

# The Aesthetics of Drugs

C. Thi Nguyen

(This is a pre-print draft manuscript. Please cite the final version, forthcoming in the *Palgrave Handbook of Philosophy and Psychoactive Drug Use*, ed. Rob Lovering)

## Abstract

The aesthetics of tea, in some practices, seems to focus on appreciating the mental effects of tea — the altered states of mind. Wine aesthetics, on the other hand, seems to actively exclude any inebriative effects. Wine experts are supposed to spit, in order to avoid inebriation when they judge wine. Why? The answer, I suggest, lies deep in several key suppositions in the traditional model of aesthetic experience: that aesthetic experience needs to be accurate of its object, and that it needs to be inseparable from the particular details of its object. But, I argue, that model is not really incompatible with an aesthetics of drugs. The problematic presupposition is that the aesthetics of drugs is either an aesthetics of the world, as experienced while drugged, or an aesthetics of the physical substance itself. The aesthetics of some drugs, such as LSD, will turn out to be a self-reflective aesthetics, instead — one in which the primary object of appreciation is the alteration of one's own cognitive faculties. This can be valuable as a humbling aesthetic vision, of one's own cognitive fragility. But the aesthetics of gastronomical drugs, such as wine and tea, will turn out to be even more complicated. Gastronomical drugs demand that we bridge the inwardly-focused aesthetics of inebriation and an outwardly focused gastronomical aesthetics. They open the door to the possibility of an aesthetic reconciliation between our capacity to get onto the world, and our fears about the fragility of that capacity.

Can there be an aesthetics of drugs? There seems to be little within what might loosely be called Western European aesthetic theory to support the possibility. The paradigmatic aesthetic experiences in this tradition are those of artworks and nature. That is to say, the paradigmatic aesthetic experiences are of external objects to which we might attribute aesthetic properties. It is the novel that is dramatic; the dancer's leap that is elegant; the

brushstroke that is flowing and expressive. In drugs, on the other hand, the actual physical substance itself — the pill, the powder — is often aesthetically insipid and surely not the real point of interest. What matters is the mental effect. What's more, under most accounts, the process of making aesthetic judgments seems to involve accurately discovering aesthetic properties in the objects themselves. Drugs seem to undermine our capacity for accuracy. In fact, some culinary traditions have attempted to actively exclude any drug effects in the service of accurate aesthetic judgments. This is why proper wine critics are supposed to spit out wine during official tastings; inebriation would interfere with proper aesthetic judgment. The practice of wine spitting itself implies the outlines of a model of aesthetic judgment: that an aesthetic judgment is supposed to be grounded in accurate assessments of mind-independent qualities of external objects. Thus, we need to exclude the mind-clouding drug effect of wine in order to get a handle on the real aesthetic qualities of the wine itself.

Elsewhere, however, there seems to be a distinctively aesthetic practice of appreciating altered mental states. There is a practice of tea appreciation which seems to include refined appreciation of what we might call inebriation — an alteration of one's perceptual experience of the world and one's cognitive abilities via some chemical effect. This alteration is often described as an "energy effect". An aesthetic appreciation of inebriation — and its relationship to the aesthetic qualities of flavor and aroma — seems to be a central focus of this tea practice. Spitting tea, then, would undermine this sort of appreciative practice, since experiencing the drug effects of tea is central to the aesthetic practice.

The point here is not simply to struggle for the right to use the label of 'aesthetic', as if the application of the word itself might, by itself, justify the practice of drug-taking. Rather, it is to use some of the conceptual framework from aesthetics to better articulate what might

be of genuine value in altered mental states. What's more, thinking about the value of inebriation will also help us to question some of the boundaries implied by standard accounts of the aesthetic — especially the focus on aesthetic attention paid to external objects. I will suggest that the tea practice is one where a primary object of appreciative attention is one's own fluctuating mental states and processes.

I will begin by surveying some telling moments from the literature of tea appreciation, largely drawn from East Asian sources. My goal here is not proper cross-cultural comparison, and I certainly do not claim to be offering a sophisticated understanding of any East Asian aesthetics. Rather, my goal is to use moments from this tea literature as inspirations for a constructive project, largely addressing the Western European tradition of analytic aesthetics, which will show a way in which that tradition could accommodate an aesthetics of inebriation. I will suggest that the aesthetics of some drugs, such as LSD, is an exclusively self-reflective aesthetics, one in which the primary object of appreciation is the alteration and undermining of one's own cognitive faculties. This is valuable in many ways. Among them: it can present a humbling aesthetic vision of one's own fragility. But the aesthetics of gastronomical drugs, such as wine and tea, will turn out to be even more complicated. Gastronomical drugs demand that we bridge the inwardly-focused aesthetics of inebriation and an outwardly focused gastronomical aesthetics. This opens the door to an intriguing possibility: that gastronomical drugs can offer experience of aesthetic reconciliation between our capacity to reliably learn about the world, and our fears about the fragility of that capacity.

### **On the delicate appreciation of inebriation**

There is a recurring thread which celebrates tea's mental effect through some East Asian literatures, especially Chinese and Korean. Consider this excerpt from a poem by Yan Zhenqing concerning 'flowing flowers' (a poetic name for tea): "Flowing flowers' purify the muscles and bones, / penetrate and cleanse the source of the mind" (Benn 2015, 86.) Consider also the words of Ch'oui Son Sa: "The highest state of tea drinking and that of meditation are the same!" (Blofield 1985, 95). And from An Kwangsok: "How can one truly talk about tea without understanding meditation? For tea and meditation are of one taste..." (99).

The relationship between meditation and tea may be puzzling for those unfamiliar with tea's complex psychoactive chemistry. Tea, as it turns out, contains two psychoactive substances compared to coffee's one. Tea contains caffeine, a stimulant — though usually in far smaller amount than with coffee. Tea also contains theanine, a relaxant. Theanine was first identified in 1949 in gyokuro, an expensive Japanese green tea reputed to have calming effects. Theanine, it turns out, is an amino acid that readily crosses the blood brain barrier. It has been demonstrated to regulate neurotransmitter levels and cause significant increases in dopamine levels and bring about other neurochemical alterations<sup>1</sup>. It also increases nerve cell growth factors and promotes central nervous system maturation.<sup>2</sup> Theanine increases the release of GABA and glycine, which in turn increases the release of key neurotransmitters — dopamine and serotonin — and drops cortisol levels (that's the stress hormone).<sup>3</sup> In double-blind studies, the oral ingestion of theanine has clear effects on brain waves, especially alpha wave activity. It promotes, says the researchers, relaxation without drowsiness.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> (Yokogoshi et al. 1998; Yamada et al. 2009; Ritsner et al. 2011)

<sup>2</sup> (Yamada et al. 2007)

<sup>3</sup> (Placzek 2017)

<sup>4</sup> (Juneja et al. 1999)

There's also evidence that theanine decreases stress levels in children with ADHD and reduces anxiety without a sedative effect.<sup>5</sup> Finally, theanine, being an amino acid, is responsible for the savory flavors of tea.

Thus, tea's long association with relaxation has a likely biochemical basis. It seems no accident, then, that tea spread with Buddhism as an aid for meditation and a certain kind of calm, relaxed focus (Mair and Hoh 2009, 42-44). The mental effects attributed to tea are best explained as grounded in a calibrated balance between the stimulatory effects of caffeine and the relaxing effects of theanine, perhaps modified by other trace psychoactive compounds. These mental effects may also be channeled and shaped through aspects of tea flavor, aroma, environment, process, and ritual. Most importantly, for our purposes, there appear to be certain practices of tea appreciation, originating in East Asia, which focus on those mental effects.

In various tea rooms, I have heard the phrase "tea drunk" used to describe the specific inebriation that occurs from a rapid overdose of certain kinds of tea. Interestingly, modern English language academic work on East Asian tea culture makes almost no reference to any sort of energy effect or inebriation.<sup>6</sup> There are only a few scattered references, here and there. For example, Daniel Reid notes that a primary use of tea is to achieve mental clarity and focus, but that an overdose leads to *cha dzui* — which he translates as "tea-tipsy". He does note that some tea-drinkers, especially pu-erh drinkers, seek out that inebriated state (Reid 2012, 90-91).

However, the careful eye will discover attention to energy effects and inebriation

---

<sup>5</sup> (Breus 2017)

<sup>6</sup> Recent examples of significant accounts of tea appreciation with little to no reference to inebriation or energy effects include (Benn 2015; Mair and Hoh 2009; Zhang 2014)

throughout the classical Chinese literary appreciation of tea. Here, for example, is an excerpt from *The Song of Tea* by celebrated poet and tea master Lu T'ung:

“The first bowl sleekly moistened throat and lips;  
The second banished all my loneliness;  
The third expelled the dullness from my mind,  
Sharpening inspiration gained from all the books I've read.  
The fourth brought forth light perspiration,  
Dispersing a lifetime's troubles through my pores.  
The fifth bowl cleansed ev'ry atom of my being.  
The sixth has made me kin to the Immortals.  
This seventh is the utmost I can drink -  
A light breeze issues from my armpits.”

(Tr. John Blofield)(Blofield 1985, 10)

The discussion of these mental effects often is couched in terms of each tea's *qi* — where *qi* can be loosely translated as “energy” or “life force”.<sup>7</sup> And the *qi* of tea is not treated like a simple drug effect, but as a widely varying quality, subject to great connoisseurship. Here's an excerpt from Liu Yuxi's “Song of sampling tea at the monastery of Western Mountain”:

“The perfume hits the nostrils and disperses last night's drunkenness,  
Pure and austere it penetrates the bones and drives out inner worry.  
Whether from sunny cliff or shady slope, each tea has its own *qi*,  
But none compares to that grown in the moss beneath bamboo.”

(Tr. James Benn)(Benn 2015, 82-83)

In certain modern tea appreciative cultures, the inebriative focus of traditional tea appreciation seems to have fused with the appreciative modes of modern drug culture. This fusion is particularly pronounced in the connoisseurship of pu-erh. Pu-erh is a specific Chinese tea varietal that is pressed into cakes for aging and microbial fermentation. White2tea,

---

<sup>7</sup> This is a very loose translation; the correct translation of *qi* is a matter of much scholarly dispute. See (Gu 2009) for both a summary of some of the complexities of translating the term, and a fascinating discussion of the relationship of notions of *qi*, a universal life force, and *wenqi*, a crucial aesthetic quality of talent, liveliness, and soul in literature.

a pu-erh vendor, offers the following description of some of their pricier teas: “A blend of raw Puer material with low underlying bitterness. The soup is thick and heavy with strong sweetness and body feel.” And another: “Strong body feel. Not the best place to start for inexperienced Puer tea drinkers.”

Cwyn, a revered pu-erh blogger (and self-described former heavy marijuana user) describes Bosch, a particular pu-erh blend from White2tea:

Bosch is drunk with the entire body, not just in the mouth, and in fact more so in the body than mouth.... Also too, this tea is slamming me up against my weakness of mind-body disconnection, my meditation subtype and continued practice. Someone who is much more grounded as a physical type, someone who maybe is a muscle athlete or with more energetic gusto, will find nothing disturbing in this tea whatsoever. A bout of weightlifting or yard work, a roll in the hay would give more of a rush, and tea like this is but a dribble in a much larger blast furnace than what I myself possess.

Another reviewer’s comments on the same tea:

So this is what stoner tea feels like... In the beginning there was light, it was like drinking a firework, not in texture of course, that would be unpleasant, but the combination of taste, qi, and texture lights up my brain like a smack to the head... Several steeps in and I am really feeling this one, it lights my belly on fire like what I would imagine eating icy-hot would feel like, it cools but it burns. My limbs feel like jelly and my brain feels like it is stuffed full of fluff, there is tea drunk and there is tea stoned.<sup>8</sup>

I suggest that theanine plays a significant role in the mental effect of tea. Moreover, certain traditions of tea appreciation place the mental effects of tea at the center focus, where those effects arise from a complex interaction between caffeine, theanine and other perceptual stimuli.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, given that explicit attention to inebriation in the appreciation of

---

<sup>8</sup>Both quotes from <https://steepster.com/teas/white2tea/65305-2015-bosch#tasting-notes>. I quote reviewers here, rather than academics, because I follow a version of David Davies’s Pragmatic Constraint on aesthetic theorizing (Davies 2004, 16-28). That is, I think that aesthetic theory should take itself as beholden to the practice and talk of practitioners and appreciators in the actual practice, unless we have a very good reason to overrule them.

<sup>9</sup> For any readers who might be inspired to go searching for this effect, I strongly suspect that most teas available to the Western market are quite low in theanine. Teas with a powerful drug effect are sought-after and quite expensive, at least to the average Western consumer’s eye. Unfortunately, there have yet been no studies about variations in theanine levels across differently sourced teas. Reputable Western-facing vendors, at the moment of writing, include White2Tea, Tea Urchin, Floating Leaves Tea, Tea Masters, and Crimson Lotus Tea.

tea, I suspect that tea has also been selectively bred to refine this drug effect over the centuries.<sup>10</sup> Finally, I suggest that the kind of detailed appreciative attention lavished on these mental effects is best characterized as an aesthetic attention.

For lack of a better term, I'll use "inebriation" to refer to alterations in one's cognitive and perceptual faculties which originate, at least partially, in the consumption of some psychoactive substance. What this brief literary exclusion has demonstrated, I hope, is that the experiential qualities of inebriation are front and center in certain practices of tea appreciation.<sup>11</sup> But interestingly, when we look at wine, we find something entirely different. In wine reviewing, one is supposed to spit precisely in order to avoid inebriation. The inebriative effect is excluded because it would interfere with the perception of the aesthetic qualities of the wine. Even when a wine taster doesn't spit, the modern connoisseurship of wine makes almost no reference to the inebriative qualities of wine; wine criticism and reviewing consist primarily of reports of tastes and smells, with a smattering of textures and visual qualities. And when Chinese tea is taken up in Western European traditions, the appreciation usually seems to focus on aspects of flavor and aroma, and almost never on its inebriative effects (except for the microscopic community of modern Western tea drunks, which I've quoted from).

It will be useful to think here in terms of the prescriptions involved in various social

---

<sup>10</sup> I am not alone in this claim, though the connection is surprisingly scarce. Reid provides a useful overview of connections between various mystical claims made about tea and recent research on theanine (Reid 2012, 87-112).

<sup>11</sup> In no way am I claiming that there is a unified Asian or Chinese tradition, or that inebriation is central to all Chinese tea appreciative practices. There is, for example, a long-standing practice of appreciating tea for its capacity to, in powdered form, be whipped into the most beautifully frothy appearance (Mair and Hoh 2009, 62-63).



practices of aesthetic appreciation. Importantly, works of art, and other related aesthetic artifacts, seem to come loaded with prescriptions about what we are to attend to, and what we are not to attend to (Davies 2004, 50-79; Irvin 2005). We are to appreciate the painting from the front, not the back; we are to look at what's in the frame, and not attend to its relationship to the wall outside the frame. We are to look at it, and not smell or taste it as part of appreciating the painting. Yuriko Saito calls these prescriptions the "aesthetic frame" of a work (Saito 2010, 18-23). Crucially, the frame helps set the ontology of the work — they tell us what is and is not part of the work, over and above the physical object. The novel is not just words on the page, but words on the page as experienced under certain prescriptions (read, and in sequence) rather than, say, eaten or burned. When we turn to look at Western practices of wine appreciation, inebriation seems decisively out of frame.<sup>12</sup> However, inebriation is front and center, in-frame, for the practice of tea appreciation I've described. So: why is inebriation out of frame with wine?

### **Why no aesthetics of inebriation?**

Perhaps there is some irresolvable incompatibility between inebriation and the aesthetic. But it is fairly difficult to say what that incompatibility could amount to. The poetry and critical discussion I've surveyed certainly sound like part of an appreciative aesthetic practice. At least, it's the kind of experience that we seek for its own sake, to which we pay careful and loving attention, and which we dissect afterwards with care and connoisseurship.

---

<sup>12</sup> I am aware that there are significant problems with over-essentializing "Asian" and "Western" cultures. Please take my uses of the terms to be simple shorthand to differentiate between clusters of practices with moderately divergent historical and cultural origins.

Speaking more formally, inebriative experiences seem to fit within many of the canonical theories of the aesthetic in the Western European aesthetic tradition. Let's run through a few of the classics. Consider the view called *aesthetic empiricism*: that one has an aesthetic experience if one engages with an aesthetic object, not for the sake of some further purpose, but for the intrinsic value of the experience itself. (Recent examples of theories in this vein include (Iseminger 2006; Goldman 2006; Stang 2012; Shelley 2015).<sup>13</sup>). Surely tea and wine drinkers can seek out inebriation for the intrinsic value of the experience rather than for instrumental value of the consumption or experience. In fact, it's actually easier to show that inebriation has intrinsic value than it is to show that food has intrinsic value. Carolyn Korsmeyer suggests that a significant roadblock for food aesthetics is that food is nutritive. She suggests that, if one always consumed food for its instrumental value, one might then doubt that there could be aesthetic judgments of food.<sup>14</sup> But note that inebriation is usually not nutritive; in fact, it is often physically harmful.

Next, consider the view that the aesthetic is marked out by a broad, *unfiltered attention* to an object. Jerome Stolnitz says that we usually approach objects with a distinctly practical attitude. Our practical interests inform our experience of each object; our interests act as an attentional filter, narrowing our focus only to those properties which serve our practical interest. We approach a hammer with the eye of a carpenter and we note only its weight, its heft, its balance, its grip; we ignore the beautiful patterns of wear on its grip and its interesting smells of worn rubber and metal. Since we live most of our life with the practical attitude,

---

<sup>13</sup> An excellent overview of aesthetic empiricism can be found in (Lopes 2018, 9, 53-70). Obviously, the view has some relation to historical notions of the *disinterestedness* of aesthetic experience, such as Kant's view. I have avoided direct talk of disinterest due to various interpretive difficulties, but it seems to me that the sort of response I've outlined below could be adapted to the various notions of disinterestedness,

<sup>14</sup> I don't myself endorse this argument. It depends on underrating the distinction between the metaphysical function of an object, and an individual's own motivations for engaging with that object.

most of our experiences are filtered and narrowed by our practical interests. But when one approaches an object without any practical interests at all, one attends fully to the object itself (Stolnitz 1960)(for modernized versions of the view, see (Kemp 1999; Nanay 2016, 1-35)).<sup>15</sup> Surely, those interested in inebriation can attend, not narrowly to useful qualities of the inebriation, but broadly to the whole of the experience. One might protest that there are some practical uses for inebriation — for loosening up at a party or de-stressing after a long day of work. But though there are certainly some practical uses for inebriation, it would be strange to think that every inebriative experience is entirely practical. Surely many experiences of inebriation are not guided by practical interests, but by an interest in the internal qualities of the experience itself.

Finally, some have held that one of the markers of the aesthetic is that we seem to demand that aesthetic judgment proceed from the judger's own experience. This is in sharp contrast to most non-aesthetic judgment, where we are permitted to acquire beliefs and make judgments second-hand. I can judge that I should take this antibiotic based simply on testimony. But judgments about the beauty of a painting, or the artful sorrow of a tragedy, all require direct experience. I can judge that my car needs a new carburetor, full-stop, based merely on the word of a mechanic, but I ought not say that Van Gogh's *Irises* is delicate, agonizing, or beautifully terrifying, full-stop, based merely on the word of an art critic (Budd 2003; Livingston 2003; Hopkins 2011; Wollheim 1980; Nguyen 2017, 2020a). Connoisseurs of the inebriative effects of tea also seem to require direct experience for judgments about the quality of an inebriative experience.

---

<sup>15</sup> Stolnitz's account of the aesthetic attitude was been largely abandoned, after George Dickie's supposedly devastating criticisms (Dickie 1964). However, Bence Nanay has offered a convincing modern reconstruction of Stolnitz's account, built to survive Dickie's criticisms

If drug experiences seem to check so many of the usual boxes, why exclude them from the realm of the aesthetic? One might think that the blockade to an aesthetics of inebriation is part of the blockade to food aesthetics, in general. Korsmeyer explains that blockade as originating from an implicit hierarchy of the senses, presumed by much of Western aesthetics. The most respectable aesthetic domains, says Korsmeyer, have been the cognitive ones, followed by those which engage with the most cognition-like senses — vision, followed by hearing. Those sensory effects which are most bodily — touch, smell, and taste — have traditionally been disparaged and their associated artifacts assigned a lowly artistic status (Korsmeyer 1999, 11-37). Perfume, food, and textured fabrics have far less cultural clout than literature, poetry, and painting in the Western tradition.

But though the hierarchy of the senses might explain the exclusion of food, that hierarchy won't explain inebriation's exclusion. Inebriation's effects include, not only bodily effects, but also changes to the appreciator's cognitive and visual faculties. Those cognitive and visual changes are, in fact, usually the prime targets of appreciation. The right explanation for inebriation's exclusion must be, instead, in the fact that inebriation modifies the ingestor's basic capacities for perception and judgment. Such a change will be a significant problem for any model of aesthetics which takes the paradigmatic aesthetic interaction to be one of *accurate judgment*.<sup>16</sup>

Tellingly, the recent philosophical literature on wine aesthetics has largely centered on grounding the possibility of a genuinely aesthetic form of wine appreciation, by showing how

---

<sup>16</sup> Korsmeyer briefly raises this concern as part of her picture hierarchy of the senses, but our investigation of inebriation should make it clear that it is an entirely distinct consideration (28-29). To my mind, the clearest statement of such an accurate judgment model is (Budd 1995, 1-44). Budd, in fact, makes a point of contrasting the appropriate judgments involved in the aesthetic judgment of artworks with their very opposite: drug effects.

wine appreciation can involve accurate judgments of flavors and aromas. Barry Smith, for example, concerns himself with disarming the worry that the existence of disagreement undermines the objective element in wine appreciation (Smith 2007). In *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty, and Intoxication*, Cain Todd devotes a book's worth of discussion to the possibility the objectivity of taste and smell perception in wine. Todd argues that appreciative judgments of wine are justified because they are grounded in perceptions of genuine objective properties in the wine. His account aims to legitimize wine appreciation by showing how many kinds of tasting notes, even romantic and high-flying ones, could turn out to be reliable cognitions of physically real volatile compounds combined with proper understandings of the relevant categories of wine (Todd 2010, 16-25,37-43,101-133). However, he discusses intoxication only over the course of one lonely paragraph (179-180). Here, then, is a first pass diagnosis of why we frame wine as we do: aesthetic judgments are supposed to be accurate in some way, but inebriation undermine accuracy. So for something like wine, we need to somehow excise its nature as a drug in order to save our capacity for accurate judgments.

What's the alternative? Let me suggest that inebriation can support a very distinctive sort of insight. It is not necessarily, however, insight into the aesthetic qualities of external objects. Rather, inebriation exposes the workings of one's own perpetual and cognitive capacities by modifying and interfering with them, making one more aware of how one's own capacities mediate one's connection with the world. If there is an aesthetic here, then, it will turn out to be a self-reflective one. But in order to make out what such an aesthetics of drugs would be like, we must get a better grasp of the historical resistance to it.

## Drugs and accuracy

Luckily, we have another diagnostic tool to help us refine what, exactly, the conflict is supposed to be between drugs and aesthetic judgments. Drugs are so anathema to the certain parts of the Western philosophical aesthetic tradition that they have sometimes been called upon as the very embodiment of the anti-aesthetic. Drugs appear in various arguments as the *reductio ad absurdum* of some aesthetic theory. Thinking about how drugs function in those arguments will help us to reconstruct exactly what is supposed to be so objectionable about an aesthetics of drugs.

Drugs show up at a key moment in Monroe Beardsley's attempt to account for the aesthetic value of objects. One might have thought, says Beardsley, that an object had aesthetic value when it had the capacity to provide aesthetic gratification. But suppose that we are gazing upon some heap of garbage. Surely that heap it is lacking in aesthetic value. But if we were to take LSD, we would likely look upon the heap and find exquisite aesthetic gratification, likely by attributing to it aesthetic properties that it doesn't actually have. But surely, says Beardsley, the LSD hasn't imbued the heap with genuine aesthetic value. So that original, simple account of aesthetic value must be wrong, because it is so permissive that it would admit drug experiences as aesthetic. Beardsley concludes, then, that we ought to modify our account of aesthetic value, and say that the aesthetic value of an object is its capacity to provide aesthetic gratification *when properly experienced* (Beardsley 1970, 49-51). Aesthetic value, in other words, doesn't arise from just any old gratification, but from gratification which arises from the accurate apprehension of some object. LSD may encourage some sort of gratification in viewing objects, but it does so by interfering with proper experience. Thus,

taking LSD is not a method for increasing the aesthetic value of our apprehension of the world; in fact, it robs us of our access to aesthetic value altogether.

Drugs also show up as a different kind of aesthetic antithesis, in the discussion of what James Shelley calls the *heresy of separable value*. It seems to be a dogma of recent aesthetic theory that the value of an aesthetic experience must be inseparable from the particular object of that experience. A core presumption shared by many aesthetic theories is that valuable aesthetic experience must be inextricably tied to the details of its object. There is no way to get access to that particular value except by experiencing that particular artwork. I cannot access the particular value of John Coltrane's *Africa/Brass* through any other means but listening to *Africa/Brass*. With drugs, on the other hand, the value of the drug is separable from the particular drug. A drug, on the other hand, is merely an instrument to some separable pleasurable experience. The details of the drug don't matter; what matters is the high, and the high is separable from the drug (Shelley 2010, 708-710).<sup>17</sup> Two entirely different drugs might give me the same experience of euphoria, or something like that — or sufficiently equivalent so as to grant the same value — and it matters not which particular drug the euphoria came from. Thus, drugs cannot offer aesthetic value because their value is separable from any particularities about the sensory qualities of the physical drug itself.

From these two arguments, we can reconstruct the implicit presumptions which lie under the resistance to an aesthetics of drugs. First, there are two presuppositions about the nature of aesthetic value.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> There are further complexities to Shelley's discussion here that are irrelevant for the task at hand. For a related discussion, see Elizabeth Anderson's criticism of hedonic theories which center on a contentless, separable sensation of pleasure (Anderson 1993, 124-5).

<sup>18</sup> I will put these in terms of aesthetic value, because the background literature has, but these claims can obviously be restated as claims about aesthetic judgment, aesthetic experience, or whatever one takes the foundational concept to be for delineating the aesthetic domain.

A1. CORRECTNESS: Aesthetic value arises from the proper experience of objects.

A2. PARTICULARITY: The aesthetic value of an experience is inseparable from the particular object of that experience.

Accordingly, there are two arguments that drugs cannot provide aesthetic value.

D1. Drugs impede the proper experience of objects, thus violating Correctness

D2. The value of the drug experience is separable from the drug itself, thus violating Particularity

I think that Correctness and Particularity genuinely capture why there is such a resistance to an aesthetics of drugs. These demands can be considered separately, but together they outline one of the core commitments of much recent aesthetic theorizing. Aesthetics is supposed to concern special kinds of experience (or value or judgment) that involve the accurate comprehension of their objects in all their particularity.<sup>19</sup>

There are objections to both demands. Here, though, I would like to assume that the demands for correctness and particularity are acceptable, and then show that certain drug experiences can meet those demands. Let's start by temporarily narrowing the scope of the discussion to those drugs that actually impede correct experiences of objects. Some drugs

---

<sup>19</sup> These are only brief sketches. For further discussion of the origins of these two demands, including arguments against their genuine prescriptivity, see, as starting points (Hopkins 2001; McGonigal 2006; Shelley 2011; Dorsch 2013; Cavendon-Taylor 2017).



may increase our sensitivity to the world and our responsiveness to the real aesthetic qualities of the world; such drugs are then useful aesthetic aids and not the real subject of contention. Correctness and Particularity give us reason to deny only the aesthetic potential of cognitively impairing drugs.

Much depends now on what we think the relevant aesthetic object is. That is, in drug aesthetics, what is the object to which we attribute aesthetic value? Crucially, there are two senses of “object” at play here. First, there is the sense in which objects are physical, or at least external, things such that different people can interact with the same object. Call this the *external object*. Second, there is the sense in which an object is anything which is the object of an experience. Call this the *object of experience*. Note the object of one experience can, in turn, be another experience — as when I reflect on my past experiences.

If an experience is aesthetic, call its object *the object of aesthetic experience*. In the sorts of object-oriented aesthetic theories we’ve been concerned with, the object of aesthetic experience is the bearer of aesthetic value. The object of aesthetic experience, in traditional art practices, is also an external object — it is the painting, the novel. But nothing in the discussion so far requires that the objects of aesthetic experience must be external objects. Shelley himself explicitly notes that the use of “object” in the discussion is sufficiently broad as to cover any possible object of an experience (Shelley 2010, Fn1).

The problem, I suggest, comes from thinking that the aesthetics of drugs must involve the aesthetic experience of some external object that we observe while drugged, such as Beardsley’s heap or the physical drug itself. I suggest, instead, that the object of aesthetic experience can be an internal state — it is the experience of being inebriated. In this sort of

drug aesthetics, the object of aesthetic experience is one's own cognitive and perceptual phenomenology, and one's experience of it *as altered*. This gives us a response to the pressure from D1. Grant, for the moment, that a drug experience is inaccurate of the world. Grant also that aesthetic experiences need to be accurate of their objects. It follows, then, that the drugged experience of an external object cannot be an aesthetic experience of that external object. But it leaves room for the possibility that there could be a *genuine aesthetic experience which has, as its object, one's own inaccurate drug experience*. It is not a mistaken experience of the world; it is a detailed self-reflective, possibly accurate, and potentially insightful, experience of one own's capacities for mistake and vulnerability. This helps explain why drug experiences are so often funny. So much of comedy is about the stark and humbling revelation of our limitations.

Let me spell this out. Suppose I have a hit of some drug while looking at a trash heap. The drug kicks in and the trash heap is transformed before me, and I experience an intense rush of euphoria. The aesthetic theorists above are schematizing the event as either:

S1: The candidate object of aesthetic experience is the trash heap. The candidate aesthetic experience is the experience of the trash heap. But the drug interferes with accurate perception of the trash heap. Therefore the drug undermines the possibility of achieving aesthetic value from the experience of the trash heap.

S2: The candidate object of aesthetic experience is the drug. The candidate aesthetic experience is the euphoria. But the euphoria is separable from the drug — the same euphoria can be achieved by some other drug. Therefore the experience isn't aesthetically valuable.

But I propose that what's really going on is this:

S3: The drug creates an inebriative experience, which may include a modified and potentially mistaken experience of the trash heap, as well as a sense of euphoria. The aesthetic experience is a self-reflective experience, of which the inebriative experience is the object. That aesthetic experience can be both appropriate of, and inseparable from, the inebriative experience.

Note that the object of aesthetic experience here is not the trash heap, misapprehended. The object of the aesthetic experience is itself another, distinct experience: the experience of misapprehending the trash heap, which can itself be properly apprehended in reflection. In particular, the misapprehension can be reflectively understood as a misapprehension. The aesthetic value of a hallucinatory drug does not come from one's believing that the hallucinations are real. It involves knowing the hallucinations are hallucinations, and knowing that they were induced — which involves taking a reflective stance in which the hallucinations are properly understood as such, in contrast to what is known to actually be true of the world. Of course, one may be convinced in the moment that the hallucinations are real, so this understanding would come later, in sober reflection. The valuable experience here turns out to be an essentially *contrastive* one.

Similarly, grant that the sensory properties drug itself is separable from the aesthetic experience of drugs. Nothing about the taste or smell of the physical tab of LSD is part of the aesthetic experience of drugs. But that tab of LSD is not the object of aesthetic experience

here; the object of aesthetic experience is the inebriative experience triggered by that tab. My aesthetic experience of some particular inebriative experience seems, quite plausibly, inseparable from the details of that particular inebriative experience. It is an aesthetic experience bound up with the *particular details of this particular experience of inebriation*. It doesn't matter, then, that different drugs might have created the same inebriative experience, and that drugs are separable from drug experiences. The crucial inseparability occurs between the inebriative experience, on the one hand, and the reflective aesthetic experience of that inebriative experience, on the other. Perhaps we might think, then, that there can't be a content-specific aesthetic experience of one's own inner drug experience. But that, too, is mistaken. This second mistake comes from thinking that one's appreciation of drugs is towards some brute, fungible, replaceable pleasure, like a simple state of euphoria. Perhaps this is true of some types of drug experiences, from which it would follow that one couldn't have correct, particular aesthetic experiences of them. But surely that isn't true of all drug experiences. So many drug experiences are full of particular detail — they are phenomenally rich experiences full of content, albeit altered by the drug.

To sum up: in the solution I've just sketched, what takes the place of, say, a work of art, is not the drug or the outside world as modified by the drug. What takes the place of the work of art is one's own mind's operation, as modified by the drug. The inebriative experience is the *object* of a distinct aesthetic experience, and not the aesthetic experience itself. This saves us from worries originating from A1 and A2. First, inebriation does not lead essentially to a misapprehension, because the aesthetic experience is our own reflection on the inebriation, which need not be inebriated itself. One can reflect from a sober state of mind — afterwards,

in memory. Second, inebriation may be separable from the drug that caused it, but the aesthetic experience of inebriation need not be separable from the inebriation itself.

There is one further objection: that my solution here requires that we take our own mental states as the object of aesthetic experience, rather than some external physical object. But I do not think there is any good reason to require that aesthetics be of external physical objects. Let me lay my cards on the table here: the aesthetics of drugs here is part of a larger project: the development of an aesthetics of activities. I think our aesthetic practice is actually full of particular practices in which we are prescribed to attend to our own activity, though they have been neglected by much aesthetic theorizing. I have called this “process aesthetics” – the aesthetics of one’s own mental and physical activity, as it feels from the inside. I also think that many of these aesthetic practices yield a distinctive kind of artwork— artifacts built to sculpt some particular activity, in which we are prescribed to aesthetically attend to our own activity. I have called these the “process arts”: artifacts which have been designed to sculpt and promote experiences of process aesthetics. I have argued that many sports, games, and social rituals such as dining have such a character, as well as certain kinds of avant-garde art practices, including some conceptual art and social practice art.<sup>20</sup> I will not argue further for that possibility here. Rather, I take the description I give of the practice of tea appreciation to add further weight to the case against the requirement that aesthetics always be of external objects.

But why might we want aesthetic experiences of our own cognitive impairment? How

---

<sup>20</sup> I offer an account of “process arts” as built around games in (Nguyen, 2020c). I gave a more general version of the account, extending it to practices such as improvisatory tango and social food rituals in (Nguyen 2020b).

could inebriative experiences have a meaningful place in human experience? They are experiences of the changeability and fallibility of our cognitive and perceptual faculties. They are humbling, which is obviously valuable. The value and meaningfulness here bears some resemblance to certain accounts of humor. What is the point of laughter? Scruton suggests that laughter is a de-valuing, an enjoyable demolition of value (Scruton 1982). This can often be a very good thing. Satire reduces our respect for unsavory authority figures. Absurdist comedy questions the rigidity with which we cling to our normal preoccupations and values. Inebriation offers an analogous demolition of one's cognitive capacities — not a devaluing, but something along the lines of a reduction of trust. It demonstrates, quite clearly, the degree to which we are dependent on potentially unreliable perceptions and cognitions. The experience of inebriation is an experience of how much you always implicitly trust and depend on the background, automatic functioning of your faculties and cognitive resources, highlighted by their being suddenly forced into incapacity. The experience reveals the fragility of our dependence on our faculties. Which leads us to the further question: what more do we get out of an *aesthetic* experience of inebriation?

### **Pharmaceuticals and gastronomicals**

To answer that question, we'll want to return to tea and wine. So far, we've been discussing non-gastronomic drugs — LSD, ecstasy, and the like. Let's call such drugs *pharmaceutical drugs*. The appreciative practices which surround them focus on the inner experience that occurs as a result, and not the particular sensory properties of the drugs themselves. But wine and tea seem to be doing something even more complicated. For in both

forms of appreciation, we are surely also paying attention to the flavors and aromas of the substance itself, alongside any inebriative effect. Let's call these *gastronomical drugs*. (Obviously, gastronomical and pharmaceutical drugs come on a spectrum. Current marijuana culture, for example, seems to put care ever-so-slightly about marijuana's gastronomical qualities, but mostly about its inebriative effects.) For the gastronomical drugs, what's the relationship between inebriation and aesthetics of flavor, texture, and aroma?

Roger Scruton offers one account. He distinguishes between mere drugs, such as pot and booze, and the higher intoxicant of wine. For Scruton, mere drugs only alter the mind and so don't really approach the realm of the aesthetic. Wine, however, does something more. The intoxicating quality of the wine is read back into the taste. We experience the intoxication as a property of the wine, as part of its flavor (2009, 128-9). Insofar as the intoxication is perceived as being an objective property within the wine itself, then our interaction with wine can yield something that bears a passing resemblance to real aesthetic judgment. But, as delightful as intoxication might be, Scruton's treatment still leaves it as a poorer relation to real aesthetic value. That objectivity is a mere illusion, since the intoxication is not really a property of the wine — we only perceive it as if it was.

The seeds of a more promising approach can be found in the tea literature. Consider John Blofield's wonderful description of the experience of having tea in the Chinese manner:

Sitting quietly attentive to the soft crackle of a charcoal fire, to the kettle's song and the sound of liquid being poured from one vessel to another, one may find that these echo the wind sighing among the pines, the musical creak of bamboos or the sound of water falling from a height or chattering among pebbles in a shallow stream. Such sounds arouse a sense of kinship with the totality of being... The beauty and texture of ceramics promotes a sense of harmony. The fresh tang of green tea is reminiscent of the scent of early springtime foliage; its subtlety hints at the mystery and complexity of natural processes. The stimulating effects of drinking it harmonize two seemingly contradictory elements — sharpened alertness and the relaxation of tension. (Blofield 1985, 100-101)

Here, the flavors help to guide one's mental state toward an attuned sensitivity towards a

wide range of elements. First, note that Blofield's description of tea is the opposite of Scruton's account of wine. The inebriative effect isn't read back into the tea's flavors — rather, the inebriative effect and flavors work together to accentuate one's experience as one's attention back and forth between the tea, its effects, and the rest of the world.

How does this work? The flavors and aromas of some teas, especially certain green and white teas, are vanishingly delicate. One must quiet one's mind and pay careful attention to catch their drift. This helps to induce a general change in one's perceptual mode, a sensitization to subtle, delicate features in the world. This sensitization is often bolstered by the inebriative effect of the tea; the particular drug effect is often one that amplifies one's experience of subtle features in the world. What's more, tea done in the classical Chinese style, called *gong fu*, involves brewing a high concentration of tea in small amounts very quickly.<sup>21</sup> One re-steeps the tea; good pu-erh can be re-steeped upwards of thirty times, the flavor changing subtly with each re-steeping. Imen Shan describes the experience of gong-fu re-steeping: "The evolving of it, it's like old films, like when it was slow enough that you could almost see it frame by frame, moving."<sup>22</sup> The changes are very delicate, and paying attention to them encourages and reinforces the sensitization of one's attention. The process of brewing the tea also involves significant physical care and delicacy. This is particularly true when brewing tea gong-fu style. Because one is re-steeping the same leaves ten or twenty times, each individual steeping is quite small. Thus the cups are usually tiny, sometimes barely larger and thicker than a quail's egg, and the whole physical procedure demands dainty, careful movements.

---

<sup>21</sup> I've provided a guide for such brewing here: <https://objectionable.net/2016/09/05/time-slices-of-tea-how-to-brew-gong-fu-style-part-i-oolong-baby/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/food/la-fo-teahabitat19-2009aug19-story.html>



Thus, the practice of brewing and drinking tea builds towards a heightened mental state, accumulating sensitizations through many particular, interlocking activities and sensory interactions. Attending to and participating in all the culinary and practical aspects of tea-making serves to amplify and direct the brute drug effects, channeling their effect into a more delicate, refined appreciation of the world. But the climax here is not one where the drinker reads all these effects back into the tea, a la Scruton. In Blofield's description, drinking tea leads to listening to the kettle's song, the sound of liquid, and the wind in the pines, which in turns leads to a sense of unity with the outer world. Drug effect and flavor combine to encourage a particular quieting and refining of the mind, which leads, among other things, to a meditative experience of the tea drinker's environment.

Blofield also hints at something more: a consonance between taste, smell, and inebriative effect. First, there is an obvious resonance of content. The green tea is fresh and vegetal, and so is the spring air outside your window, and the experience suggests a connection between the two. The drug effect of these teas is often similarly light, and seems to heighten one's appreciation of delicacy and freshness in the world, but then also reveals a resonance between the drug effect and the outside world. But it's not always about daintiness and freshness. Many winter-harvest oolongs have a spareness, a thin-ness and a clarity, that resonates well with winter air and dead branches, as well as the clarifying effect of their light dose of caffeine and theanine. Certain pu-erhs involve thick, heavy flavors of smoke, forest floor, mushroom, and fermentation. Combined with a hard blast of the drug effect often found in these teas — often with a heavy, body-intensive, semi-soporific mental effect — the tea pushes its drinker into a drowsy state, one which eases the way to particularly languorous

forms of attention. These forms of attention are particularly well-suited to aesthetic experiences of deep, slow, rich sounds and thick textures, which, in turn, often marry well with the warm, low flavors of pu-erh.

Much of the Chinese tea poetry, too, embeds tea drinking in a pleasing social context. But the socializing itself can also be drawn into the aesthetic gaze. Proper appreciation of the tea involves entering a mental state that increases one's aesthetic attunement to the exterior world, and which leads to a particular form of socialization with other tea drinkers, which itself is drawn into the expanding bubble of aesthetic appreciation. The climactic experience, as described by Blofield, is a sort of aesthetic zooming out, where the aesthetic qualities of the tea itself lead one to an outwardly directed aesthetic appreciation of the world, and of one's place in it.<sup>23</sup>

### **Harmony between the inner and the outer: a theory of tea aesthetics**

This reveals a striking difference, now, between the aesthetics of pharmaceutical drugs and the aesthetics of tea which I've extracted from the appreciative literature. The pharmaceutical aesthetics I sketched seems entirely self-directed. Blofield's descriptions seems to describe a multidirectional form of aesthetic appreciation, which includes a gastronomical aesthetic appreciation of the tea, a drug appreciation of the cognitive changes, and an outward bound appreciation of the world, all fused together in some fascinatingly complicated

---

<sup>23</sup> Though the Japanese tea ceremony is an extremely different practice from the one I've described here, note that Yuriko Saito describes the Japanese tea ceremony as having indefinite boundaries, which include not only the tea itself, but the carefully arranged tea hut and tea garden, and the weather conditions, and the spontaneous conversation (Saito 2010, 34; Wilson 2018).

way.

It seems crucial, however, that the literature which surrounds pharmaceutical drugs often emphasizes radical perceptual and cognitive changes, resulting in interesting cognitive mistakes. If we accept the view that the aesthetic value requires correct apprehension of the aesthetic object, then any purely pharmaceutical aesthetics must involve a wholly inward form of aesthetic attention. Pharmaceutical experiences trade away correct apprehension of the outer world in exchange for aesthetically valuable manipulations of one's conscious phenomena and cognition. The literature on tea appreciation, on the other hand, often emphasizes a clarity of perception of the outer world. Much of this may have to do with the fact that some of tea's effect is from caffeine, which is a stimulant, along with the fact that theanine's effects are relatively mild. In that case, the mild inebriative effect of tea doesn't necessarily block valuable aesthetic experiences of the outside world. It may, in fact, enhance one's sensory capacities, and make accurate perceptions and their accompanying aesthetic experiences more likely. (Compare, also, to the oft-stated view that marijuana use permits the greater apprehension of perceptual qualities, especially some musical qualities.) But the tea practice adds something more than simply an aid to perception. One is attending, not only to the gastronomical features of the tea, but also to the way one's mind changes in response to the drug effects of tea. At the same time, the very act of attending to the delicate, subtle gastronomical features entangles with the drug effect, inflecting the direction of one's mental shifts. And this is accompanied by aesthetic attention to features in the rest of the environment, embedded within a change in the perceptual and cognitive faculties underlying that attention. This suggests that the tea appreciative practice *combines and relates* an outwardly

oriented aesthetic appreciation of the world with an inwardly oriented aesthetic self-reflection.

What might we gain by attending both outwardly and inwardly at once? For one, external objects can help to reveal internal states of mind. When we attend to an external object — a tablecloth, the moving lights outside a car, a song — the object can act as a kind of perceptual anchor against which we can more clearly experience the dynamic shifts in our own perceptual and cognitive faculties. The cloth shifts from merely being a pleasant background pattern to an alive, rippling, deep, radiating geometric structure; I know the cloth itself hasn't changed, so I can use that shift to get a grip on the changes in my underlying cognitive functioning. And it seems particularly compelling to cast that outward anchor towards some external aesthetic object. This creates the possibility for a complex multilevel resonance and harmony — an aesthetic experience first of an object, and then a second-order aesthetic experience of changes in the faculties involved in the first-order aesthetic experience, and then aesthetic harmony between the first-order and second-order experience. Perhaps this is why Blofield suggests that the experience of natural sounds, during tea drinking, arouses “a sense of kinship with the totality of being”. That sense of kinship arises when there is some perceived harmony between the flavors of the tea, the other outside objects of perception, and the inner motions of the mind. Implicit in the Blofield passage is a harmony between the quiet dynamism of the natural environment and the quiet dynamism of the drinker's own shifting faculties. That multi-level harmony across objects of perception and changes in perceptual and cognitive faculties is perhaps the most remarkable possibility offered by this tradition of tea aesthetics.

Though I cannot pretend here to do anything even resembling real work in comparative

philosophy or Chinese aesthetics, I can suggest a few opening connections. Liu Qingping offers the following generalization about the comparison between Chinese and Western European aesthetics. Western aesthetics, he says, is centered on the correct judgment of objects. Chinese aesthetics, on the other hand, centers around achieving a harmonious unity between humans and world.

...Traditional Chinese aesthetics always holds that beauty is not only a pleasant property of objective things, but is, first and foremost, a free state or way (*Dao*) of human life itself in harmony with the natural world, and that the most important thing for human beings is not merely to feel or contemplate those beautiful things in the outer world through cognitive activities, but to make their own lives or existences beautiful through their practical-emotional activities. (Liu 2006, 35)

Sarah Mattice explains, along similar lines, that a traditional Chinese aesthetic ideal is harmony — not just in the art object or object of consideration, but a harmony between artist, art object, and audience. And the right way to experience that harmony, suggests Mattice, is to let the mind *rove* playfully between all these elements (Mattice 2013, 203-4). These observations might help start us get ourselves oriented with this practice which encourages an expansive attention, and of an inebriated mind which wanders freely from tea to nature to changing self.

### **On spitting**

What does all this mean for wine aesthetics and the practice of wine spitting? Wine seems to occupy a curious middle ground. On the one hand, unlike with pharmaceutical drugs, it has a clear gastronomical quality. On the other hand, like the pharmaceutical drugs and unlike Blofield's tea experience, the drug effect can be strong enough to cognitively impair the drinker. What are we to make of this? The drug effects of tea seem to allow, easily, a

harmony between an outwards aesthetics experience and an inward aesthetic experience. If we still grant the demand for aesthetic correctness, wine seems to offer a certain kind of tension. It offers gastronomical aesthetic qualities in an external object — the wine — but at the same time, it offers a drug effect that threatens to rob the drinker of their capacity for accurate aesthetic judgment. Perhaps the answer, then, is that these two effects are in tension and we simply have to choose. If we want an aesthetic experience of inebriation, we should drink away and simply accept that we will lose contact with the gastronomical aesthetic qualities. If we want, on the other hand, to concentrate on the gastronomical aesthetic qualities, we should spit and thus preserve our capacity for accurately getting onto the outside world. The practice of wine spitting is one which, at its root, has given up on the possibility of resolving that tension.

But I think we need not give up all hope yet. For I think there is another possibility suggested by the tea literature: one where we resolve the tension by enlarging our aesthetic focus in the practice. One where we oscillate between an inebriative aesthetic and a gastronomical aesthetic, and then integrate these aesthetic experiences over time (though perhaps, if the demand for correctness is stringent enough, the full aesthetic value of wine will then only be apprehended by the sober mind in memory). Something reminiscent of Blofield's description of tea seems to happen in some successful dinner party. The flavor of the wine suggests a certain mood — perhaps a quiet, reserved mood, or perhaps an aggressive, boisterous one. We drink wine all night and toe up to the line of drunkenness — cross a little bit over, come back across, enjoy the wine, then slip all the way over into drunken, boisterous revelry. Later, we recall the experience, including the direct aesthetic experience of wine and

the reflective experience of our own inebriation. Here, there is the possibility of an integrative aesthetic judgment — one that finds some harmony between the taste of the wine, the shift of the mind, the social mood, and their various interactions.

The integrative tea aesthetics, then, might show us a direction in which we might wish to develop our practice of wine appreciation — and other drug aesthetics, too. It opens up a possibility of developing a practice of wine that does not force us to choose between one of its most potent aspects — its flavors and aromas — with another of its most potent aspects — its inebriative effect. After all, the way we aesthetically frame is merely part of our aesthetic practice, and our practices are up to us. We can reframe our practice in order to make better use of the aesthetic resources of the world. And if we reframe that practice, then wine-makers might have more reason to make wines to pursue that multi-level harmony — wine with gastronomical qualities that encouraged and harmonized with certain inebriated states of mind and the kinds of environmental perception and social interaction inebriation brings.

And that kind of harmony might offer its own special kind of meaningfulness. Consider Kant's discussion of dinner parties, as elucidated by Alix Cohen. Dinner parties, according to Kant, are "the highest ethicophysical good" because they find the right balance between our physical nature and our intellectual and moral nature. Experiencing this balance is meaningful because it helps us to negotiate the tension between our animal and intellectual nature. A good dinner party offers us an experience of a particular harmonious integration between these apparently conflicting natures (Cohen 2008).

An aesthetic practice of gastronomical drugs, which integrates the sensory and the inebriative experiences could offer us a neighboring sort of meaningfulness. There is a tension

between externally directed aesthetic experience and the heavier sorts of inebriation. Aesthetic experience, as we've been conceiving of it, requires proper perception of its object. Heavy inebriation reveals the fragility and malleability of our perceptive and cognitive faculties, by showing us how our faculties may be subtly changed and undermined through chemical intervention. When we pursue an integrated experience of such a gastronomical drug, we are doing something very complicated. We are carefully attending to some feature of the external world, in the delicate and openhearted mode of aesthetic attention, as the capacities which we use to perceive and understand that world change on us just as we are trying to make use of them. Here is an experience both of profound contact with the world, juxtaposed with an experience highlighting the fragility of our means of contact.

Exposing how dependent we are on our faculties and how vulnerable we are to their being changed, might be threatening. But if we successfully integrated an experience of the malleability of our perceptive and cognitive faculties with an experience of the outside world, as delightfully apprehended via those faculties, then we will have produced for ourselves a moment, at least, of resolution — a temporary experience in which our capacity as cognitive beings to get onto that world, and the fragility of that very cognitive capacity, are happily joined. Just as dinner parties, for Kant, might resolve the tension between our nature as embodied animals and our nature as intellectual beings, so gastronomical drugs might provide a moment of aesthetic reconciliation for the tension between our need to genuinely experience the world, and the fragile and embodied means we have for experiencing it.

## **Bibliography**



- Amis, Kingsley. 2010. *Everyday Drinking: The Distilled Kingsley Amis*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Anderson, Elizabeth. 1993. *Value in Ethics and Economics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Beardsley, Monroe. 1970. The aesthetic point of view. *Metaphilosophy* 1 (1): 39-58.
- Benn, James A. 2015. *Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Blofield, John. 1985. *The Chinese Art of Tea*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Breus, Michael J. 2017. What You Need to Know About L-theanine. *Psychology Today Blog*, August 29.
- Budd, Malcolm. 1995. *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry and Music*. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- . 2003. The acquaintance principle. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (4): 386-392.
- Cavendon-Taylor, Dan. 2017. Reasoned and unreasoned judgment: On inference, acquaintance and aesthetic normativity. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 57 (1): 1-17.
- Cohen, Alix. 2008. The ultimate kantian experience: Kant on dinner parties. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 25 (4): 315-336.
- Davies, David. 2004. *Art As Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press.
- Dickie, George. 1964. The myth of the aesthetic attitude. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1): 56-65.
- Dorsch, Fabian. 2013. Non-inferentialism about justification - the case of aesthetic judgments. *Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (253): 660-682.
- Goldman, Alan H. 2006. The experiential account of aesthetic value. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (3): 333-342.
- Gu, Ming Dong. 2009. From yuanqi (primal energy) to wenqi (literary pneuma): A philosophical study of a chinese aesthetic. *Philosophy East and West* 59 (1): 22-46.
- Hopkins, Robert. 2001. Kant, quasi-realism, and the autonomy of aesthetic judgment. *European Journal of Philosophy* 9 (2): 166-189.
- . 2011. How to be a pessimist about aesthetic testimony. *Journal of Philosophy* 108 (3): 138-157.
- Irvin, Sherri. 2005. The artist's sanction in contemporary art. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63 (4): 315-326.
- Iseminger, Gary. 2006. The aesthetic state of mind. In *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Ed. Matthew Kieran.
- Juneja, Lekh Raj, Djong-Chi Chu, Tsutomu Okubo, Yukiko Nagato, and Hidehiko Yokogoshi. 1999. L-theanine - a unique amino acid of green tea and its relaxation effect in humans. *Trends in Food Science & Technology* 10 (6-7): 199-204.
- Kemp, Gary. 1999. The aesthetic attitude. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (4): 392-399.
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn. 1999. *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*. Ithica: Cornell University Press.
- Liu, Qingping. 2006. The worldwide significance of chinese aesthetics in the twenty-first century. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 1 (1): 33-40.
- Livingston, Paisley. 2003. On an apparent truism in aesthetics. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (3): 260-278.
- Lopes, Dominic Mclver. 2018. *Being for Beauty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mair, Victor H. and Erling Hoh. 2009. *The True History of Tea*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.
- Mattice, Sarah. 2013. Artistry as methodology: Aesthetic experience and chinese philosophy. *Philosophy Compass* 8 (3): 199-209.
- McGonigal, Andrew. 2006. The autonomy of aesthetic judgment. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46 (4): 331-348.
- Nanay, Bence. 2016. *Aesthetics As Philosophy of Perception*. Oxford University Press.
- Nguyen, C. Thi. 2017. The uses of aesthetic testimony. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 57 (1): 19-36.
- Nguyen C. Thi. 2020a. Autonomy and aesthetic engagement. *Mind* 129 (516): 1127-56.
- Nguyen, C. Thi. 2020b. The arts of action. *Philosopher's Imprint* 20 (14): 1-27.
- Nguyen, C. Thi. 2020c. *Games: Agency as Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Placzek, Kate. 2017. L-Theanine in Green Tea Stimulates Neurotransmitter Production & Reduces Anxiety. *The ZRT Laboratory Blog*, May 19.
- Reid, Daniel. 2012. *The Art and Alchemy of Chinese Tea*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Ritsner, Michael S, Chanoch Miodownik, Yael Ratner, Tatyana Shleifer, Maria Mar, Leonid Pintov, and Vladimir Lerner. 2011. L-theanine relieves positive, activation, and anxiety symptoms in patients with schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder: An 8-week, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, 2-center study. *J Clin Psychiatry* 72 (1): 34-42.

- Saito, Yuriko. 2010. *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scruton, Roger. 1982. Laughter. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1): 197-228.
- . 2009. *I Drink, Therefore I Am: A Philosopher's Guide to Wine*. London: Continuum, 2010.
- Shelley, James. 2010. Against value empiricism in aesthetics. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88 (4): 707-720.
- . 2011. Hume and the value of the beautiful. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51 (2): 213-222.
- . The concept of the aesthetic. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/aesthetic-concept/>.
- Smith, Barry. 2007. The objectivity of tastes and tasting. In *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*. Ed. Barry Smith. Oxford: Signal Books.
- Stang, Nicholas F. 2012. Artworks are not valuable for their own sake. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (3): 271-280.
- Stolnitz, Jerome. 1960. *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Todd, Cain. 2010. *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty, and Intoxication*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Wilson, Daniel. 2018. The Japanese tea ceremony and pancultural definitions of art. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76 (1): 33-44.
- Wollheim, Richard. 1980. *Art and Its Objects*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Yamada, T, T Terashima, S Kawano, R Furuno, T Okubo, L R Juneja, and H Yokogoshi. 2009. Theanine, gamma-glutamylethylamide, a unique amino acid in tea leaves, modulates neurotransmitter concentrations in the brain striatum interstitium in conscious rats. *Amino Acids* 36 (1): 21-7.
- Yamada, Takashi, Takehiko Terashima, Keiko Wada, Sakiko Ueda, Mitsuyo Ito, Tsutomu Okubo, Lekh Raj Juneja, and Hidehiko Yokogoshi. 2007. Theanine, r-glutamylethylamide, increases neurotransmission concentrations and neurotrophin mRNA levels in the brain during lactation. *Life Sci* 81 (16): 1247-55.
- Yokogoshi, H, M Kobayashi, M Mochizuki, and T Terashima. 1998. Effect of theanine, r-glutamylethylamide, on brain monoamines and striatal dopamine release in conscious rats. *Neurochem Res* 23 (5): 667-73.
- Zhang, Jinghong. 2014. *Puer Tea: Ancient Caravans and Urban Chic*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.