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The Affective Experience of Aesthetic Properties

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ABSTRACT

It is widely agreed upon that aesthetic properties, such as grace, balance, and elegance, are perceived. I argue that aesthetic properties are experientially attributed to some non-perceptible objects. For example, a mathematical proof can be experienced as elegant. In order to give a unified explanation of the experiential attribution of aesthetic properties to both perceptible and non-perceptible objects, one has to reject the idea that aesthetic properties are perceived. I propose an alternative view: the affective account. I argue that the standard case of experiential aesthetic property attribution is affective experience.

The Affective Experience of Aesthetic Properties

1. THE EXPERIENTIAL ATTRIBUTION OF AESTHETIC PROPERTIES

Aesthetics was initially conceived of as the philosophical enquiry into the beautiful. However, aesthetic attributions, by art critics as well as by ordinary people, are rarely predicated with the statement 'this is beautiful'. It is for this reason that most contemporary aestheticians prefer to talk about a variety of aesthetic properties. Sibley introduced the notion of an 'aesthetic concept' in order to distinguish between artworks' aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties (Sibley 1959, 1965).¹ Suppose that an art critic says that what makes a certain painting balanced is the red mass in the left corner. 'Balance' is an aesthetic property that differs from non-aesthetic properties, such as 'red'. The essential differences between aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties remain controversial, but there are several properties commonly taken to be aesthetic, including graceful, balanced, dainty, dumpy, elegant, dynamic, garish, ungainly, beautiful, ugly, pretty, and sublime (for an extended list see De Clercq 2008, p. 895).

As there is no uncontroversial definition of 'aesthetic property', the common way to start a paper on aesthetic properties is to give some paradigm examples, instead of a definition.² A reason for this might be that 'aesthetic properties' is a name given to a number of properties that may not belong to a clearly defined category. In this paper, I avoid this problem by focusing solely on a clear category of aesthetic properties: evaluative properties which are somehow related to aesthetic value or to aesthetic appreciation.³

Evaluative aesthetic properties are properties that can be characterized as more or less positive or negative. They are distinct from purely descriptive properties, such as those which refer to art history. For instance, 'Cubist' and 'Impressionist' are not evaluative properties. One might have positive or negative associations with these art movements, but these properties are not intrinsically evaluative. The same goes for the descriptive property of 'dynamic'. In some contexts to possess this property is aesthetically positive; in others, it is not. Evaluative aesthetic properties, on the other hand, are intrinsically related to aesthetic value or to aesthetic appreciation. This is what sets them apart from other evaluative properties, such as moral properties.

I will focus solely on the psychology and cognitive architecture of experiential aesthetic property attribution. Although most literature on aesthetic properties focuses on metaphysics, I wish to remain neutral in that debate.⁴ I am more interested in aesthetic properties from a philosophy of mind and philosophy of perception perspective. I want to discuss how we as human beings experientially attribute aesthetic properties to objects. I say *experiential* attribution of aesthetic properties because I want to distinguish it from attributing aesthetic properties with a dry eye. I take 'experiential aesthetic property attribution' to be a more neutral description of what I want to discuss than 'having access to aesthetic properties'. The latter would presuppose some kind of realism about aesthetic properties, while I wish to remain neutral on the metaphysics of aesthetic properties. Instead, I want to investigate how we experience them. The 'experiential attribution of properties' is a neutral way describing experiential content. For instance: 'you experience the dancer's pirouette as elegant' can be described as: 'you experientially attribute the aesthetic property of elegance to the dancer's pirouette'. I do not want to discuss the nature of aesthetic properties but rather focus on the psychological and cognitive architecture of experiential aesthetic property attribution.

This is question relevant to both aesthetics and philosophy of mind. In philosophy of mind it is debated which properties can be represented in perceptual experience (cf. Bayne 2009; Siegel 2006). During the last few years, this has become an important topic in philosophy of perception. We can all agree that we perceive colours and shapes, but can we also perceive other properties such as seeing a pine tree as a 'pine tree'? In addition to its colours and shapes, do we see the 'pine-treeness' of the pine tree? Which properties can be represented in perceptual experience? An aesthetic property is an obvious candidate. You can argue that you do not just see the colours and shapes of a painting but also the balance of the composition, the elegance of certain brushstrokes or perhaps even its beauty.

In fact, in aesthetics this seems to be the standard view: aesthetic properties are perceived. I reject this claim and I will argue that the standard case of experiential aesthetic property attribution is affective experience. An experience of an aesthetic property is more like an emotional experience than it is like a perceptual experience. Experiencing 'elegance', for instance, is closer to experiencing 'fearsomeness' than it is to experiencing 'red'. I will discuss why most aestheticians think that aesthetic properties are perceived before presenting the affective account of experiential aesthetic property attribution. I will also consider some objections.

2. PERCEIVING AESTHETIC PROPERTIES

Shelley (2003) observes that most aestheticians presuppose the standard account of experiential aesthetic property attribution which entails that aesthetic properties are perceived. This claim - although problematic - is rarely criticized. Arguably, the most often cited passage on aesthetic properties, by Sibley, is taken to be a formulation of the standard view:

‘It is important to note first that, broadly speaking, aesthetics deals with a kind of perception. People have to see the grace and unity of a work, hear the plaintiveness or frenzy in the music, notice the gaudiness of a color scheme, feel the power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone . . . the crucial thing is to see, hear, or feel. To suppose that one can make aesthetic judgments without aesthetic perception . . . is to misunderstand aesthetic judgment.’

(Sibley 1965, p. 137)

Binkley (1977) argues that Sibley’s statement, that aesthetic properties are perceived, is supported by a long tradition of aestheticians. From aesthetics pioneers such as Baumgarten, through formalists like Bell, to Beardsley: all of them agree, according to Binkley, that aesthetics is all about perception. We can conclude from the quotes below, by two of the most prominent aestheticians of the last few decades, that the perception view is still the standard view:

‘Aesthetic attributions to works of art, and the terms used to effect such attributions, are largely descriptive; that is to say, they are based on, and obliquely testify to the occurrence of, certain looks or feels or impressions or appearances that emerge out of lower-order perceptual properties. In so far as an aesthetic attribution is intended as objective, that is, as the attribution of a property of intersubjective import, such impressions or appearances are relativized to a perceiver who views a work correctly...’

(Levinson 2001, p. 62)

‘Furthermore, the use of aesthetic terminology in such accounts of our interactions with artworks is, most essentially, ‘experiential’ or ‘perceptual’ where those terms are generally understood by contrast to responses mediated by the application of concepts or reasoning.’

(Carroll 2001, p. 5)

One could argue that this reading of these authors is uncharitable. They could be read as saying that aesthetic properties are 'experienced' in a broad sense of the term. Then, the question a philosopher of perception would ask is: which kind of experience are they talking about? Is it literally a perceptual experience? In any case, I think that there should be more clarity about which kind of experience is responsible for the experiential attribution of aesthetic properties.

One reason why aestheticians think that aesthetic properties are 'perceived' is that you can distinguish between experiencing something as beautiful/balanced/graceful and merely judging it as having a certain aesthetic property. Hopkins calls these two different ways of aesthetic assessment 'savouring beauty' and 'judging beauty' respectively (Hopkins 1997). The latter is nothing but a belief that something is beautiful, whereas the former involves a certain sensible response.

'Judgment' can be a confusing concept as it means something different in aesthetics than it does in the philosophy of mind. 'Aesthetic judgment' is often understood as a person's evaluation of an artwork, which can be (partly) experiential. However, Hopkins seems to understand judgment as a non-experiential state. I share Hopkins's intuition that you can have two kinds of aesthetic assessment: one is experiential and the other is not. There is a difference between the belief (a non-experiential state) that X has aesthetic property P on the one hand, and the experiential attribution of aesthetic property P to X on the other.

Let me illustrate this distinction with an example. When Lucy sees the Rothko paintings at the Tate Modern, she is moved by their beauty. Afterwards, she buys the poster version of one of these paintings in the museum shop. Because Lucy is getting used to seeing the Rothko on the wall of her

apartment, she no longer strongly senses its beauty every time she looks at it. One day, Nick, who has come over for dinner, asks Lucy why she likes the Rothko painting. Lucy can describe the different features of the painting that make the painting beautiful without experiencing its beauty. In this case, she 'merely' believes that it is beautiful. But sometimes she can look at the painting and feel the sensation she felt when she first saw it in the museum. At these moments, she really 'experiences' its beauty.

The question remains, though: what is meant by 'experiencing' or 'savouring'? It would be a mistake to identify 'experience' too quickly with 'perception'. That is what I will argue for in the next section.

3. NON-PERCEPTIBLE AESTHETIC PROPERTIES

The claim that aesthetic properties are literally perceived implies that aesthetic properties are part of perceptual content. For instance, the balance of the painting is literally part of the content of one's perceptual experience, in the same way as the painting's colours are part of the perceptual content of the person looking at the painting.

This claim is problematic, as there seem to be aesthetic properties that can be experientially attributed without a perceptual experience thereof. A mathematician, for instance, can experience the elegance of a brilliant mathematical proof, without thinking that the way the proof looks is 'elegant'. The proof is not perceptible, but it is aesthetic nevertheless. More commonly, we are moved by reading novels all the time. When we experientially attribute aesthetic properties to the novel, we traditionally do not attribute it to the type font, but to the non-perceptible content. A novel can be beautiful, a passage

sublime, a phrasing can be experienced as very elegant and graceful, and the narrative's structure can be experienced as well balanced.

Another example of non-perceptible art is conceptual art. In conceptual art, the material object is less important than the idea behind it. You can, of course, think that the *Fountain* is aesthetically valuable because the urinal Duchamp presented as art has an elegant shape. But, in doing so, you might be missing the point. It is the idea behind the artwork that is 'witty', 'challenging', 'provocative', and 'brilliant'— or, if you dislike it, 'uninspired' and 'shallow'.

The claim that we can attribute aesthetic properties to non-perceptible objects is not a new one. Schellekens (2007) argues that we can attribute aesthetic value to ideas, particularly when we appreciate conceptual art. The aesthetic value of conceptual art is usually not attributed to the physical object, but to the idea behind it. Similarly, Shelley (2003) argues that we do attribute aesthetic properties to non-perceptible artworks, such as conceptual art and literature.

An account along these lines that goes into the details of the concept of mental representation, is (Lopes 2016). Lopes tries to accommodate the idea that one can experientially attribute aesthetic properties to non-perceptible artworks, such as conceptual art and literature. Lopes argues that we need a broader conception of 'experience' of which sensory perception is a proper subset. Lopes uses Dretske's account of mental representation to define such a broad conception of experience. Dretske sees mental representation as a way of encoding information; sometimes the representation is experiential, sometimes non-experiential. Seeing a red chair and the subsequent belief that that chair is red are two states with similarities in content. What makes a representation experiential is its way of encoding this information together with its functional role. An experience of red encodes the

information differently than a perceptual state for instance. Such a conception of experience allows Lopes to argue that aesthetic properties can be experientially represented without sense perception. If you read a novel, several non-experiential states will contain information about that novel. However, an experiential representation might encode aesthetic information on the basis of these states. Aesthetic properties can thus be experientially attributed to non-perceptible artworks.

This idea is a problem for the standard account that says that aesthetic properties are perceived; because it suggests that the experiential attribution of aesthetic properties is not perceptual. A possible objection to this claim is to say that we do not experience aesthetic properties when engaging with non-perceptual art. This is the best bet for someone who is defending the standard account. One can argue that literature and conceptual art are not 'aesthetic', given that they are non-perceptible. The framework of aesthetic properties, then, only works for perceptible art and not for non-perceptible art. Schellekens, Shelley and Lopes reject this strategy. However, it is hard to see how one would settle this debate when 'aesthetic property' is, as mentioned before, not a clearly defined concept. It is unclear what will determine whether the elegance of a mathematical proof is truly an aesthetic property just as the elegance of a painting is.

Here is a reason why we should consider non-material elegance as being not that different from material elegance. First of all, we use the same word. As most articles on aesthetic properties start with paradigm examples, instead of clearly defining what aesthetic properties are, and 'elegance' is used as a paradigm example, it is hard to argue that some instances of elegance are aesthetic properties and others are not. One is committed to saying that elegance is a paradigm case of an aesthetic property, no matter to which entity it is attributed. Secondly, we use the same word because phenomenologically, different experiences of elegance have something in common, regardless of which object it is

attributed to. Elegant brushstrokes, elegant mathematical proofs and the elegant behaviour of people all have something in common: they feel the same. Again, it seems hard to settle this debate, but we have good reasons to doubt whether the standard view is true. Therefore, an account that gives a unified explanation of aesthetic property attribution to both perceptual and non-perceptual objects seems to be a more satisfactory account than one which does not.

In order to experience a painting as balanced, one needs to perceive the non-aesthetic properties such as colours, shapes, and spatial properties. In the philosophy of perception these properties that are obviously literally perceived are called 'low-level properties', which make up the bottom-up information that we get from our senses (cf. Siegel 2006). Aesthetic properties are not represented by 'low-level perception'.

Aesthetic properties are distinct from low-level perceptible properties because something else is required to get from specific colours and shapes to 'elegance'. Yet, what mental state or process is responsible for this? I think we have good reasons to reject the idea that this is a perceptual process. As the cases of literature, conceptual art and elegant mathematical proofs show: one can experientially attribute aesthetic properties to non-perceptible objects. There is thus an experiential state which is able to represent an aesthetic property on the basis of perceiving colours and shapes, as well as on the basis of non-perceptual input such as a mathematical proof. It cannot be perceptual as it is inconceivable that one has a perceptual experience without low-level perceptual properties. It is absurd to claim that instead of colours and shapes a 'mathematical proof' is represented in low-level perception.

Which state would this be: experiential but not perceptual? A straightforward answer is that the experience of aesthetic properties is affective. In the next section, I will argue why this is the best explanation. I will defend an account that can accommodate the experiential aesthetic property attribution of both perceptible and non-perceptible aesthetic objects. I will call this the affective account and it says that the standard case of experiential aesthetic property attribution is an affective experience.

4. THE AFFECTIVE ACCOUNT

The affective account that I will defend is the claim that the standard case of experiential aesthetic property attribution is an affective experience. An experience of a painting's elegance then consists of a perceptual experience combined with a positive affective experience. The mathematician who experiences the elegance of the mathematical proof has a similar positive affective response. While reading a novel or assessing a conceptual artwork, aesthetic attribution works via affective experience.

What an emotion is, is something heavily debated by both philosophers and psychologists alike, but what everybody seems to agree upon is that a minimal requirement for an experience to be emotional is that it has a particular representational component. Let us call this component 'affective representation'. Here is an uncontroversial definition of affective representation: it is a mental representation which represents its object as more or less positive or negative. The term 'valence' is often used to refer to this experience of lesser or greater positivity.⁵ When I say 'affective experience', I mean a consciously experienced affective representation and I do not refer to entities such as qualia or mere feelings without representational content. In doing so, I presuppose representationalism as the philosophy of emotion is predominantly representationalist with very few, if any, exceptions.

It will be helpful to illustrate the notion of an affective experience with an example: the experience of something as 'refreshing'. When I perceive a glass of water, I can represent the water as 'drinkable'. The statement that the water is drinkable is a statement that can either be true or false, representing the water as drinkable is either accurate or inaccurate. In other words, the representation of the water as drinkable does or does not 'match' reality. In this sense, representing the water as 'drinkable' is what I will call objective representation.⁶ One can represent water as drinkable with a dry eye.

When I am thirsty I will have a different experience of a glass of water than after I have just been forced to drink ten litres of water. If I am thirsty I will represent the water as desirable, and in the second case, I will feel repulsed by the sight of another glass of water. This is not entirely objective because, in addition to a representation of the mind-independent reality, my perspective or condition does matter considerably. I represent the water as 'desirable' or 'not-desirable'. I understand that different people in different conditions will each experience water differently. This is an example of what I will call a perspectival state. A perspectival state can but does not have to be a desire; it can also be a goal, a preference, a disposition, a norm, a value or a personal association. Every state which does not represent reality as it, but is rather concerned with what is significant or valuable to one's own, is a perspectival state.⁷

So, imagine that I represent the water as drinkable, which is an objective representation, and at the same time, because I am thirsty, I also represent it as 'desirable', which is a perspectival representation. Now, if I drink the water I will have a positive affective experience. There is a specific kind of positivity that you experience when you drink water when you are thirsty. Commercials for bottled water and soda do a good job of representing this experience. They seem to call the combination of drinkable,

desirable, and pleasurable 'refreshing'. This, in my view, is a property which is similar to an aesthetic property.

'Refreshing' is an experienced property. However, the representation of 'refreshing' is not just the representation of its 'drinkability' combined with the representation of its 'desirability'. The essential feature that links objectivity and desire is the positive affective experience we undergo in drinking the water. It is the experienced 'positivity' that represents 'this is good', or 'my desire is fulfilled'.

This is why affective experience is an evaluative mental representation. The 'evaluation' consists of considering how an objective representation (f.i. the content of perception or belief) matches an essentially perspectival state (i.e. a goal, desire, preference, disposition or personal association). I hold that affective experiences evaluate 'objective' content by relating it to an essentially perspectival mental state, which appears to consciousness as an experience that can be characterized as more or less positive or negative. Valenced experience is a bridge between representations of the mind-independent world and mind-dependent, perspectival states. Greater or lesser positivity or negativity is always relative to a norm, a goal, a disposition or to any other perspectival mental state.

The example of a 'refreshing' experience can illustrate the structure of affective representation. You represent the water as 'drinkable' (objective state) and you are really thirsty (perspectival state). If you drink the water, this will fulfil your desire. This results in a positive affective representation. The 'positivity' enters your mind by means of affective representation.

Let us see how well the affective account applies to aesthetic properties. To experience the elegance of a painting, one needs a mental process that establishes the representation of an aesthetic property

on the basis of the representation of low-level perceptible properties. Evaluative aesthetic properties are somehow 'positive' or 'negative'. As the mental state that represents positivity and negativity is affective experience, it is the obvious candidate for the missing link between low-level properties and aesthetic properties. One has good reason to maintain that affective experience is the standard case of experiential aesthetic property attribution.

The affective account says that if you 'savour' beauty, beauty is attributed by means of affective representation. Remember Lucy who first experienced the beauty of the Rothko paintings, but who even after getting used to the Rothko poster still maintained the belief that it is beautiful, even when she did not experience it as beautiful. What is the difference between these two aesthetic assessments? The first time Lucy was moved by the Rothko paintings her experience was literally 'positive'. This positivity is represented in experience by means of affective representation.

The experience of beauty lacks a strong descriptive component; an experience of beauty is an unspecified experience of 'aesthetic positivity'. Most aesthetic properties seem to have both a descriptive and evaluative component and are, therefore, more specific than beauty. This category of properties includes elegance, grace, gaudiness, garishness, and balance.⁸ These properties are very similar to the property of refreshingness. If you say 'drinking this water feels good' then you are just describing a subjective state, but if you say 'this water is refreshing' you are being more specific. 'Refreshing' does not seem to be entirely subjective, given that it says that the water is 'good' because it is drinkable and quenches your thirst. It is also possible that instead of experiencing the 'refreshingness' of the water, you attribute the property of 'refreshing' to the water without affect. When you read in this paper that drinking water is refreshing when you are thirsty, you did not experience it, but I presume that you believe that my claim is correct. If you literally experience the

refreshingness, the experience of positivity has to be part of your experience as well. The same goes for the experience of a dancer's pirouette as graceful. You represent the movement as having a particular form, but you also represent the movement as 'good'. If there is a difference between holding the belief that the dancer's pirouette is graceful and experiencing the gracefulness, the difference is that in the latter case you experience the positivity. Literally experiencing greater or lesser positivity or negativity is affective experience.⁹

Although 'refreshing' and aesthetic properties are similar, there is also a significant difference. The perspectival state which is at the basis of refreshingness experience is thirst, while the perspectival state responsible for aesthetic properties is arguably not the satisfaction of an occurrent desire. What, then, is the perspectival state that gives rise to an affective experience of an aesthetic property? It is that aspect of the human mind that craves for the aesthetically good: an aesthetic sensitivity. In the philosophy of emotion, there is an ongoing debate on what the nature of what I call a 'perspectival state' is. The account that Price (2015, pp. 116–131) calls the 'interest-based account' claims that perspectival states are not to be reduced to desires or mere preferences. Perspectival states are 'interests' which are our longings for a list of objective 'goods' such as 'health; security; adequate material resources; good social status; autonomy; good social relationships; intellectual stimulation' (Price 2015, pp. 117–118) Emotions are not just sensitive to our preferences and desires, but to what we value. Think about it: most of our profound emotions are not triggered by desire satisfaction but by the things that are of value to us for complex and obscure reasons. The aesthetic is no different: we are sensitive to objects of aesthetic value for complex and obscure reasons. It is a research project on its own to investigate how and why we have such an aesthetic sensitivity but I think we have good reasons to believe that we have an aesthetic interest and that this is what I call a perspectival state.

The affective account presents a unified explanation of how aesthetic properties are experientially attributed to both perceptible and non-perceptible objects. Experiencing the elegance of a dancer's pirouette and experiencing the elegance of a mathematical proof are both instances of affective experience. In the former case, the objective content is constituted by a perception of the dancer's pirouette, while in the latter case perception does not do this work. People who disagree with the affective view will have to provide an explanation as to why both a mathematical proof, as well as a dancer's pirouette, can be experienced as 'elegant'.

The affective account gives a satisfactory explanation of the experiences of the variety of properties that are called 'aesthetic'. Affective experience is not an optional add-on to the experiential attribution of aesthetic properties, but it is the standard case of the experiential attribution of aesthetic properties. In the next section, I will discuss objections one can raise against this statement.

5. POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS

5.1. Affective penetration of perception

One can argue that affective experience itself cannot represent aesthetic properties because what is needed is a perceptual state that is penetrated by an affective experience. In this sense aesthetic properties are perceived and affective experience is not doing the work of representing the aesthetic property. Some philosophers maintain that emotion, like other mental states, can penetrate perceptual

experiences (see Siegel 2012). This claim is not uncontroversial, but one might hold that an emotion can influence the content of a perceptual experience. For instance, when you are afraid of a dog, you might say: 'his teeth look bigger'. One might argue that this is literally true: the experience of fear changes something in your perceptual experience. The teeth are literally perceived as bigger. The same can be argued for about aesthetic properties. When you experience gracefulness, this might be a case of 'affective penetration', which involves the penetration of an affective experience into a perceptual experience. If one takes this to be true, one can argue that aesthetic properties are not attributed by means of affective experience but they are perceived by an affectively penetrated perceptual state (see also Prinz 2014 and Stokes 2014).

I reject this claim and hold that an aesthetic property can be represented by an affective experience. To represent water as refreshing, it is not the case that an affective experience penetrates the perception of the water resulting in an experience of refreshingness. The affective experience needs an objective state, which is, in this case, the perception of the water. You are always afraid of something or angry at someone and the object of your emotion needs to be given to you by an objective state. This does not imply that every objective state is penetrated by the emotional experience. First of all, this objective state does not have to be a perceptual experience. One can be afraid of an imaginary lion. Moreover, being afraid of a lion one sees does not need a penetration of the perceptual experience of that lion; affective experience is enough. Likewise, experiential aesthetic property attribution does not have to be based on a perceptual state. Moreover, if one experiences certain colours as elegant, it is not the case that the affective experience penetrates the perceptual experience of those colours and changes its content. Affective experience alone can represent an aesthetic property.

5.2. Affect is perceptual

If one holds that affective experience is perceptual, then the whole set up of this paper falls apart. If this is true then claiming that aesthetic properties are affectively experienced is not contradictory with saying that they are perceptually represented. Johnston (2001), for instance, claims that affect is perceptual because it is a refinement of the senses and he uses the experience of beauty as an example of such an affect. However, I agree with Wedgwood's criticism of Johnston's account (Wedgwood 2001). Wedgwood argues that affect is often a reaction to a non-perceptual phenomenon, and thus not essentially a refinement of the senses. The affective account of aesthetic property attribution entails that affective experience can be a response to a non-perceptual object, such as the experience of a mathematical proof as elegant.

Brady (2013) rejects what he sees as the epistemological presupposition of most philosophers who claim that emotion or affect is a kind of perception, including Johnston. He rejects the claim that emotions and affects silence the demand for justification for that which it discloses. Emotion and affect are supposedly perceptual because they justify evaluative beliefs, just as, for instance, seeing that the cup is red justifies the belief that the cup is red. Brady argues that the opposite is true: emotions do not silence the demand for justification. When you are alone at night in your apartment and you hear a weird noise, you might be afraid, but this does not silence the demand for justification for the belief that you are in danger. You are not going to call the police, just because you are afraid. When you see a stranger in your apartment, on the other hand, you will likely call the police. If you see a person in your apartment you will not look for other evidence that there is, in fact, somebody in your

apartment. That is what silencing the demand for justification means. Like other affective experiences, I do not think that an experience of an aesthetic property silences the demand of justification in the same way as perception does. One can have interesting debates about whether something is beautiful or not, whereas there are no interesting disagreements about what one sees unless your discussion partner is hallucinating. I agree with Brady that emotion and affect have a different epistemological status than perception and that this is one good reason to reject the claim that they are perceptual. There are more reasons to reject this claim, but this is, I think, the most important one.

More recently, Tappolet (2016) argued for a new version of the perceptual view of emotion. In response to Brady's remark that perception and emotion have a different epistemological status, she argues that we need to reject 'reliable representationalism' about emotion. Tappolet (2016, pp. 41–45) states that, because emotions misfire more often than not, we have to give up thinking of emotion in terms of reliable correlation altogether. The reason why emotions do not silence the demand for justification is that they are not reliable. In Brady's example, it is likely that one's fear because there is a weird noise, is a false alarm. It is not likely that there is actually danger present, just because there is a weird noise. According to Brady, emotions, therefore, do not silence the demand for justification.

Tappolet on the other hand, claims that because emotions are unreliable one should not think of them as reliable representations. The alternative that one should endorse, according to Tappolet, is what Dokic and Lemaire (2013) call (without endorsing it) the direct access thesis. This is the claim that emotion is the direct perception of value. Since emotion directly presents the evaluative world, it provides direct evidence for empirical judgments about this evaluative world.¹⁰ It is, however, a strange move to defend the direct access thesis about emotion as a response to the claim that they are

unreliable. The claim that emotions are unreliable and often misfire seems almost in contradiction with the claim that they directly present us with values themselves. If emotions are unreliable, it also seems wrong to say that they are direct evidence for empirical judgments.

Let us compare this to perception. Suppose that someone argues that because perception is unreliable, you should think of perception as that which directly presents reality as it is and that therefore perception is direct evidence for your empirical judgments. If your perception is unreliable and you misperceive the world most of the time, it does not follow from this that it immediately shows you reality as it is. Likewise, Tappolet's move to defend the direct access thesis about emotions because they are unreliable is unjustified. So I hold that Brady's criticism of the perceptual view still holds.

As a matter of fact, in (Tappolet 2016), Tappolet does not actually claim that emotion literally is perception. Instead, she argues that emotion and perception are very similar because they have a lot of significant features in common. Tappolet also lists a couple of differences between emotion and perception. I think that very few people would deny that emotion and perception are somewhat similar but this is something else than claiming that emotion literally is perception. Claiming that emotion is very similar to perception is consistent with the affective account of the experiential attribution of aesthetic properties.

5.3. The metaphysics of aesthetic properties and sentimentalism

This paper meant to put metaphysics aside, but one could criticize the affective account for presupposing a metaphysical position. Anti-realism and emotivism are often used synonymously.

Given that I claim that the experience of aesthetic properties is an affective experience, one may have the idea that I presuppose anti-realism. However, my account does not necessarily agree with, nor does it oppose, the anti-realism of aesthetic properties. If one accepts the affective account, one can go both metaphysical ways. An anti-realist will claim that there is nothing more to aesthetic properties than this experience alone. The properties are constituted by this experience, and therefore they do not exist mind-independently. A realist about aesthetic properties could say that the experience of aesthetic properties picks out something in reality. Alternatively, one can defend a position that occupies the middle ground between these positions, and which argues for some kind of mind-dependent realism. In either case, my account remains neutral on this metaphysical debate and is consistent with most metaphysical accounts of aesthetic properties.

In this sense, the affective account of aesthetic property attribution is different from the branch of emotivism that presupposes that emotions are merely feelings and not representational in themselves. Most emotion theorists today think that emotions are representational, and rightly so.¹¹ If you fear a lion, you represent the lion as being a certain way. It is not the case that you just feel something in your body. Likewise, the affective experience of aesthetic properties is not just a feeling that happens after we represent an aesthetic property. The affective experience is the experiential representation of the aesthetic property.

As a last note to this section, I want to emphasize that the affective account is also very different from sentimentalism.¹² Sentimentalists also describe a similar relation between emotion and value, just like the affective account does. Sentimentalism is, however, not a theory of how we attribute evaluative properties to objects, but it is an account of the nature of evaluative properties. The affective account

remains neutral on the metaphysics of aesthetic properties. Sentimentalism, which is also more general than the affective account as it is meant to be a claim about *all* evaluative properties, is the claim that something has an evaluative property if and only if a particular response to it is appropriate or fitting. For instance, a particular object is fearsome if and only if fear is the appropriate or fitting response to that object. This account received a lot of criticism (see f.i. Brady 2013, pp. 114-115). I only want to point out here, that the affective account is not a version of sentimentalism. No metaphysical claims about aesthetic properties follow from the claim that aesthetic properties are affectively represented. The appropriate or fitting affective experience to something which has an aesthetic property would be, according to the affective account, an accurate affective representation of that property. This says, in fact, nothing substantial about the nature of that property. It is similar to the claim that something is red if and only if the fitting response to it is an accurate perception of red, which says nothing about the metaphysical nature of red. For this reason, the affective account is not a version of sentimentalism.

5.4. 'Positive' aesthetic properties can be experienced as 'negative'

Experiencing positive aesthetic properties does not always result in positive experiences. For instance, 'balance' seems to be a positive aesthetic property, but Baroque painters saw balance in a negative light, as it was the opposite of their aesthetic ideal. For Rubens, experiencing balance, as opposed to merely holding the belief that something is balanced, would entail having a negative experience, not merely believing it. This might be a problem for the affective view, were it to imply that the experience of a positive aesthetic property has to be positive.

It is important to notice that 'possessing positive aesthetic properties' is not necessarily synonymous with 'having a positive aesthetic or artistic value'. Aesthetic properties are, however, the building blocks of these more complex phenomena and can contribute to a work's artistic merit in a less predictable way. Compare this to wine tasting. If you drink wine, you perceive different aspects of the wine. You might just say you like it, by which you mean that in general, you have a positive experience thereof. A wine connoisseur is very good at distinguishing between the various representations she has formed while tasting. When addressing the evaluative aesthetic properties of the wine, she is describing the various affective representations she has had. Not all these qualities have to be positive to make a good wine: you can have an excellent 'balance' of an extremely bitter taste and a sweet and elegant aftertaste. The same holds for artworks. A painting can be successful in expressing sadness by virtue of its ugly features. Paintings can be considered kitsch because they are over-the-top pretty. If everything is too pretty. Rubens might have thought that if the compositions of paintings are too balanced, then the painting becomes too static and not vivid enough.

6. TO CONCLUDE: TWO SETS OF AESTHETIC PROPERTIES

I have argued that aesthetic properties are experientially attributed by means of affective experience. The affective account provides a satisfactory explanation of how we experientially attribute aesthetic properties to both perceptual and non-perceptual objects. However, this does not hold for every property that has been called 'aesthetic'. In the introduction, I pointed out that the claims and arguments in this paper are limited to the aesthetic properties that are evaluative and somehow related to the aesthetic. Given that nobody has provided a strict definition of what 'aesthetic properties' actually are, in the broad sense of the word, I suspect that this notion does not make up a natural kind.

The aesthetic properties that fall within the scope of the affective account, on the other hand, are a better candidate for forming a natural kind.

Consider these two sets of properties:

- A. The set of properties that have been called 'aesthetic' (i.e. the list, De Clercq 2008, p. 895)
- B. The set of properties that are affectively experienced

There is a significant overlap between those two sets. However, not all properties that belong to A also belong to B and vice versa. It is hard to argue that A forms a natural kind, whereas the set of properties that overlaps between A and B is a better candidate to form a natural kind. These properties are aesthetic properties that are affectively experienced, which implies that some kind of positivity or negativity is represented. What sets them apart from other affectively experienced properties, like 'fearsomeness' and 'danger', is that there is a different kind of positivity or negativity being represented; namely, aesthetic positivity or negativity.

It might be helpful for aestheticians to focus on this category of affectively experienced aesthetic properties, rather than on the broad notion of aesthetic properties. It is this category that is the most controversial regarding different topics in aesthetics, such as those related to aesthetic value, normativity, and testimony.¹³

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¹ Note that Sibley uses the term 'aesthetic concept' and not 'aesthetic property'. These papers, just like the majority of philosophical texts back then, were embedded within linguistic philosophy. This framework is not as mainstream now as it used to be; therefore, contemporary philosophers are more likely to use the term 'aesthetic property'. I will do so as well.

² De Clercq (2002) is one notable exception.

³ Some argue that aesthetic properties are necessarily evaluative (f.i. De Clercq 2002), others argue that not all aesthetic properties are evaluative (f.i. Levinson 2001).

⁴ An interesting overview and discussion of the ontology of aesthetic properties is presented by Levinson and Matravers (2005). On the question in which way aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties relate, see (Levinson 1984) and (Currie 1990).

⁵ For an overview of different accounts of valence see: Colombetti (2005) and Prinz (2010). Each account of emotion has its own theory of valence. Some, e.g., Barrett (2005), argue that there is only one kind of valence: a scale of greater or lesser negativity or positivity. Next to this valence scale, there is also an arousal scale, which represents the greater or lesser intensity of the affective experience. This implies that affective experience can only represent the degree to which something is positive or negative and how intensely it is experienced, not whether it is 'fear', which would require an additional inference. Others (e.g., Scherer 2005) argue that there are different types of valence: affective experiences pick up information by assessing different kinds of positivity/negativity. An experience can be either positive or negative because it is, for instance, an experience of familiarity/novelty or of goal conduciveness (satisfied/disappointed). Scherer's account of valence also allows for emotions to be defined as sequences of different valence representations.

⁶ What I call objective representation is similar to what (Deonna & Teroni 2012) call the cognitive base of emotion.

⁷ What I call a perspectival state is often called 'emotional significance' or 'personal significance' in the philosophy of emotion. For a discussion and overview, see (Price 2015, pp. 117-118).

⁸ It is debated how the evaluative and descriptive components stand in relation to each other. For instance, Levinson (2001) claims that they can easily be separated, while De Clercq (2002) criticizes this view. For an original take on this debate see Zangwill (1995).

⁹ I remain neutral as to whether aesthetic assessment is possible on basis of testimony. If this is the case, then it consists of judging that something is aesthetically valuable without experiencing it.

¹⁰ The direct access thesis about emotion is very similar to direct realism about perception. For a good criticism of a (hypothetical) direct realism about emotion, see (Brady, 2013, pp. 78–82).

¹¹ See (Lyons, 1980) for a historical overview of the rejection of the Humean feeling theory of emotion and the branch of emotivism which presupposes this theory.

¹² Examples of sentimentalism arguably include: (Gibbard 1990; McDowell 1998; Wiggins 1987).

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