskin-style "myth of the innocent eye" (Nanay 2016: 131-3). I think this more specific claim is importantly wrong.

First, we need to hear more about what sort of cognitive penetrability of perception Nanay needs for his theoretical purposes. He says he can get by with the weak claim that "our visual experience is subject to top-down attentional influences" (Nanay 2016: 133). But I don't think this claim gives us enough to destroy the myth of the innocent eye. To see why, here's Ruskin:

The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the innocence of the eye; [...] a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour [...] without consciousness of what they signify [...]. (Ruskin 1857: 22)

As far as I can tell from this passage, Ruskin could accept that vision can be affected by top-down attentional influence, where non-innocent perception might involve all too much top-down attention. He could also invoke our top-down attention as a means to recover innocent perception. For example, when he discusses looking at grass, and writes that "to [the accomplished artist] it does not seem shade and light, but bluish green barred with gold" (Ruskin 1857: 23), perhaps the artist pulls this off by deliberately attending to patches of color on grass without attending to how the grass is illuminated. So Nanay's minimal construal of the cognitive penetrability of perception needn't conflict with the idea of the innocent eye, in fact our re-

covery of the innocent eye might require the intervention of our (top-down) attention.

Nanay also claims that the myth of the innocent eye is refuted by a broader range of psychological experiments, according to which a heart-shaped cut-out looks redder because of our prior information about hearts, or a picture of a banana looks yellower because of our prior information about bananas. Here again the idea of the innocent eye does not have to conflict with these experiments, and might even require that perception is cognitively penetrable in the experiments' sense. Theorists like Ruskin could acknowledge the existence of perception that is cognitively infused, thanking Nanay for pointing out some of the ways in which our current perception fails to be innocent. They would then ask us to regain perception that in some way brackets our prior knowledge and expectations. Since any such "innocent perception" can itself be lost, they could even allow that all perception is cognitively penetrable. And since the "innocent" perception recovered is recovered as a result of desire, cognitive effort (and again potentially attention), they might allow an important sense in which the "innocent" perception recovered is itself cognitively shaped. It may or may not be possible to succeed in their project of recovery, but that question is not directly addressed by the experiments mentioned by Nanay, and it is not yet clear how to extrapolate an indirect answer.

I do agree that the cognitive penetrability of perception matters for aesthetics, I actually think that Nanay has overlooked some of its potential implications, and now will examine one of them.

Consider when Nanay addresses puzzling pairs such as Duchamp's *Fountain* and corresponding non-art urinals, or pairs of fakes and corresponding originals, and writes that "as indistinguishable objects [they] share all their observable properties by definition" (Nanay 2016: 109). Or when he discusses Danto's Gallery of Indiscernibles involving many paintings of the same shade and size with different titles, and writes that "while the observable properties of all these artworks are the same, their 'meaning' and aesthetic value can be very different" (Nanay 2016: 120). On the tempting line of thought Nanay takes up, the puzzling pairs consist of two objects that have the same observable properties, yet differ in their aesthetic properties. The pairs are thereby supposed to serve as counterexamples to the view that sameness of observable properties entails sameness of aesthetic properties.

Once you're on board with the possibility of cognitive penetration, you should be more careful about this line of thought. For example, the cognitive penetrability of perception, and your background knowledge about art, might result in your perceiving *Fountain* as wry, or a version of *The card players* as being painted by Cezanne. (This is not to say that cognitive penetration is the only way to end up being able to perceive such properties, just that it is a plausible route to such an outcome). Now the property of being painted by Cezanne would be an observable property, one that fails to be had by any fakes not painted by Cezanne. The puzzling pairs we started out with would fail to have the same observable properties after all, and we would now still have space for the view that any two works with the same observable properties have the same aesthetic properties.

In sum, Nanay is wrong to think that the cognitively penetrability of perception rules out the myth of the innocent eye. But he is absolutely right that it matters for central debates in aesthetics, as it does for the debate about whether aesthetic differences between works could still exist when the works are the same with respect to their observable properties.

I'll now close with a more general observation about Nanay's approach. Throughout the book, he works with the notion of experience, even defining the scope of aesthetics in its terms (Nanay 2016: 6). He also almost never discusses unconscious perception or unconscious attention (although he discusses them extensively in other work). To exaggerate a bit, he could have called his book *Aesthetics as consciousness studies* rather than *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception*.

Assuming that there are such mental states as unconscious perception and unconscious attention, as is widely maintained in psychology and the philosophy of perception, why not broaden the scope of the discussion to unconscious mental states? What justifies the experience-first approach used in the book? If we are to take the philosophy of perception seriously when doing aesthetics, we should take the possibility of unconscious perception and unconscious attention seriously as well. For example, when we consider whether the observable properties of a work fix its aesthetic properties, we might benefit from considering versions of the thesis that include or exclude unconsciously observable properties of a work. Perhaps the consciously perceivable properties of a work do not always fix its aesthetic properties, but a work's overall perceivable properties do fix its



aesthetic properties once we include the work's unconsciously perceivable properties.

When Nanay preaches that aesthetics will benefit from deeper engagement with the philosophy of perception, I applaud. Given his neglect of unconscious perception and attention, I just think that he (and the rest of us) have a lot of work left to do.

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### **On the historical reconstruction of aesthetic attention: a comment on Bence Nanay's *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception*** Jakub Stejskal (Freie Universität Berlin)

It is sadly an uncontroversial statement to declare that philosophy of art history has not been a particularly lively field in contemporary anglophone aesthetics<sup>1</sup>. As Bence Nanay's compatriot Arnold Hauser (1963: v) stated in the *Preface to Philosophy of art history*, such a philosophy "inquires what scientific history of art can accomplish, what are its means and its limitations". Major contributions to the topic so understood over the last fifty years in English language have come indeed from professional art historians (Gombrich, Baxandall, Podro spring immediately to mind), with a few exceptions, notably the philosopher Richard Wollheim. As it happens, Nanay's *Aesthetics as philosophy of perception (APP)* is dedicated to the memory of Wollheim and it is refreshing that Nanay devotes part of the book to discussing, precisely, the principles of generating art-historical knowledge.

The major proposal Nanay makes in this department is that an essential (if not the essential) problem of art-historical theory, the question of historicity of vision, should be understood in terms of visual

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the tide is changing, see the special issue of the "British Journal of Aesthetics" on *Art, history, and perception* (2018).

attention. This is the argument I take to inform the claim, developed across the span of the book: 1) what one sees and what it feels like to see it depends in large part on how one exercises one's attention (as to see consciously is to notice) and 2) how one exercises attention is (among other things) subject to non-hardwired, top-down, external influences; 3) the nature and impact of such influences varies with each individual according to their experiential record; 4) there are patterns of exercising attention people with similar experiential record tend to employ under similar external conditions; 5) since shared experiential records and external conditions change, so do patterns of visual attention; 6) studying these records and conditions (in the form of written documents and visual artefacts) may provide access to past patterns of exercising visual attention.

The proposal, so understood, has much to recommend it. One of its advantages is that it makes it incumbent on the art historian studying historical shifts in spectatorship not to stop at the once fashionable drawing of general correspondences between collective mindsets and visual orders (e.g., between Cartesianism and linear perspective<sup>2</sup>), but to delve into specific strategies of guiding attention as they inscribe themselves into and thus influence the appearance of artworks. A Wölfflinian project of treating visual artworks as documents of past modes of looking is revived (Wölfflin 2015; see also Nanay 2015) and a potentially firmer ground is established for talking about the reasons for why visual art of more or less distant past looks the way it does.

Nanay's novel interpretation of the history-of-vision claim in terms of the history of visual attention is spelled out in the form of an argument for the history of the aesthetic appreciation of pictures. Attending aesthetically for Nanay means primarily to attend to aesthetically relevant properties, that is, to those properties of a particular that change "the *valence* of one's experience of that particular" (Nanay 2016: 72). In the case of pictures, the aesthetically relevant properties are often design-scene properties: one appreciates pictures when one attends to how the design and scene properties relate (Nanay 2016: 45-8). Such a twofold attention needs to be distinguished from a mere twofold perception, which is just what any pictorial seeing is supposed to be: one perceives both the surface and

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<sup>2</sup> For a congenial exposition of such generalizations, see, for example, Jay 1988.

the scene, but does not necessarily pay attention to their relation (Nanay 2016: 45). Crucially, Nanay allows that twofold attention to design-scene properties is not the only way of appreciating pictures aesthetically (Nanay 2016: 60, 62). In fact, Nanay's discussion of how a retrieval of past modes of exercising visual attention may be carried out revolves around the claim that twofold attention has been the dominant form of picture appreciation only in a specific cultural setting (chapter 7).

Specifically, Nanay proposes that the comparison of pictures painted in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy combined with respective contemporary written documents about them provide strong evidence that the twofold attention he claims is characteristic of a dominant form of aesthetic appreciation of pictures – attention to design-scene properties – becomes systematically exploited in Western painting only after 1550. He supports this claim by noting the increased incidence around this time of pictures that rely for their effect on the involvement of twofold attention such as Arcimboldo's portraits/still-lives or the "closed form" paintings using symmetrical organization of shapes and colours along a central axis (Raphael, Leonardo). The absence of such a visual attention prior to sixteenth century is supposedly corroborated by the absence of any discussion of the design-scene aspect – in fact, of any design properties – in both Alberti's treatment of *compositio* in *De pictura* as well as in Michael Baxandall's famous reconstruction of the Florentine period eye. As his main argument against the involvement of twofold attention prior to the sixteenth century, Nanay asserts that in quattrocento (as opposed to cinquecento) paintings, depicted figures generally tend not to overlap, which, Nanay claims, would appear unnatural to those exercising twofold attention who would notice that this is not how objects commonly appear in the field of vision. And since there is nothing to suggest that such an unnatural effect figured prominently in the fifteenth-century pictorial experience, Nanay draws the tentative conclusion that twofold attention was not exercised by the audience (Nanay 2016: 153-6).

The trouble with these considerations is that arguing for the presence or absence of twofold attention in appreciating pictures becomes sometimes indistinguishable from an argument for the presence or absence of a specific strategy for ordering pictorial content. It is, for example, not clear from Nanay's exposition whether Alberti's discussion of composition addresses the production of desired aes-

thetic effects (by drawing attention to scene properties) or more generally the configuration of pictorial content (Nanay 2016: 152). The same applies to his reference to “the alternating black and white of the receding side walls” of Leonardo’s *Last supper* fresco: was it an effective way of guiding twofold seeing to the depicted scene, or was it also to be noticed and appreciated for this very effect, as Nanay suggests (Nanay 2016: 150-1)? Granted, the likely answer is that it all depends on who was doing the noticing. It is entirely plausible – indeed, very likely – that both modes of attention were mandated: the colour alternation was an effective means of guiding the visual attention of those who visited the refectory in Milan, although perhaps only a minority of them were able to actually appreciate it. And it is equally likely that Alberti had both strategies in mind: to navigate twofold seeing effectively to the depicted content as well as to draw aesthetic attention to the scene properties. But the respective claims require different evidence, as not all pictures that prescribe aesthetic attention prescribe it to the same kind of properties to which their configuration guides twofold vision.

Just as exercising visual attention to pictures is not the same thing as attending to them aesthetically (not every act of pictorial perception amounts to aesthetic appreciation), so retrieving historically specific strategies of organizing pictorial content is a different matter from establishing what pictorial properties make an aesthetic difference in what historical context (not every act of ordering pictorial content is necessarily motivated by aesthetic ends). All pictures exploit twofold perception, that is, they initiate our twofold seeing in order to make their content salient to our attention. Importantly, that by itself says little about whether they invite aesthetic attention and if so, to what features of their configuration (scene properties, design properties, or design-scene properties). We thus need, in this context, to distinguish between two ways of talking about how the twofold character of picture perception is exploited by picture configuration. While Nanay makes use of the distinction between picture perception and aesthetic appreciation of pictures, the corresponding second distinction between retrieving modes of configuring pictorial content and reconstructing modes of aesthetic appreciation is virtually absent from his account.

The difference is crucial to the art historian wanting to learn about past ways of attracting aesthetic attention. For one, it is arguably easier to identify patterns of configuring pictures’ content than to recon-

struct modes of attracting aesthetic attention. Elsewhere, Nanay (2015) develops what strike me as tools for the former by introducing the distinction between surface (2D) and scene (3D) organization of pictorial content<sup>3</sup>. A picture may organize its pictorial content based on design (2D) or scene (3D) values (or perhaps some combination of both). But whether the configuration serves aesthetic ends is a different matter. Consider Nanay's discussion of Alberti and Baxandall, which leaves no other option than that fifteenth-century Italian paintings required aesthetic attention to scene (3D) properties – one was not prescribed to appreciate either the surface properties or their relation to the depicted scene<sup>4</sup>. Yet these paintings' marked avoidance of occlusion (Nanay 2016: 153-4) is what Nanay (2015: 154) characterizes as a symptom of 2D pictorial organization. So here we have an example of 2D-configured pictures prescribing aesthetic attention to 3D properties. If we treated 2D organization as necessarily implying appreciation to surface values, Nanay would either have to be wrong in his interpretation of the textual evidence (as suggesting quattrocento appreciation of scene properties) or he would be wrong in his attribution of 2D organization to quattrocento paintings (which would imply appreciation of surface properties). But if we treat 2D as primarily a means of configuring pictorial content then it remains an open question what about these pictures was to be appreciated. In other words, it remains a possibility that quattrocento paintings were 2D-organized and that at the same time what was supposed to be appreciated was not the 2D organization itself, but rather aspects of the depicted scene.

And just as the avoidance of occlusion (a symptom of 2D organization) is compatible with prescribing appreciation of scene properties, it is for the same reason compatible with requiring the appreciation of design-scene properties. Nanay's claim that in the latter case the audience could not help but notice the unnatural scene organization assumes that, were the fifteenth-century beholders to exercise two-fold attention, they would notice the avoidance of occlusion as an

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<sup>3</sup> "Pictorial elements" are either "organized and grouped according to their position in the depicted space" or to "their outline shape on the picture surface" (Nanay 2015: 151).

<sup>4</sup> Another option – highly unlikely – would be that no aesthetic attention was prescribed.

unnatural ordering of a scene. But this implies that they would expect their paintings to offer a visual representation of depicted events that would strive to appear as little staged as possible. Yet it is not clear why the two attitudes – twofold attention and naturalist criteria for scene organization – should go hand in hand. Arguably, if one expects the scene organization of a picture to be naturalist in this way, one does not need to exercise twofold attention to notice that something is awry: the scenes appear staged. And conversely, appreciating pictures by means of twofold attention does not require a default commitment to this kind of naturalism, so that a deviation would register as an anomaly. Baxandall (1988: 81) urges us to look “at the painters’ representations of people in terms of [...] represented people assessed not by the standards applied to real people but by standards adapted from experience of real people”, which in the fifteenth century case means from their experience of tightly choreographed religious plays and dancing patterns (Baxandall 1988: 71-81), where avoiding occlusion arguably was to be expected. Attention to design-scene properties would not have to register anything unnatural about the scene organization. It is easier to identify a pattern of configuring pictures’ content than establish a pattern of prescribing aesthetic attention.

Avoidance of occlusion as a consequence of 2D pictorial configuration is thus compatible with appreciating design, scene, as well as design-scene properties. To be clear, I do not take Nanay to claim the contrary in *APP*. Nor is my point to argue that quattrocento paintings prescribed twofold attention. Rather, Nanay’s arguments do not convince me that they did not. And they fail to convince me partly because Nanay sometimes makes it sound as if reconstructing how twofold seeing was guided were the same project as reconstructing aesthetic norms of appreciation. And if I am right to assume that the former is less challenging than the latter, then I fear Nanay has made the task of recovering prescribed modes of aesthetic attention appear easier than it in fact is. Once one distinguishes between the two endeavours (recovering pictorial organization versus reconstructing prescribed aesthetic attention), new, intriguing options of inquiry emerge. Here is an example: as already suggested, a picture may invite aesthetic attention to scene properties (say, a startling gesture of a depicted person) even if the scene itself is configured predominantly with respect to surface values; but what would a picture look like that would prescribe appreciation of its design (and not design-scene)

properties even if the design itself tracked scene organization? A challenge that awaits the historian of vision, then, is to find effective ways of distinguishing between the properties of pictures introduced to guide twofold vision and those that are introduced to be appreciated.

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## Responses

Bence Nanay

I am extremely grateful to Paolo D'Angelo, Nico Silins and Jakub Stejskal for their thorough engagement with my book and their critical analyses. Responding to critics is not always a fun task. Critics can sometimes misunderstand some points in the book. They can also make critical comments that are difficult to do anything about short of rewriting the book completely.

Luckily, neither is the case with the three critical remarks above. All three critics picked up on questions I had left deliberately open in the book and pushed me in new unexplored (and often unexpected) directions. This is a sign of great intellectual exchange not just in author-meet-critics scenarios but in any kind of academic settings, that

the debates are pushed further, opening up new directions of research and of exploration.

Jakub Stejskal focuses on the parts of the book that are most relevant to art historians and devotees of the disappearing discipline of the philosophy of art history. He picks up on the threads of the book that aim to make a contribution to the philosophy of art history, especially in chapter 7. One really important way in which aesthetics (understood as philosophy of perception) can be helpful for art historians is to elucidate how people in different historical eras (and in different parts of the world) experienced artworks differently from the way we do. The main lesson here is that just because we now, in 2019, experience an artwork in a certain way, this does not mean that the creators and spectators of this artwork, often centuries ago (and often in distant continents) had the same experience. And understanding art from this period very much involves, if not presupposes, the understanding the experiences of those people who created and looked at this work centuries ago.

In much of the book I talk about what I take to be an important kind of aesthetic experience, but which may be temporally limited in scope. This experience is characterized by distributed attention. In the case of looking at pictures, this amounts to, among other things, attending to the relation between the surface and the depicted scene – to the way in which the picture depicts its subject. I call this form of attention (in the case of picture appreciation) “twofold attention”. And this is indeed something we do a lot these days, when aesthetically engaging with pictures (and artworks in general). But just because we do so now, this does not mean that we have always done so. In fact, while there are reasons to believe that (European) observers have had this way of engaging with pictures since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is much less clear how (European) observers before the 16<sup>th</sup> century did so.

In the book, I remained deliberately tentative about arguments concerning how, say, Italian humanist spectators experienced pictures before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but I did want to emphasize that there may be reasons to think that the kind of twofold attention that is ubiquitous these days (and that has been ubiquitous since the 16<sup>th</sup> century) might not have been the primary way of engaging with pictures in earlier times. Stejskal analyzes my arguments in support of this claim and pushes me to say more about just how people in, say,



14<sup>th</sup> century Italy did experience pictures (if not by means of exercising their twofold attention).

This is an excellent question and I wish I could spend the next five or ten years trying to figure out the exact answer to it, which is obviously relevant not only to aesthetics, but also to art history (and even to history in general). Stejskal points to a crucial distinction between understanding how people perceived pictures and how they appreciated pictures aesthetically – a distinction I make heavy use of in chapter 3 of my book (when talking about pictorial experience in the present) but much less so in chapter 7 (when talking about pictorial experience in the past). And he is right that we could make serious progress if we utilize this distinction in the historical context.

My main argument for showing that observers as early as the late 16<sup>th</sup> century must have exercised twofold attention was that if they had not, we could not explain some artistic practices (like bravura brushstrokes or Archimboldo-type configurations) that presuppose our aesthetic appreciation of the relation between the surface and what is depicted. If the observers didn't routinely attend to the relation between the surface and what is depicted, then they could not have appreciated this relation aesthetically. And as we have no strong evidence for the aesthetic appreciation of this relation from, say, the 15<sup>th</sup> century, we have no reason to posit twofold attention for this era.

Both Stejskal and Paolo D'Angelo would like to know more – if we really have a reason to doubt that twofold attention was the norm in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy (a claim I only endorsed tentatively in the book), what can we know about the experience of observers in this era? Here again, I can only give a very tentative answer, which really only aims to show just how much more research would be needed on this topic. We know a fair amount, for example, about painting and experience in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy, thanks to Michael Baxandall's book of the same title. And he consulted a very impressive amount of contemporary documents that shed some light on what 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian observers attended to when they looked at a picture. We also know a fair amount from contemporary treatises on painting (for example by Alberti). And while it seems that there is plenty of evidence that observers attended to the depicted scene and that they also attended to various surface features, there is much less evidence that they attended to the relation between the two. We could not exclude the possibility that they in fact exercised twofold attention (just like we

do now), but another, arguably more likely possibility is that their attention alternated between the surface and the depicted scene (the way Ernst Gombrich describes picture perception in general).

Paolo D'Angelo's commentary gives a very thorough and charitable chapter by chapter overview of my whole project, but it also pushes back at a number of crucial points. One of these is exactly Stejskal's central concern about what we can and what we can't infer about 15<sup>th</sup> century picture perception. The other recurring critical point has to do with the very notion of aesthetic experience I use.

My aim in the book was to demystify the concept of aesthetic experience – to understand it the way a philosopher of perception would understand a special kind of experience, by characterizing, for example, how our attention is exercised. Here, again, I gave a broad promissory note that the account of aesthetic experience in terms of distributed attention is by necessity a partial one and that any full account of such distributed attention would need to bring in, for example, reference to what kind of properties are attended to and also the notoriously difficult concept of valuing our experience for its own sake.

Many of D'Angelo's comments push me to clarify this second point of connection as he is skeptical (as am I) that we can understand everything that needs to be understood about aesthetic experience just by appealing to a special exercise of distributed attention. And it would be an excellent project to understand the exact relation between attention and evaluation in the context of aesthetic experiences.

I have to confess that I am not a fan of the concept of value in general and not a fan of the concept of aesthetic value in particular. Part of what I tried to achieve with this book was to shift the emphasis from thinking of aesthetics as value theory (just like ethics would also be a form of value theory) to thinking of aesthetics as a descriptive branch of philosophy (just like philosophy of mind would also be a descriptive branch of philosophy). The main question of aesthetics is not what we should do, but what we do actually do (and what kinds of experiences we have) in what kinds of circumstances.

But D'Angelo is absolutely right to push me on the relation between my account and the concept of value as this division between value theory and descriptive branches of philosophy is not a very helpful one (although it keeps popping up in job ads, for example). And it would be neither feasible nor desirable to exile all references

to values in aesthetics. My aim was not to exile but to push the concept of value to the background. But D'Angelo is right that in this case, I owe some account of how value fits into my approach, something I deliberately avoided in the book, but that would be an excellent research project to undertake in the future.

Nico Silins has three lines of criticism. The most concrete one is about something I left deliberately blank in the book – the concept of aesthetic difference. The central concept in my book is that of aesthetically relevant properties. I argue that we can reformulate most traditional questions of aesthetics with the help of this concept (which is more helpful than the concept of aesthetic properties). And aesthetically relevant properties are, in turn, defined as properties that are such that attending to them makes an aesthetic difference. And then while I give many examples of such aesthetic difference, I never give an actual definition. I give a very tentative working definition, which I explicitly don't endorse, but no actual definition. Silins (rightly) points out that there are problems with the working definition and he wants to know how an actual definition of aesthetic difference would go.

And Silins is absolutely right. Given that part of my problem with those approaches that take aesthetic properties to play a central role in aesthetics is that they do not (and, it seems, cannot) define aesthetic properties, I should say more about how the concept of aesthetic difference (and, as a result, the concept of aesthetically relevant properties) should be, and should not be, defined. And I have, since the publication of the book, defended a definition of aesthetic difference (in Nanay 2019), which I am still not entirely happy with, but here it is. An aesthetic difference amounts to a difference in the representation of the relation between my experience and what this experience is about. This is not the place to defend this way of thinking about aesthetic difference, but, on the face of it, this new definition is not susceptible to Silins's counterexamples.

The second point Silins raises is about the relevance of the well-documented top-down influences on perception for our aesthetic theory. I emphasized some aspects of why it matters that our aesthetic experiences, like all our experiences, are influenced in a top-down manner by other, higher order mental states. Silins urges me to consider other aspects. It is a happy coincidence that my main research in aesthetics since the publication of this book had a lot to do with exactly this research direction. The general idea is that if aes-

thetic experience is influenced in a top-down manner, then we should expect that people who grew up in different parts of the world (and as a result, whose experiences are influenced by different higher level mental states in a top-down manner) would have very different aesthetic experiences of the very same object. And this line of reasoning has important implications for what I call “global aesthetics” the study of aesthetic experiences in a cross-cultural context. Aestheticians often assume that aesthetic phenomena (including aesthetic experiences or the experience of beauty) amount to some kind of cultural universals – something that is the same regardless of one’s cultural background. But if we take the top-down influences on perception seriously, then this cultural universalism is just not an option. Aesthetics can only be non-universal, global aesthetics.

Silins’s final point is about the emphasis of the book on conscious experiences. As he rightly points out, in my other works, I rely very heavily on the notion of unconscious perception and unconscious attention. So much so that in other works, I never talk about perceptual experiences, but rather of perceptual states (which may or may not be unconscious). Why the emphasis on conscious experiences in this book then? This is a fair charge and one that is especially close to my heart given my general stance towards consciousness (which I consider to be an optional, and not so interesting, feature of mental states) in my other work. In the book, I restricted the discussion of perception to conscious experiences, because I assumed that this would be easier for aestheticians to relate to. But Silins is absolutely right that new directions open up if we acknowledge the complex interaction between conscious and unconscious perceptual processes. I did say a bit about this in chapter 3 of the book as picture perception is constituted by exactly this kind of complex interaction between conscious and unconscious perceptual processes. But more could and should be done on this in future research.

I want to thank again my three commentators, Paolo D’Angelo, Nico Silins and Jakub Stejskal for their insightful and helpful comments that do exactly what only the very best book commentaries do: open up new research directions.

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