IN DEFENSE OF THE AESTHETIC ATTITUDE

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ABSTRACT

The enormous and seemingly insurmountable difficulties encountered in the attempt to think clearly about the central problems in aesthetics has led many recent aestheticians to redefine their object of study, and to examine the methods appropriate to aesthetics. Liberal-minded theories in aesthetics are often too ambitious, however, and in their attempt to better account for aesthetic experience, they lose philosophical integrity. This thesis reviews the liberal aesthetic theory of Arnold Berleant, and recommends the restitution of the notoriously conservative aesthetic attitude. The defense of the aesthetic attitude comes in two parts. The first concerns the conceptual necessity of the aesthetic attitude for saying anything at all intelligible in aesthetics. The second is a defense of the aesthetic attitude from a decidedly un-conservative point of view. Here it is maintained that the aesthetic attitude underlies the distinction we routinely make in our aesthetic experience between the practical world and the world of the text, a distinction which Berleant seeks to collapse. It is demonstrated that a hermeneutical analysis of aesthetic experience upholds the importance of a traditional form of the aesthetic attitude in theory and experience alike.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Aesthetics is perhaps the most theoretically complicated sub-discipline of philosophy. In the simplest terms, the aesthetician is responsible for certain facts about art and nature and must provide a coherent account of our aesthetic experience while addressing metatheoretical concerns. Additionally, the aesthetician must account for the normative or critical aspects of aesthetic experience, and these too must be integrated into some kind of theoretical edifice. Lastly, aesthetics, seemingly more than other disciplines, has to legitimate itself as a discipline, delimiting its indebtedness to and freedom from other theoretical pursuits, philosophical and non-philosophical alike.

The foregoing may give the impression that aesthetics is too unwieldy, and that its success in explaining its subject matter is always vitiated by its complexity. Such a comment would be premature and unwarranted, however, since the notion of theoretical success in aesthetics is itself central to the debate. But one thing that can be readily agreed upon is that the success of an aesthetic theory, like all theories, is measured to a large extent by its ability (logical considerations about coherence etc. aside) to account in

some way for an identifiable set of experiences, however inchoate they may be.

Arnold Berleant has now been arguing for the last 25 years that aesthetic theory has systematically failed to capture aesthetic experience, largely because of its underpinnings in philosophy. He proposes that aesthetics should be freed from theoretical constraints common to philosophy so that the aesthetic may be investigated on its own terms. Briefly, this means that aesthetics must freely attend to its subject matter (the arts and nature, although other experiences may possibly provide aesthetic experience), and must examine the facts of aesthetic experience before embarking on theory. To do otherwise would be to continue the tradition of aesthetics in which theory precedes and prejudices the facts of aesthetic experience.

Berleant is sensitive to two philosophical influences which have dominated aesthetics. First, he objects to the notion of the aesthetic attitude, the main philosophical approach to aesthetic experience since the eighteenth century. With its attendant principle of disinterestedness, the aesthetic attitude represents to Berleant the chief way that theory precedes the examination of aesthetic facts, prejudicing in turn what can and cannot

be considered to be aesthetic. Second, Berleant finds traditional aesthetics object-oriented, a feature he feels reflects a theoretical influence from philosophy. Because art has traditionally been thought to consist of a distinct class of objects, aesthetics has theoretically founded itself on dualist metaphysics. These influences in aesthetics are related in significant ways, since the philosophy of the aesthetic attitude necessarily presupposes the objecthood of art.

In the place of traditional aesthetic theory, Berleant proposes an empirical aesthetics designed to account for the phenomena of aesthetic experience more fully than previous theories without invoking the aesthetic attitude or being grounded in a dualist metaphysic. Berleant naturally regards his campaign for a new kind of aesthetic theory as being a genuine alternative to traditional theories. Thus, Berleant's success is dependent on the degree to which he successfully breaks with tradition in his attempt to offer a more viable aesthetic theory. Here we find, as is often with self-styled "radical" theories that what is touted as new is often merely the old in a different form. Berleant's aesthetic theory, while an innovative critique of the tradition, is still part of the canon it addresses. We shall find that Berleant's

aesthetics can make the positive gains it claims for itself only at considerable philosophical expense.

Berleant attacks aesthetic theory for its utter failure to deliver what it promises, a unified and coherent account of our experience. His approach is metatheoretical; aesthetics is appraised for its ability to adequate theory to experience. In Chapters 1 and 2, Berleant's critique of the traditional aesthetic program will be explored in detail. We shall find that Berleant's challenge to aesthetic theory is global, causing him to all but practically abandon rigorous theorizing about art and the aesthetic. Berleant is left with a metatheoretical position from which to critique aesthetics, and the body of data traditionally charged to aesthetic theory, but he altogether lacks an aesthetic theory. His difficulty is that his metatheoretical position fails to supplant traditional aesthetic theory with anything else, leaving us with a critique but not an explanation. Yet some of his metatheoretical considerations touch, however mediately, on our actual experience. It therefore seems that Berleant has a theory of the arts, but he cannot specify it because of a metatheoretical commitment to anti-theory in aesthetics. At the end of the second chapter, it will be shown that some theory of the arts is necessary to sustain Berleant's

metatheory, without which the metatheory remains groundless and unintelligible.

In the third chapter, Berleant's strategy for overcoming the distinction between practical and aesthetic attention is considered. Berleant's claim is that once divested of conceptual predeterminations, aesthetics can establish its autonomy. In part, this entails dispensing with the contemplative disinterested attitude with which the aesthetic has come be associated. If we follow Berleant, no distinction can be made between the practical applications of an object and its aesthetic function, because such a distinction would require some conceptual distinction, leading ultimately to a form of aesthetic attitude. However, this metatheoretical position is unsatisfactory. It does not open or free aesthetics, but rather closes or ends it. By making the practical coextensive with the aesthetic, and by failing to provide the conceptual grounds by which to distinguish the two in experience, Berleant's position encourages a thoroughgoing technicization of art, and closes all hermeneutic possibilities for the interpretation and appreciation of our aesthetic experiences.

I intend to show at the level of aesthetic theory that both aesthetic objects and aesthetic attention are

necessary in aesthetic theory, and that both can be had without invoking traditional dualist forms of the aesthetic attitude. At the level of metatheoretical considerations, it will be demonstrated that part of what makes art and the aesthetic special features of experience is that they are not necessarily committed to practical application. I hold that the freedom of aesthetics is dependent upon maintenance of a Ricouerian notion of the world of the text, without which our attention to the arthood of art collapses into a mere practical commerce.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction.

Arnold Berleant, Professor of Philosophy at C. W. Post College of Long Island University has written on aesthetics continuously since the mid 1960s. His work has encompassed a diverse range of topics in aesthetics, but perhaps his views on the relationship between studies in aesthetics and philosophy in general are the those he is most known for.[1] In this respect, Berleant's work can be regarded as an interesting and updated version of John Dewey's Art as Experience.[2] Dewey and Berleant maintain that aesthetic experience is continuous with other modes of perception, and that the whole of human experience is therefore the subject of any aesthetic inquiry. Both philosophers also maintain that the narrow range of activities carried out in the artworld cannot alone furnish the material for a complete aesthetic theory, nor can the traditional theoretical practices of the artworld comprehensively delimit the possibilities for thinking about our aesthetic experience.

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[1]See especially Arnold Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - I" The British Journal of Aesthetics, 26:2 (Spring 1986), and "The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," The British Journal of Aesthetics, 26:3 (Summer 1986).

[2]John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1934).

It is not incidental, then, that Berleant may remind one of Dewey on many points. But rather than comparing and contrasting Berleant and Dewey's positions on the significance and status of aesthetics, let this introduction raise the issue of Dewey's influence on Berleant for the reader to bear in mind.

This first chapter attempts a comprehensive examination of Arnold Berleant's writings. We will begin by noting his position that aesthetics has been systematically led astray via pernicious and distinctly unaesthetic influences from philosophy. Then we will examine Berleant's claim that the modern arts have long left philosophical aesthetics behind, a fact which Berleant takes as incontrovertible proof that aesthetics must break with philosophy in its drive to legitimate itself as an autonomous discipline. Next, we will consider Berleant's reason's for restoring aesthetics to an empirical methodology, and will attend to his distinction between truly empirical theory and surrogate theories in aesthetics. Finally, Berleant's positive theory, his aesthetics of engagement, will be taken up as the outcome of his idiosyncratic brand of empiricism.

A remark should be made about the manner in which the primary texts for this thesis have been approached.

Berleant's writings are regarded as a whole, and a certain continuity is thought to run through them. This approach could be systematically defended by showing that articles jig-saw themselves into chapters of monographs, and that the later monograph builds upon the earlier one. No explicit attempt to do this is made here although it is born out below.

2. The Independence of Aesthetics as a Discipline.

Aesthetics, Arnold Berleant reminds us, only became a discipline unto itself in the eighteenth century with Baumgarten's Aesthetik (1750). To be sure, the history of aesthetic concepts such as beauty reaches as far back as classical times, but then art was "an activity [...] at once cosmic, social and individual."[3] Aesthetics in the modern era is to be distinguished from its cosmological and metaphysical roots by an epistemological turn. Our attention has been directed to the way in which we perceive art, so that aesthetic phenomena that were once considered ontologically, like beauty, are now handled in terms of the way they are experienced.[4] Indeed, the etymological roots

[3]Arnold Berleant, Art and Engagement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 9. See also, Arnold Berleant, "Experience and Theory in Aesthetics," in Possibility of the Aesthetic Experience, ed. M. H. Mitias (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), p. 91.
[4]Ibid, p. 10.

of Baumgarten's term *aesthesis* stresses the experiential basis of aesthetics.[5]

By paying close attention to the way that we experience art, it was hoped that aesthetics would be liberated from conceptual matters. Plato's approach to aesthetic phenomena here exemplifies the most thorough attempt to conceptualize beauty as being a quality of the highest forms of rationality. For Plato, knowledge of the beautiful in the Symposium is achieved at the end of "an ascent which culminates in grasping the imperishable, super-sensible, ideal form of beauty."[6] On Plato's account, the form of beauty is not directly experienced in art, but is

[5]Arnold Berleant, "The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 23:2 (Winter 1964), p. 186. See also Art and Engagement, p. *xii*. [Peter Angeles, Dictionary of Philosophy (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981), p. 4: "**aesthetics** Gk., *aesthetikos*, 'one who is perceptive of things through his sensations, feelings, and intuitions.' The word *aesthesis* means 'primary, rudimentary sensation.'"] Berleant is not quite accurate in locating the epistemological turn in Baumgarten's Aesthetic. Baumgarten first used "aesthetic" in its modern sense in his dissertation Reflections on Poetry (1735), where the "sensate discourse" of poetry finds its place in a perceptual rather than conceptual faculty. Where logic is the perfection of conceptualizing, *aesthesis* is the perfection of perception. "The Greek philosophers and the Church fathers have already carefully distinguished between *things perceived* and *things known*. It is entirely evident that they did not equate *things known* with things of sense, since they honored with this name things also removed from sense (therefore, images). Therefore, *things known* are to be known by the superior faculty as the object of logic; *things perceived* of the science of perception, or **aesthetic**." Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Reflections on Poetry, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), p. 78. The relevant sections are 115-117, pp. 77-79.

[6]"Experience and Theory in Aesthetics," p. 91.

rather known at the end of a dialectic. Despite the fact that Plato was fully aware of the powerful effects that art can have,[7] the ontological, not the aesthetic, aspects of beauty tend to be emphasized. Berleant regards this as a subordination of a key part of our experience to a philosophical position, a view that fails to adequately account for our aesthetic experiences. Apart from Plato, other extra-aesthetic factors have influenced our experience of art. Among these Berleant lists religious doctrines, and political systems. For example, Christian beliefs tended to restrict the painters to representations of religious rather than secular subjects, and the Puritans had sufficient socio-political power to ensure moral standards were maintained in art as well as politics.

Historically, then, our experience of art has been influenced and in some cases controlled by conceptual, not aesthetic, factors. The traditional role of the arts has been to enhance beliefs and values of the current intellectual paradigms, and this association is what has lent art its credibility, its truth.[8] There has been a long standing conviction that art could "derive its full

[7]Viz. Republic, Book 3.
[8]Arnold Berleant, The Aesthetic Field (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1970), p. *vi*. Berleant says that the metaphysical, the moral, the social and the psychological have all directed the arts at one time or other.

sustenance from the roots of philosophical thought."[9] Developments in art have thus been dependent on movements in other areas of culture. "Indeed, the claim of artistic expression to the status of equal genius is of comparatively recent occurrence and has rarely been freely allowed."[10]

However, Berleant laments, Baumgarten's work did not emancipate the arts as completely as one might have expected. Turning to the experience of art did not completely free art from theoretical predeterminations. As much as the intention was to attend to art for its own sake, the mode of appreciation which came to dominate aesthetics was largely derived from philosophical commitments alien to the proper practice of aesthetics.[11] Berleant points out that the hallmark of modern aesthetics, disinterested appreciation, is "actually derivative, for it embodies the classical model of the cognitive attitude as a contemplative ideal."[12] Shaftesbury, who first developed the idea of disinterested appreciation, maintained that beauty is a

[9]Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 29:2 (Winter 1970), p. 155.
[10]"The Sensuous and the Sensual," p. 185.
[11]Ibid. Berleant says that despite the fact that the arts have "emancipated themselves from subservience to the church, state and social interests, concepts under which much aesthetic discussion is conducted betray the extent to which aesthetic theory still remains bound to biases deriving from the inferior origins of the arts."
[12]Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetic Function," in Phenomenology and Natural Existence, ed. Dale Riepe (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1973), p. 183.

property of art, but that it does not lie in the material from which art was made.[13] Rather, it requires the creative influence of the productive artist. As Berleant says, "[i]t is art that beautifies matter, and since there is no principle of beauty in the physical object, that principle of meaning, regulation, and order must be supplied by the mind."[14] The aesthetic qualities that inhere in the object are wrought by artistry. Thus, appreciation of art is attention to those qualities.

Attention properly paid to artistic qualities must be pure attention, which means that our other interests, whether practical, intellectual or emotional, must not encroach on our appreciation of art. Kant perhaps gives the most widely known formulation of disinterested appreciation in his third Critique where he remarks that "taste in the beautiful is alone a disinterested and *free* satisfaction; for no interest, either of sense or of reason, here forces our assent."[15] For Kant, "[*t*]*aste* is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object

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[13]Art and Engagement, p. 12. This point is discussed further in the second chapter.
[14]Arnold Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - I,", p. 103.
[15]Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment, Section 5 in Philosophies of Art and Beauty, eds. Albert Hofstader and Richard Kuhns, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 285.

of such satisfaction is called *beautiful.*"[16] If the defining feature of art is that it is beautiful, then disinterested appreciation is the sole means of appreciating art.

Disinterested appreciation is the central idea behind what has come to be known as the aesthetic attitude.[17] The adoption of an aesthetic attitude, prior to or at the time of an encounter with art, is to render oneself disinterested. Divesting oneself of practical interests and assuming a contemplative attitude makes possible a unique and unmuddied perception of those qualities that make art objects beautiful. It is through the separation of the practical and the aesthetic that artistic freedom was thought to be made possible.[18] The presence of this attitude is the precondition to having aesthetic experience. All other dispositions are non-aesthetic attitudes where attention may be paid to intellectual, emotional or pragmatic matters.

[16]Kant, p. 286.

[17]As will be shown in Chapter 2, disinterestedness is also the cornerstone of the theory of taste. Because Berleant's objections are to the rationalist presuppositions of disinterested appreciation as characterized by the attitude theorists, theories of taste will be left for the next chapter.

[18]Arnold Berleant, "The Eighteenth Century Assumptions of Analytic Aesthetics," in History and Anti-History in Philosophy, eds. T.Z. Lavine and V. Tejera (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 256. In essence, this freedom was to be found in the appreciation of art for art's sake.

Berleant locates the source of modern aesthetics' continued subservience to philosophically preconceived notions of correct appreciation in the aesthetic attitude. His contention is that aesthetics can never be an independent field of inquiry so long as it is philosophically thematized by contemplative attitudes and object oriented metaphysics. Berleant finds that disinterested appreciation is pervasive in contemporary aesthetics, especially analytic aesthetics, and thinks that the traditional model of art appreciation cannot account for the contemporary arts, if it ever was an adequate theory of the arts at all.[19]

3. Aesthetic Attitude and the Contemporary Arts.

Berleant therefore challenges the notion of the aesthetic attitude in the tradition of aesthetics since the eighteenth century. The first of the two grounds for freeing aesthetics of the aesthetic attitude concerns attitude theory's inability to explain recent (i.e. twentieth century) developments in the arts. This challenge is presented on two main fronts. The first front concerns

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[19]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," p. 104. See also "The Eighteenth Century Assumptions of Analytic Aesthetics," p. 260, Arnold Berleant, "Does Art Have a Spectator?," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 45:4 (Summer 1987), p. 412, and "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," p. 156.

the status of art objects in contemporary arts. As we have seen, disinterestedness is "an attitude denoting the perception of an object for its own sake without regard to further purposes, especially practical ones, and requiring the separation of the object from its surroundings in order that it may be contemplated freely and with no distracting considerations."[20] Art is thus distinguished from non-art because it is an object which can be attended to without distraction by its surroundings. This, according to Berleant, is one of the main philosophical assumptions at work in disinterested appreciation - that art consists of objects, and that these objects are of a special kind among other objects.[21]

The special status of art objects is due, in part, to the rarity or individuality of the materials involved, and the fact that art has generally been hand made by someone with a refined skill.[22] To most people, art refers to some *thing* which, by virtue of its rarity, is associated with economic value and ownership.[23] As Berleant says, this "reinforces their separateness. It is a move, one might

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[20]Art and Engagement, p. 12.
[21]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," pp. 104-106. See also "The Eighteenth Century Assumptions of Analytic Aesthetics," pp. 261-266, and Art and Engagement, pp. 20-31.
[22]Art and Engagement, p. 34. The ritualistic aspects of certain artworks also gave them iconographic significance.
[23]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," p. 104.

say, from the distinct to the distinctive."[24] The view that art objects have a special status among other objects has lead to "the cult of the museum."[25] By sequestering art away in special venues, out of the daily commerce of life, belief in the special status of art objects is nowhere made more apparent.

A remarkable number of theoretical attempts have been ventured to demonstrate why art objects are distinctive and special - that art has this special status is not at issue.[26] The merit of these theories aside,[27] there have been recent artistic movements that deny that art is an object, and even if it is, it is of no special kind. A succession of developments in painting from Impressionism to Optical Art have moved painting away from imitative representationalism and deny the role objects play in what is painted.[28] Berleant remarks that "Braque's bold assertion was a symptom of this change: 'I do not paint objects,' he stated, 'I paint the relations between objects.'"[29] Matisse's similar claim that he does not paint objects but rather the differences between them also

[24]Ibid.
[25]Art and Engagement, p. 15.
[26]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," p. 106.
[27]Berleant calls these "surrogate theories." See section 5 below.
[28]Arnold Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - II,", p. 196.
[29]Art and Engagement, p. 20. See also "The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," p. 196.

indicated the growing decline in the representation of objects in painting.[30] This change is also represented by entire art movements. Berleant thinks that Impressionism "dissolved the substantiality of things into atmospheric appearances;" that in the case of Expressionism, that "the perceptual process took a psychological turn;" that in Surrealism "the painter's oneiric world dominated the visual one;" and that the advent of Colour-Field and Optical Art brought about completely "non-objective painting."[31]

The disappearance of the represented object in new forms of painting implies a change in the way that the painting itself is regarded. In the case of a realist representation of a building, the building exists independent of the painting and can be compared to its likeness in painting. The ostensive reference of a representationalist painting and the painting are therefore on a visual par so far as the spectator is concerned: two objects are seen and their likeness is contemplated. But in the case of non-representationalist painting, this mode of appreciation is precluded.

Some examples will make Berleant's point. Abstract Expressionism, Optical Art and Colour Field paintings are

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[30]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 196.
[31]Art and Engagement, pp. 21-22.

non-representational, and require "appreciative engagement" from the spectator in order to complete visual plays or to appreciate visual ambiguities.[32] Novel approaches to our appreciation of painting are necessary with certain Dadaist works. Berleant salutes Dada as "a revitalization of aesthetic experience by transferring attention from the exhausted art object into the realm of meaning."[33] Dada, like Conceptual Art, has the unique ability of being able to transform the object into its meaning, a process which at once trivializes the art object itself, and in some cases includes complete absence of the painted object.[34] An example of the latter is Giulio Paolini's *Les fausses confidences*, which Berleant describes as "a number of merely primed canvases in a low arrangement, while a slide image is projected above them, exemplifying the liberation of the image from the art object."[35] Common to these styles is the contribution to the appreciative act at the perceptual level which representational painting does not require, or

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[32]Ibid, p. 22.
[33]Ibid. Berleant makes this remark in specifically in reference to Giulio Paolini's *Les fausses confidences*.
[34]Ibid, pp. 22-23. Examples Berleant cites include Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, Sol Lewitt's *Six Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty-Five Lines*, and Vito Acconci's *Step Piece* which Berleant describes as a "record of a daily sequence of steppings onto and down from a stool at a steady rate of speed, performed as a daily series for a month." (p. 23)
[35]Ibid, p. 22.

certainly to a lesser degree. The consequence is that the appreciation of such paintings requires a shift from passive perception of the art object where its qualities are all important to the contribution made by spectators. This shift from the objective to the subjective in painting denies the painting its sovereignty as an object.

The special status of the art object has also been challenged by the contemporary arts. In the visual arts, Duchamp's *Fountain* is perhaps the most famous example of found art. Found art is art in which the materials are readymade - they are not unique and may be found in many settings. In theatre, the special status of art is also challenged. Berleant considers Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to be paradigmatic of the emphasis on the ordinary, not the special.[36] In this play, the dialogue is banal, as if taken from the duller moments of daily life. Found art has even made its way into music. *Musique concrete* and industrial music involve the sampling and arrangement of sounds found in ordinary environments, such as a street, a factory, or the wilderness.[37] In dance, gestures from ordinary daily affairs have been choreographed by Merce Cunningham.[38] It is evident, then, that the idea that art can be found among

[36]Ibid, p. 24 See also "The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 197.
[37]Ibid. See also "The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 198.
[38]Ibid, p. 40.

other objects, or that it can be made from mundane objects, presents a challenge to the special status art objects have formerly been awarded.

Technology has also played a role in changing the status of art objects. Since pre-Industrial Revolution artefacts were all hand-made, their value was determined by the level of workmanship and the quality of the materials used. Technological innovations, in particular the ease with which artefacts can be reproduced, have responded to the inclusion of the ordinary in art.[39] The forces of production have met the demand for novelty, and the corresponding effect is that innovation is prized over workmanship. Technology has made art increasingly more available - the democratization of art - and has led to the "deliberate dethroning of art and its reintegration into the course of normal human activity."[40] "Gone is the ideal of beauty and in its place appear the mundane and subterranean."[41]

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[39]Ibid, pp. 40-41. See also "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," p. 157.

[40]Ibid, p. 42.

[41]Ibid. Berleant: "Industrial technology, then, has radically altered the methods and objects of the arts, while social and perceptual changes in the modern world have overridden the conventional separation among the component factors in aesthetic experience. These changes have encouraged the return of the high arts from an exalted but isolated position in the domain of social life to the more integrated yet central position that has been their usual place in the rich tapestry of every other civilization."

The second front of Berleant's claim that the aesthetic attitude is unsuccessful as a theory of the contemporary arts concerns the requirement that art objects must be attended to in a special way. The traditional mode of appreciation, based on the notion of the inherence of aesthetic qualities in art objects has meant that "we were instructed to assume a stance toward art objects that removes all practical interests and allows us to contemplate the work of art for its own sake, with a disengagement that excludes every other consideration."[42] Kant solidified the notion of disinterested appreciation by making the apprehension of beauty a function of the faculty of judgment, a faculty which is not tied to practical concerns.[43] Kant takes aesthetic appreciation out of the realm of human affairs, and paves the way for a theory of art that has no practical orientation.

The special status of art demands a special attitude, "an attitude peculiar to the contemplation of art...a characteristic of the perceiver, not of the object, and is distinguished by some identifying trait."[44] In this century, there have been numerous characterizations of the aesthetic attitude. For Bullough, distance "is taken to

[42]Ibid, p. *xiii*.
[43]Ibid, p. 12.
[44]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," p. 106.

represent the sense of dissociation wherein lies the difference between our practical relation to objects and the aesthetic one."[45] For Stolnitz, "[t]he ability to encourage disinterested attention becomes, in effect, the defining condition of art; whatever does not permit this is beyond the pale."[46] Beardsley, too, developed his own account of the aesthetic attitude in his "The Aesthetic Point of View," and Ortega y Gasset has taken another tack in his "The Dehumanization of Art."[47]

However, Berleant thinks that "much of the recent history of the arts reads almost like an intentional denial of the doctrine of disinterestedness."[48] In a response to the contemplative attitude in the appreciation of fine art, artists have "shaped works in every medium in which the active participation of the appreciator is essential to their aesthetic effect."[49] Active participation usually means that the perceiver must contribute perceptually, as in the case of the paintings by Jasper Johns.[50] The modernist novel also demands the reader's imaginative participation, such as Joseph Conrad's Chance which requires the reader to

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[45]Ibid, p. 107.
[46]Ibid.
[47]Ibid. See also Art and Engagement, p. 13.
[48]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 198.
[49]Ibid, p. 198.
[50]Art and Engagement, p. 28.

put the chronology in order.[51] In Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, the reader is obliged to examine the four perspectives of the same events, offering a fifth and over-arching view.[52]

Occasionally, art requires some kind of physical response, as in the case of the circumambulation of sculpture. Mark di Suvero's sculptures even included swings which are meant to be used.[53] Physical responses are also appropriate in some forms of modern art in which the art is a situation rather than an object. These situations are variously called "happenings," "performance art," and "multi-media events," and all require the perceiver to participate in a controlled environment.[54] Lastly, architecture and urban design do not offer "contemplative objects but require human activity to complete them, perceptually as well as functionally."[55]

These examples of the modern arts cannot be appreciated disinterestedly. They are not meant to be contemplated. Rather, their proper appreciation requires perceptual, imaginative or physical participation. In

[51]Ibid, p. 29.
[52]Ibid, p. 30. Other examples include Nabokov's Pale Fire, Alain Robbe-Grillet's The Voyeur, and Calvino's If On a Winter's Night a Traveller, and Joyce's Ulysses.
[53]Ibid, p. 27.
[54]Art and Engagement, p. 19.
[55]Ibid, p. 31.

short, Berleant thinks that the appreciation of modern art requires engagement, not contemplation. The modern arts, he says, "have affected our very ability to identify what art is and our capacities for experiencing that art."[56] Now if our customary aesthetic is undermined, then in light of the contemporary arts, "it is presumptuous for the theory of the arts to legislate the practice of the arts and condemn the innovative."[57] The inability of traditional aesthetics to account for contemporary art is, for Berleant, a sign that aesthetics has philosophical commitments which are not in keeping with the practices of art.[58]

4. Aesthetic Theory and Aesthetic Data.

Berleant's second reason for rejecting the aesthetic attitude thus concerns the relationship between theory and the data that the theory intends to cover. In The Aesthetic

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[56]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 196.
[57]Ibid.
[58]"Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," p. 156. For example, Berleant identifies recent aesthetics with a move towards conceptual analysis, which concentrates on the "meaning and significance of aesthetic concepts rather than to the materials and practices of the arts." (p. 155) The signal of the failure of this approach for Berleant is Weitz's claim that it is "logically impossible to define the concept *art.*" (p. 155)

Field, Berleant is explicit that theory must follow data:

> In general, it is the task of any theory to account for phenomena, and by accounting for them, to make experience more understandable and consequently easier to achieve and control...Theorizing is not primarily an attempt to define concepts unambiguously and to construct coherent systems. Rather, it is an effort to identify, relate, and explain phenomena..."[59]

In a later work, Berleant is somewhat more cautious, remarking that even if one cannot demonstrate by reasoned argument that theory must follow experience, for all practical intents it must.[60] The point is much the same, however: the data of experience must guide theory first and last, and in the case of aesthetic theory, the task is to account for aesthetic phenomena. An empirical, rather than conceptual approach must be taken if a successful theory of art is to be developed.[61]

When theory precedes experience, it can lead to legislation about what can be art.[62] This problem is generally encountered with attempts to define art where one of the many characteristics of art is singled out as its necessary condition.[63] Analytic aesthetics, in attempting to answer the question "What is art?" has sought, in a

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[59]Ibid. See also The Aesthetic Field, p. 6.
[60]Art and Engagement, p. 3.
[61]"The Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," pp. 155-156
[62]Art and Engagement, p. 3.
[63]"The Eighteenth Century Assumptions of Analytic Aesthetics," p. 262.

manner fit for a theoretical question, those conditions which satisfy a particular conception of art. In the tradition of the aesthetic attitude, this has come to mean that the sole designation of art is that it is an object amenable to disinterested contemplation.[64]

Alternately, the difficulty of explaining art is regarded as one of art's merits. Art, according to some, is supposed to be mysterious, ineffable, elusive. For it to be otherwise denigrates art to the level of mere craft. The failure here is that rather than examining aesthetic activity, it is concluded *a priori* from a principle abstracted from some other area of human activity that reason cannot broach aesthetics.[65] Berleant thinks that to insist on the "impossibility of understanding artistic activity is to parade a failing as a virtue."[66] Berleant holds that it is indeed possible to provide a theory of the arts, and that success will meet any theoretical attempt that approaches the arts "freshly and without prior commitment to outside doctrines or systems."[67]

The contemporary arts demonstrate irrefutable proof that aesthetic theory is out of step with the practices of

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[64]Ibid, p. 266.
[65]The Aesthetic Field, p. 4.
[66]Ibid, p. 3.
[67]Ibid, p. *vi*.

the arts. For Berleant, this is fact. Contemporary art practices operate independent of, and occasionally in defiance of traditional aesthetic theory. Now a natural solution to this problem might be to deny the art status of those works which do not square with aesthetic theory. This solution would easily prove the failure of modern art to live up to customary aesthetic standards.[68] But rather than dismissing artistic innovations as category errors, Berleant says that aesthetic theory must explain developments.[69] The recent developments in the arts are not aberrations but are rather the necessary developments of art as a cultural phenomenon.[70] Prejudging these developments with aesthetic theory from the past is to retroactively justify that theory with tendentious selection of data, and begs the question.[71] It would be a false move for aesthetics to take as its "*terminus a quo* a previously accepted body of art works

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[68]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 199.
[69]"Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts." p. 157. For an objection against the contemporary arts, see Jerome Stolnitz, "The Artistic and the Aesthetic 'in Interesting Times,'" The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 37:4 (Summer 1979). A different but no less interesting attack on the modern arts can be found in Tom Wolfe, The Painted Word (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1975).
[70]Art and Engagement, p. 43.
[71]Ibid. This is a common remark in Berleant's work. See also The Aesthetic Field, p. 8, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 200, and Art and Engagement, p. 3.

whose choice predetermines the kind of conclusion to which one is led."[72] Thus a new theory must be provided:

> [I]t is our engagement with the arts that aesthetics is responsible for clarifying and explaining, and all theoretical assertions must stand ultimately on their ability to do these. While the arts of the past might appear to corroborate the customary explanations, I am convinced that this is only apparent and that the appreciation of the traditional arts has been impeded and distorted by doctrines that misrepresent aesthetic activity.[73]

5. Toward an Empirical Aesthetics.

In an early paper,[74] Berleant recommends that the best way to attempt a definition of the nature of art is to examine those experiences that commonly exemplify art experiences, and compare them with what is held to be art. Such a procedure will identify the most successful concepts "formed by people for the purpose of effectively dealing with their multitudinous similar and diverse experiences."[75] Dealing primarily with the experience of art and not with art concepts shows how dependent concepts are on primary experience, and also demonstrates the genetic influence experience has on the conditioning of our concepts.[76]

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[72]The Aesthetic Field, p. 7.
[73]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 195. See also Art and Engagement, p. 18 for another formulation of this same point.
[74]Arnold Berleant, "A Note on the Problem of Defining 'Art.'" Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 25:2 (1964).
[75]Ibid, p. 239.
[76]Ibid, p. 240.

This position subsequently hardened into a more thorough-going empirical aesthetics which takes into account all the relevant aesthetic phenomena available.[77] Berleant says that a "vortex of experiences of art and the aesthetic lies at the center of our thinking about them,"[78] and that this vortex can only be tackled by a phenomenological account.[79] Thus a methodologically sound aesthetics is in the first place descriptive, and from the experience of art an inductive theory will emerge.[80]

An empirical aesthetics, Berleant says, plots out "a region in the matrix of human experience that is commonly distinguished from other modes of experience."[81] Berleant holds a theory of preconceptual facts in which there is "a considerable store of perceptual experience that we generally regard as aesthetic."[82] Here, Berleant separates aesthetic phenomena and aesthetic facts. Aesthetic phenomena are "the events or occurrences which involve art and beauty," and aesthetic facts are those "highly probable *statements* about these events, especially general statements, that have been arrived at by carefully examining

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[77]The Aesthetic Field, p. 8.
[78]Art and Engagement, pp. 3-4.
[79]The Aesthetic Field, p. 10.
[80]Ibid, p. 10.
[81]Ibid, p. 15.
[82]Ibid, p. 12.

those situations in which aesthetic phenomena occur."[83]

Several kinds of aesthetic facts can be distinguished:

> 1. Situational facts "describe *the conditions under which aesthetic experience occurs.*"[84]
>
> 2. Experiential facts "describe *the characteristics of aesthetic experience* itself."[85]
>
> 3. Objective facts are "about *the objects which are involved in aesthetic experience.*"[86]
>
> 4. Judgmental facts constitute "*the body of critical judgments about these objects and events.*"[87]
>
> 5. Interdisciplinary facts are those from "*studies of aesthetic events and objects from the standpoint of various related disciplines.*"[88]

What is more, because aesthetic facts rest on the empirical data of aesthetic phenomena, they are "capable of empirical confirmation."[89] Indeed, Berleant takes it to be part of the task of aesthetic theory to "construct a theoretical framework capable of empirical verification which will both guide such research and organize its results."[90] To this,

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[83]Ibid, p. 13.
[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid.
[86]Ibid.
[87]Ibid, p. 14.
[88]Ibid.
[89]Ibid.
[90]Ibid, p. 15.

Berleant adds the hope of progress:

> As the body of factual knowledge increases in quantity and accuracy, aesthetic theory will also have to develop and change. Only through such a procedure as this can aesthetics really assume the character of a respectable cognitive discipline and achieve a body of knowledge that will demand our acceptance.[91]

6. Surrogate Aesthetic Theories.

Before considering the detail of Berleant's empirical aesthetics, it is worth briefly considering why he thinks that the previous theoretical attempts have failed. His criticism is two-fold. First, other aesthetic theories are guilty of having privileged only a part of the aesthetic data available, yet have offered themselves as exclusive and comprehensive explanations of aesthetic phenomena.[92] Second, and more important to Berleant is the fact that "each theory commits the identical logical error of equivocation by replacing the explanandum, that which is to be explained, with a surrogate that represents it inadequately."[93] As a method of critique, Berleant thinks that it is possible to survey the surrogate theories "in the light of some independent objective basis"[94] which all surrogate theories are devised to account for, but which, in

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[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid, p. 20.
[93]Ibid.
[94]Ibid, p. 23.

the end, none do. In short, all surrogate theories are not true to aesthetic experience.

Berleant considers imitation theory to be the most obvious instance. He says that imitation is unaesthetic because an imitative work is necessarily something which is extra-aesthetic, namely the object being represented.[95] This has the effect of leading us away from the aesthetic to the non-aesthetic. Worse yet is that imitation theory evokes a kind of "cognitive perception" in the assessment of the reality of the representation. This detracts us from the "preanalytic experience" of art proper to aesthetic appreciation.[96] Thus the failing of imitation theory is that the cognitive object of representation stands in place of the aesthetic object, and is given theoretical pride of place.[97]

With respect to emotionalist theories, it is difficult to dispute that art is capable of communicating emotion; this observation, so noted, is a theoretical advance over imitation theory. Such a fact, however is hardly sufficient basis for a theory of art, as is reflected

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[95]Ibid, p. 26.
[96]Ibid.
[97]Berleant comments: "Here it is only necessary to acknowledge that art is different from the literal knowledge-gathering activity of the sciences. This is a much milder form of the thesis and is rarely disputed today." Ibid, p. 26, n. 4.

in the limited vocabulary of emotion these theories employ.[98] Emotionalist theories stipulate but one aspect of our experience of art, make it the most important aspect of aesthetic experience, and yet are unable to account for the nuances of our emotional responses to art. Berleant suggests that only Langer's account of feeling is true to our experience, and even then it is too general to be convincing.[99]

Perhaps the single most popular surrogate theory is expressionist theory. Expressionist theories generally hold that art is a vehicle for expressing emotions, ideas or images. Like imitation theory, expressionist theory misdirects us away from aesthetic experience to the creative intention of the artist.[100] In order to ascertain whether the intentions are correctly perceived, reference must be made to "cognitive standards of truth" which are out of the bounds of aesthetic experience.[101] Attempts to legitimate the true expressive force of art is also invokes the genetic fallacy - each work of art should be appreciated for its own sake. The concern of aesthetics, Berleant says, is with aesthetic experience, not with biography.[102]

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[98]Ibid, p. 27.
[99]Ibid, p. 28.
[100]Ibid, p. 29.
[101]Ibid, p. 30.
[102]Ibid, p. 31.

Another approach has been to consider art as an activity which performs the same function as language. Language, which is instrumental, points to other things, quite unlike art which is the "focal point of intrinsic perceptual awareness."[103] Berleant is suspicious of the supposition that art has meaning. It draws to heavily on the subjective experience of art, and reveals the "pervasive presence of an intellectualist bias which insists that emotion be construed in cognitive terms."[104] All theories which rely on some notion of symbolic form, such as Langer and Panofsky's, are thus attempts to reduce all art to a special kind of cognitive experience which flies in the face of the immediacy of art experiences.[105]

The last surrogate theory Berleant considers is the most difficult to dispense with. Formalism, because it takes up art on its own terms rather than advancing an extra-aesthetic standard, has itself challenged representation in the arts. In the famous formulations of Bell and Fry, all representation is regarded as extra-aesthetic, contributing nothing to aesthetic experience. Berleant thinks that it is perhaps here that formalism over extends itself: "There are connections with experience

[103]Ibid, p. 32.
[104]Ibid, pp. 32-33.
[105]Ibid, pp. 33-34.

beyond the perception of form alone that may be aesthetically relevant."[106]

Each surrogate theory draws our attention to a facet of aesthetic experience, and attempts to define art in terms of that particular mode of experience. They can be instructive, but every surrogate theory is too narrow in scope to account for all aesthetic experience. All surrogate theories hold in common that our encounters with art constitute a distinctive mode of experience which has a force and identity of its own. Berleant agrees that there is a distinctive mode of experience we call aesthetic experience. However, he objects to the fact that surrogate theories, in order to explain aesthetic experience, must make recourse to other experiential modes. For example, expressivist theories must rely on the standards of verification to confirm what a particular work is intended to express. The objection, then, is that "[a] mode of experience distinguishable from other kinds can hardly be adequately represented by them."[107]

7. Empirical Aesthetics.

It is Berleant's contention that aesthetic theory must deal directly with aesthetic experience, and must do so

[106]Ibid, p. 37.
[107]Ibid, p. 42.

in an empirical fashion by attending to the "intrinsic qualities" of those experiences. Aesthetic theory must establish "direct communion" with our experiences of art, and must overcome the difficulties of "rendering in concepts what is actually a recognizable type of experience."[108] As an autonomous discipline, aesthetics must accomplish this task empirically by adapting itself directly to our aesthetic experiences. "Only then will we be able to enhance the totality of human experience by truly recognizing its aesthetic dimension."[109]

Thus as a general dictum of aesthetic theory, the "sole significance of all art lies in the experience which it engages."[110] As vague as this may be, it expresses Berleant's *arche*, that every aspect of aesthetics (producing, appreciating, appraising) depends upon reference to experience.[111] But aesthetic experience is not discontinuous with or independent of other experiential modes. On the contrary, it is continuous with the entire range of human activity.[112] This is an important point for Berleant because it establishes the empirical fact that our aesthetic experiences, distinct as they are, are not

[108]Ibid, p. 44.
[109]Ibid, p. 45.
[110]Ibid, p. 93.
[111]"The Sensuous and the Sensual," p. 186.
[112]The Aesthetic Field, p. 93.

separate from other experiences. As he says, "the modes of experience are not ontological; they are rather empirically determined patterns that have histories and that are eminently mutable."[113] An empirical aesthetics obviously does not start with *a priori* precepts but rather examines the experience itself, and so Berleant now turns to the features of aesthetic experience itself.[114]

Berleant, in his The Aesthetic Field, itemizes the more significant features of aesthetic experience, collecting in effect all of the aesthetic phenomena upon which aesthetic theory rests. Aesthetic experience is an *active-receptive* experience in which perceivers are not passively stimulated by art but are rather responsible themselves for aspects of their experience.[115] As we have seen before, this can include walking about sculptures or in buildings, or by completing the plots of some novels. Again, the active-receptive nature of our response to art can be a physical, intellectual or imaginative contribution to our sensory experience.

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[113]Ibid. It is for this reason that Berleant abstains from referring to *"the* aesthetic experience," favouring instead just "aesthetic experience" which means "experience qualified by the presence of characteristics which make it aesthetic."
[114]It is a curiosity that in The Aesthetic Field that the discussion of aesthetic experience *follows* the analysis of the aesthetic field.
[115]The Aesthetic Field, p. 97.

Another feature of our aesthetic experience, one Berleant considers vastly underrated, is the *sensuous*. Berleant remarks that it has been the case that the sensuous in aesthetics has been restricted to hearing and seeing.[116] The other senses have been regarded as *sensual*, and refer in general to bodily pleasures.[117] Their association with the body makes them grosser than those intellectual pleasures which can be had at a distance through sight and hearing. Appropriately, Berleant notes that from Plato onward the aesthetic is restricted to hearing and seeing, the senses most important to our knowledge of the sensory world.[118] The legacy from the Greeks is passed on through Christian thinking in which sight and hearing were considered purer senses precisely because they do not draw attention to the body.[119] For both Greek and Christian thinkers, the formal and conceptual aspects of art, perceived by sight and hearing, are more amenable to discourse, and have thus received greater attention.[120] Contrary to this tradition, Berleant considers it a questionable metaphysics which encourages us to associate only some senses with specific art forms, thereby rejecting the contribution of the other

[116]Ibid, p. 102.
[117]"The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics," p. 185.
[118]Ibid, p. 188. Berleant refers to the Hippias Major 299a.
[119]Ibid, p. 187.
[120]Ibid, p. 186.

senses in aesthetic experience. Since no major art forms are dedicated to touch, smell or taste, they have had no significant role in the theory of aesthetic perception.[121]

Berleant holds that an aesthetic theory properly attendant to the phenomena of aesthetic experience is one which takes into account the interdependency of the senses in perception. An account of aesthetic experience not antecedently dedicated to non-aesthetic metaphysical and epistemological conditions would attend to the sensual and the sensuous of the body. On the one hand, the erotic aspect of nude drawing for one has systematically been disregarded in favour of formal or stylistic considerations.[122] On the other hand, and more important for Berleant, is the sensuous aspect of the body in architecture. Architecture more than any other art form is scaled to bodies, is designed around the practical parameters the human body demands, and is resultantly perceived as a continuum of the human form.[123]

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[121]Ibid, p. 187. Berleant says that with respect to the distinction between the sensuous and the sensual, his "object is to reveal how the restraining hand of the moral censor, gloved in metaphysical doctrine is still a powerful force in aesthetic theory, an influence which exhibits itself in this commonly held distinction." (p. 185)

[122]Ibid, p. 189. See also The Aesthetic Field, pp. 106-107. Berleant favorably cites Kenneth Clark's view that the body is not a subject of art but is itself a form of art because of the fusion of perception and the representation of the body into a sensuous unity.

[123]The Aesthetic Field, pp. 107-110. As we shall see shortly, architecture and the environment are aesthetic paradigms for Berleant.

Aesthetic experience is *immediate* in the sense that all experience of art is in the "ever-moving present."[124] All art has a temporal quality because it is experienced in lived time. Even if the art is more spatial than temporal in nature, such as a sculpture as compared with music, our experience of it takes place in time. Berleant says that

> [a]s qualitative experience, art is felt with a compelling directness in which detachment, deliberation, and all other intermediate states have no place. Symbol and substitute, therefore, do not yet exist, nor does propositional truth. There is forceful presentation rather than representation.[125]

The experience of art is also not wholly dependent upon the art itself, since art is remarkable in its ability to evoke memories. The "compelling directness" of art can therefore be a combination of simple perceptual immediacy as well as the immediate awareness of our own psychological states.[126] It is in this way, too, that for Berleant, aesthetic experience has an *intuitive* dimension not unlike the intuition of the creative artist where aesthetic experience is freely and spontaneously grasped.[127]

It is the *qualitative* unity of aesthetic experience which makes it an identifiable and integral part of our

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[124]Ibid, p. 112.
[125]Ibid, p. 113.
[126]Ibid, p. 111.
[127]Ibid, p. 117.

experience.[128] As Berleant says, this experience is preconceptual: "Before primary experience is cognized by being categorized, quantified conceptually ordered and manipulated in some way, it is filled with the sensory qualities of the world."[129] Aesthetic experience is thus a qualitatively distinct and self-sufficient experience which does not require any operation of the intellect to sustain its integrity.

Berleant places much emphasis on the non-cognitive character of aesthetic experience. Art, he says, possesses no cognitive attributes such as truth, knowledge or meaning, and serves no didactic function as Plato and Tolstoy thought.[130] Berleant locates the error in thinking that art has a epistemic function in the association of the senses with knowledge. For Plato and Aristotle, the senses were significant only because perception provides basic knowledge of the world. By associating the senses with knowledge, our perceptual experience was assigned a role subordinate to metaphysical objectives. However, Berleant, as we have seen, considers sensory experience to be direct and immediate. It is to be contrasted with the mediated nature

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[128]Ibid, p. 100.
[129]Ibid.
[130]Ibid, p. 117.

of intellectual experience, which requires contemplation and reflection.[131]

The "aesthetic error," then, is to import the reflective, analytical attitude of theory into the apprehension of art. Apprehension is the perceptual act of experiencing art - the experiential precondition as it were to the appreciation of aesthetic qualities.[132] This is to be contrasted with the act of understanding art which is a

> reflective, cognitive activity of identifying and analyzing the data, formulating appropriately relevant abstractions, and developing explanatory hypothesis about the nature and meanings of art.[133]

Experience is the precondition to theory, and all theory about art is the reflective attempt to come to conceptual terms with an experience that has an immutable essence not shaped in any way by concepts. An experience of art is therefore not a source of knowledge because concepts *represent* what is originally *present* in the perception of art.[134]

The view that art is not a source of knowledge has two consequences worth mentioning briefly. The cognitive content of art is usually attributed to the presence of symbols. Seemingly, the widely held view that appreciation

[131]Ibid, pp. 119-122.
[132]Ibid, p. 122.
[133]Ibid.
[134]Ibid, p. 124.

of art requires knowledge of the meaning of symbols has suggested that a work of art is meaningful in proportion to its symbolic content. Berleant claims that the standard view of symbols is that they point beyond themselves, that is, they stand for an object absent from the art, not for themselves.[135] Thus a diaphanous patch of blue in Gustav Klimt paintings stands for death. However, Berleant believes that this account of symbols requires reflection alien to otherwise direct aesthetic experience. If this is the case, then symbols cannot be experienced aesthetically, but would rather be a conceptual provision of aesthetic theory. According to Berleant, symbols are appreciated directly, and hence have an aesthetic function. But in order to make this intelligible, he claims that symbols stand for their objects directly - there is no referential gap between the symbol and its referent.[136] This, Berleant concludes, gives them "experiential relevance rather than referential relevance."[137]

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[135]Ibid, p. 129.
[136]Ibid, p. 131. Berleant: "*The symbol functions aesthetically,* not as an intellectual object which facilitates the analysis of meaning, *but as a vehicle for the direct perception of an identity between it and the object symbolized.*" Apart from the fact that this conception denies the difference between the symbol and its referent, it also forecloses on the possibility of the interpretation of the symbol, since all ambiguity regarding the referent would be removed by merging the symbol with its object.
[137]Ibid.

The other consequence concerns the intrinsic nature of aesthetic experience. For Berleant, cognitive processes are for the sake of knowledge, which makes them instrumental. These processes are unlike aesthetic experience, which Berleant thinks is sought out for its own sake.[138] Because aesthetic experiences have their own unique experiential quality, their own signature, Berleant contends that we seek such experiences not for ulterior motives, but because we are interested in appreciating the experience itself. If we subject art to performing metaphysical, moral or religious tasks in the hope that art will bear knowledge, we overlook the actual phenomena of aesthetic experience.[139]

8. The Aesthetics of Engagement.

Berleant collects all of the above aspects of the aesthetic experience into a unified description he calls the aesthetics of engagement. Engagement is the cornerstone of Berleant's aesthetic theory, and it is intended reflect the activities of art as they occur most distinctively and forcefully. Engagement is defined by a reciprocal

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[138]Ibid, p. 141.
[139]Ibid, pp. 142-144. Taken to the other extreme is the position of art for art's sake which detaches aesthetic experience from the rest of one's experience, thereby encouraging disinterested appreciation instead of an immediate response.

arrangement in which

> [a]ppreciative appreciation is not merely a psychological act or even an exclusively personal one. It rests on a mutual engagement of person and object that is both active and receptive on every side."[140]

Central to the theory is a doctrine of perceptual unity in which the perceiver and the object are joined, and there are three characteristics of this unity to be mentioned.

Perceptual unity is *Continuous* in the sense that aesthetic experience is not separate from other experience but is rather "assimilated into the full scope of individual and cultural experience without sacrificing its identity as a mode of experience."[141] As a mode of experience, the aesthetic is not restricted to art alone, but may be featured in the practical, the religious or the social. Regardless of the domain in which we have aesthetic experience, "its qualitative features combine in a distinctive and identifiable fashion."[142] In each and every case of aesthetic experience, *perceptual integration* is the experiential means by which we grasp this continuity. Berleant thinks that we grasp the aesthetic in a synaesthetic manner, which is to say that in aesthetic

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[140]Art and Engagement, p. 45.
[141]Ibid, p. 46.
[142]Ibid, p. 47.

experience there is a blending of the different sensoria into an undifferentiated whole.

A holistic account of perception blurs the traditional distinctions between perceivers, performers, creators and art, according to Berleant.[143] With respect to differentiation between the individual arts, there is no clear perceptual basis for distinguishing one from the other. Sculpture, for example, cannot be classified as a visual art simply because vision is the dominant perceptual mode in its appreciation. Other perceptual modes may also be involved, such as touch. But of paramount of importance for Berleant is the fact that the blurring of traditional distinctions has as its chief consequence the rejection of the view that art consists of objects. Rather, art must be regarded as consisting of situations in which aesthetic experiences occur.[144] We are not passively receptive to art. On the contrary, we are actively *engaged* in a continuous and integrated experience in which the appreciative, the material, the creative and the performative are seamlessly unified.[145] Because it is based on the unity of perception, Berleant holds that the aesthetics of engagement demonstrates human immanence in the world.

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[143]Ibid.
[144]Ibid, p. 49.
[145]Ibid.

In Art and Engagement, Berleant examines painting, architecture, literature, music, dance and film in a case by case analysis to verify in each instance the applicability of the theory of aesthetic engagement. Each kind of art cannot be appreciated in a disinterested way, but rather requires active appreciation. As we have seen already, the theory must fit the facts, and so Berleant provides a remarkable catalogue of art failed by the canon of traditional aesthetic appreciation. We have no need to examine Berleant's examples and remark on the significance of each work with respect to the aesthetics of engagement; it is more instructive to examine the aesthetics of engagement in each kind of art. Engagement will be discussed with respect to painting and architecture only for three reasons. First, painting is perhaps the source of the most entrenched doctrine of disinterested appreciation, and is therefore a major obstacle to the aesthetics of engagement. Second, architecture better exemplifies certain aspects of engagement than other art forms. So where painting is a test case for the aesthetics of engagement, architecture is a paradigm. Third, and related to the second is the fact that where other art forms exhibit aspects of engagement, it is usually idiosyncratic to their

form, such as transrealism in reading[146] or generation and de-composition in music,[147] and are therefore not illustrative of the general theory of engagement.

Painting is the art form perhaps most amenable to disinterested appreciation since its appreciation requires not only a physical separation between the perceiver and the work, but also because of the quality of sensory and psychological distance inherent in sight. Berleant regards painting as the archetype of the old aesthetics, and so it is therefore critical to the theory of engagement that it can be shown that painting can be actively appreciated. The credence given to distance and hence to disinterestedness has generally come from spatial properties pictorially represented in paintings.[148] Berleant remarks that the space represented in paintings is usually Newtonian, meaning that space is like an empty container in which objects are placed.[149] This kind of space lends itself to Bullough's psychical distance (where space is metaphorical) and the distance that separates the perceiver and the painting, and is usually explained away in the psychological terms of binocular disparity.[150]

[146]Ibid, p. 130.
[147]Ibid, p. 150.
[148]Ibid, p. 55.
[149]Ibid.
[150]Ibid, pp. 56-57.

Recent developments in physics have shown that Newtonian space is but one conception of space, and is perhaps limited in scope. Berleant claims that the physics of relativity demonstrate that we are a part of a space-time continuum in which our position and presence can determine what and how we perceive.[151] In such a conception of space, there is an "intersection of epistemology and metaphysics" which implicates the knower in the known.[152] This Berleant calls the "phenomenological approach to the perception of space," and its significance lies in making space "continuous with the act of perception."[153] A phenomenological analysis of space reveals for Berleant the continuity perceivers have not only with their physical surroundings but also with pictorial landscapes. It demonstrates that when we perceive depth of field in a painting, our perceptions have a necessary and constitutive role.[154] Contra disinterestedness, a full understanding of our perception of space supports an aesthetic of engagement in painting.

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[151]Ibid, pp. 58-59.
[152]Ibid, p. 60. Berleant makes reference to Husserlian intentionality: "'each conscious process *means something or other* and bears in itself its particular *cogitatum.*'" (p. 61)
[153]Ibid, pp. 60-61.
[154]Ibid, p. 72-73.

Architecture holds special significance for Berleant's theory of engagement because it is in our experience with architecture that aesthetic experience and practical activity are bridged, and also because of the broader implications of architecture for human environments in general.[155] Architecture importantly undermines many traditional distinctions, such as between beauty and function or work and appreciation.[156] No aspect of the human environment is unaffected by our presence, so much so that Berleant remarks that "architecture and the human environment are...synonymous and coextensive."[157] But there are different ways in which the human environment can be created. In *monolithic* conceptions of architecture, buildings are deliberately set off perceptually from their site (cathedrals and skyscrapers), or the effect may be isolated, as in the case of a house standing isolated on its plot.[158] With *cellular* architecture, the building and its site are integrated together, a union carried further in *organic* forms where the site and building are more fully

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[155]Ibid, p. 76.
[156]Arnold Berleant, "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," Dialectics and Humanism, 15:1 (1988), p. 98. Berleant remarks that conjoining use and beauty demonstrates the inseparability of people and buildings, a point he develops subsequently in perceptual terms.
[157]Art and Engagement, p. 77.
[158]Ibid, p. 79.

integrated.[159] Organic architecture reaches its zenith in *ecological* architecture wherein extreme sensitivity is paid to features of the site such that structural forms complement and adapt rather than impose themselves on the site.[160]

Three identifiable forms of experience roughly corresponding to these forms of architecture. With a *contemplative* attitude, the spectator gazes removed from the environment, and attends to the placement of objects in the space before them.[161] The contemplative attitude is associated with monolithic and cellular conceptions of architecture, where the objectification and separation of buildings from perceivers seems to reflect the conception of space in the building's design. However, this container view of space makes the spectator and his environment discontinuous. Berleant objects that as "actors in the world, we are inseparable from it and fully implicated in its dynamic processes."[162] A phenomenological view of space would treat space "not as an independent quantity but as an intentional object related to the perceiving body."[163] The most important perceptual feature of architecture, space,

[159]Ibid, pp. 79-80.
[160]Ibid, p. 80.
[161]Ibid, p. 82.
[162]Ibid, p. 86.
[163]Ibid, p. 87.

also present bodily in our use of architecture. In fact, the use and perception of architecture meet in an *active* conception of space where the dynamism of the body is considered continuous with its surroundings.[164] In both use and appreciation, "[a]rchitectural experience, then, is primarily somatic, not visual."[165]

The perceptual mode best suited to the ecological form of architecture is *participatory* - an engagement of the environment in which the reciprocity between humans and the environment is so complete that no clear demarcation exists between them.[166] In ecological architecture, the building and site are conjoined such that the environment is as much an extension of the building as the building is integrated into the environment. The point is that perceptually the building and its site appear to be one.[167] Here two perceptual factors complete the reciprocal arrangement. The first is that architectural and environmental features

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[164]Berleant refers to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of space in which the body is regarded as the "degree zero" of spatiality such that all spatial aspects of action and perception emanate from the body outwards to the surroundings. See Art and Engagement, p. 86 and "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm, pp. 99-100.

[165]"The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," p. 101.

[166]Art and Engagement, p. 89.

[167]Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater is universally regarded as the paradigm of this form of architecture, at least for domestic dwellings. There is virtually no visual break between the Wright's building and its site.

"reach out to affect and respond to the perceiver."[168] Second, perceivers engage a "unitary perceptual field" in which experience binds the perceiver with the environment.[169]

Clearly architecture exemplifies all of the aforementioned aspects of perceptual unity in aesthetic engagement. Practical and aesthetic engagement of architecture alike depend upon the spatial continuity of the perceiver's body with the building and its environment. This continuity is also established by the perceptual integration or situatedness of the perceiver in an architectural environment. Moreover, this perceptual integration is perhaps most complete in architecture. Because architecture is the paradigm of synaesthesia, we shall find cause to refer to it in the next chapters.

9. Empirical Aesthetic Theory.

Berleant has remarked that his aesthetic theory is a "naturalistic aesthetic" that eschews transcendental (read

[168]Art and Engagement, p. 90.

[169]Ibid, p. 91. In "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," (pp. 102-106) Berleant suggests that if architecture can be engaged, then by extension the environment itself can be engaged. The same perceptual and spatial features of architecture are relevant to the appreciation of the environment, wherein the largest perceptual unit is the landscape. But also because the appreciation of the environment may also take into account our perception of time, touch, taste and smell, our environmental engagement may truly be synaesthetic. This has lead Berleant to remark, although only in passing, that appreciation of the environment may be a possible basis for the theory of engagement. (Art and Engagement, p. 91)

rational) approaches to our experience of art.[170] A naturalistic aesthetic theory is "the way of working on aesthetic experience in order to attain knowledge" about art, and about our experience in the world in general.[171] Since philosophy is at root a rationalist rather than empirical science, Berleant believes that philosophy in aesthetics can only contribute to methodological awareness and set forth the conditions "for successful investigation."[172] It is for this reason that Berleant remarks in Art and Engagement that his aesthetics does not follow a general dialectical course but rather "rests on a general conceptual structure."[173]

The basis of this conceptual structure, as we have seen, is that no aesthetic theory can decide in advance what counts as aesthetic experience. In other words, theory depends both logically and temporally on antecedently experienced aesthetic phenomena. Thus Berleant's defense of engagement in the arts is "not so much an argument from text as an argument from art."[174] It is perhaps a measure of Berleant's desire to overcome traditional aesthetics that he

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[170]The Aesthetic Field, p. 188.
[171]Ibid, p. 17.
[172]Ibid, p. 18.
[173]Art and Engagement, p. *xiii*.
[174]Ibid.

is willing consider the both the environment and painting as equally legitimate sources of aesthetic experience.

Clearly, Berleant's objective is to reclaim the territory of aesthetics, and to make aesthetics into the independent discipline Baumgarten envisioned. But for all of the remarks about having left traditional aesthetics behind for the sake of a new and theoretically unconditioned empirical aesthetics,[175] Berleant's theory nonetheless is a part of the tradition of aesthetics. It is in fact very instructive to situate Berleant's theory within the traditional debate over the nature of aesthetic appreciation. A closer look at his arguments against the traditional approaches, one which he provides, the other which he ignores, indicates more fully what Berleant thinks aesthetic experience is.

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[175]For example: "This book does not offer a position to be disputed only dialectically. By claiming to account for aesthetic experience, it must therefore be tested against such experience." (The Aesthetic Field, p. 191.) Also: "I ask only that what I have written be judged in the light of the facts of aesthetic activity and not the conventions of aesthetic thought." (The Aesthetic Field, p. *vii.*) And: "[W]e must develop an understanding of aesthetic activities that rests on the arts and their experiences and not on external standards such as official policies or epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions." (Art and Engagement, p. 211.) Lastly: the defense of engagement is "not so much and argument from text as an argument from art." (Art and Engagement, p. *xiii.*)

CHAPTER TWO

1. Introduction.

In the account of Berleant's position in Chapter 1, it was apparent that the guiding light of Berleant's theory was the liberation of aesthetics from philosophy. As near as aesthetics came to being an autonomous discipline after Baumgarten, it has continued to labour primarily under philosophical interests. If aesthetics is to become a fully independent discipline, it must develop its own standards and methods instead of turning to already established philosophical positions. Aesthetics, then, can no longer gain its philosophical sustenance or principle of legitimation from established metaphysical or epistemological positions.

We may summarize Berleant's characterization of an independent aesthetics as follows. It is of importance to recognize first the existence of aesthetic phenomena as part of our basic experience of the world. Berleant takes it as an undisputable fact that we have aesthetic experiences - it is a given which needs no further explanation. Aesthetic experience is an identifiable part of a larger matrix of human experience. Yet as distinct as it is, it is not separate from other experiences that we have. Now the purpose of any theory is to organize the data of experience,

and in the case of aesthetic theory, the data of aesthetic perception must be examined as it is experienced. That is, theory must not over or under-determine aesthetic experience. On the contrary, aesthetic theory is the project of organizing experience already and immediately apprehended as *aesthetic* experience.

In this chapter, then, we will consider in detail Berleant's strategy for providing a sovereign aesthetics. We will begin in Section 2 by noting that Berleant initially distances himself from traditional aesthetics by steadfastly refusing to define either art or the aesthetic. In the next section, a brief historical account of the history of the aesthetic attitude is given to serve as a backdrop for Section 4, the core of this chapter, where Berleant's criticism of the aesthetic attitude is taken up. In the fifth section, we will note that Berleant's work also contains an implicit criticism of the empirical aesthetic theory traditionally pitted against the aesthetic attitude. This section's significance lies in the fact that while Berleant claims his aesthetics is essentially empirical, he cannot align himself with the traditional empirical aestheticians because they rely on the same dualism which Berleant thinks is the root of aesthetic attitude theory. In the last section, it will be demonstrated that Berleant's

drive for an autonomous aesthetics over-extends itself, leaving key concepts of aesthetics undefined and ungrounded. It will be shown that, contrary to what Berleant thinks, the aesthetic attitude is conceptually necessary to aesthetics and that without it, Berleant's aesthetic theory is unintelligible.

2. A Note on Defining Art and the Aesthetic.

It is clear that in specifying that theory must follow lived experience, Berleant hopes to take great steps forward towards freeing aesthetics from theoretical predeterminations. In order to ensure this freedom, Berleant refrains from defining art. A classification in which the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for art are stipulated would only be able to account for artwork already in existence. Since no theory of art can predict artistic innovations, theory would always have to accommodate new art in terms of old theoretical constructs. On Berleant's view, new artistic developments which contradict the canon of classification are always threatened with the possibility of being declassified as art in order to save the theory. In Bell's formalism, for example, a representationalist work lacking significant form may be an "interesting and amusing

document," but it is not art.[1] Other similar examples abound in surrogate theories, all of which demonstrates that often what is produced by artists cannot be called art because it does not have the support of a theory of classification. Naturally, competing theories of art arise, and the term "art" no longer refers to the same objects. As Berleant has observed, in the many attempts to define art, "the use of the same term is no guarantee of identity of connotation or denotation.[2]

Berleant locates the problem of defining art in the attempt to restrict the denotation of "art" to a class of objects. Instead of an object-oriented definition of art, Berleant suggests that the "limits" of art are distinguished by the many ways it functions in perception.[3] Any potential definition of art must therefore be understood as a definition of the boundaries of aesthetic experience. However, since Berleant's description of the aesthetic field is tuned to the aesthetic experience and not to an ontology of art, we are not provided with a fuller definition of art. Berleant is only willing to venture that "[i]f an object succeeds in evoking an aesthetic experience, it, then, in

[1]Clive Bell, Art, (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), pp. 23-24.
[2]Arnold Berleant, "A Note on the Problem of Defining 'Art.'" Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 25:2 (December 1964), p. 240.
[3]Arnold Berleant, The Aesthetic Field (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1970), p. 155.

that instance, becomes an aesthetic object."[4] This says nothing of art objects themselves, and is therefore not an outright attempt to classify art. In a sense, Berleant is interested in aesthetics, not art. This can be seen in his taking the environment to be a paradigm source of aesthetic experience without distinguishing it from or equating it to art.[5]

Just as much as Berleant does not attempt to define art, he refrains from providing a rigorous definition of aesthetic experience. Instead, the concept of the aesthetic field is designed to point out the "experiential invariants" of aesthetic experience, such as the fact that aesthetic experience is always continuous with other experiences.[6] An observation such as this is only meant to be descriptive of aesthetic experience. No experiential invariant is intended to carry the force of either a necessary or sufficient

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[4]"A Note on the Problem of Defining 'Art,'" p. 240.
[5]Berleant's reluctance to define art reflects his stance against the aesthetician's predilection to theorize rather than attend to the actual experience of art. In the "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 29:2 (Winter 1970), Berleant claims that Morris Weitz's view that "aesthetic theory is foredoomed to fail inasmuch as it is logically impossible to define the concept *art*" (p. 155) has shown that conceptual analysis is self-defeating in aesthetics. Aesthetics is amenable to empirical, not conceptual analysis. An empirical aesthetics therefore has no place for ontologies of art, since ontologies are, on Berleant's view, rationalist enterprises. A similar point is made in The Aesthetic Field, p. 155.
[6]The Aesthetic Field, pp. 47-48.

condition for having an aesthetic experience.[7] The four "corners" of the aesthetic field, the perceiver, the aesthetic object, the performer and the artist are thus only meant to be illustrative of the domain in which aesthetic experience occurs. As Berleant has suggested, the aesthetic field is a theoretical construct meant to

> account for all of the major factors that enter into the experience of art, without prejudicing their importance or their divisions, and without taking any one of them as exclusive or even central.[8]

Clearly, Berleant regards aesthetic experience as ineffable because of its immediacy. The attempt to conceive of the conditions of aesthetic experience involves the mediation of pure experience. Mediation is a distortion of aesthetic experience, which means to Berleant that analysis in aesthetics is always at the expense of the enjoyment of the richness of aesthetic experience. Tied in with this is Berleant's conviction that the structures employed by rationalist aestheticians to explain aesthetic experience always eventually prescribe what counts as aesthetic

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[7]One might debate that a complete description of aesthetic experience would also be an explanation of the necessary and sufficient conditions for aesthetic experience. The suspicion is that Berleant would argue that, first, he does not intend to offer a complete description, and second, a complete description is impossible because new and different experiences continually arise.

[8]Arnold Berleant, Art and Engagement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. *xi*.

experience. This point will now be pursued in greater detail.

3. The History of Aesthetics.

As we have seen, Berleant maintains that aesthetic experience is traditionally characterized by a distinct and deliberate attitude. This attitude is regularly defined by Berleant as disinterested attention to aesthetic objects, where the notion of disinterestedness is generally taken to mean that attention paid to aesthetic objects for their own sake, without the distracting influence of other considerations, such as practical interests. Attitude theorists identify aesthetic appreciation with this attitude, and since the conditions of this attitude can be stipulated, the conditions of aesthetic experience are thereby given. Regrettably, Berleant fails to provide a proper account of the tradition of aesthetic attitude, and instead moves directly to critique it. This account will now be provided, and then Berleant's objections will be considered.

It is widely recognized that Shaftesbury was the first to use "disinterestedness" as a philosophical term.[9]

[9]This recognition is largely due to Jerome Stolnitz's "Of the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" in Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology, eds. George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

In his treatise, "An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor,"[10] disinterestedness is associated with those moral actions thought to be intrinsically good:

> If the love of doing good be not, of itself, a good and right inclination, I know not how there can possibly be such a thing as goodness or virtue. If the inclination be right, 'tis a perverting of it, to apply it solely to the reward, and make us conceive of such wonders of the grace and favour which is to attend virtue, when there is so little shown of the intrinsic worth or value of the thing itself.[11]

Doing good for its own sake is disinterested action, since no interest or reward - material, social or Providential - is to be garnered. While "disinterestedness" was originally meant to stand against Hobbes' ethical egoism, the term's currency was not restricted to ethics but was also used in aesthetics.

For Shaftesbury, the moral and aesthetic are virtually the same, since moral or aesthetic judgements require the same refinement of taste. Taste itself is the activity of judging which combines both reason and feeling in the person's response to the beauty underlying an aesthetic object or moral situation. As Stanley Grean notes, taste is susceptible to either emotional or intellectual failure. Thus, "[g]ood taste requires both the

[10]Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, "An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour," in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc., ed. John M. Robertson (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), Vol. 1.
[11]Ibid, p. 66.

consistent employment of the intellect and the harmonious exercise of the affections."[12] In an aesthetic or moral judgement, then, we must suspend emotional and intellectual interests which may distort our capacity to assess the forms of beauty.

Shaftesbury's conception of taste has Neoplatonic roots: beauty cannot be separated from rationality.[13] This is made clear in the "The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody" where beauty is distinguished as the principle which forms but is distinct from matter:

> In respect of bodies therefore, beauty comes and goes? So we see. Nor is the body itself any cause either of its coming or staying? None at all. For body can no way be the cause of beauty to itself? No way. Nor govern nor regulate itself? Nor yet this. Nor mean nor intend itself? Nor this neither. Must not that, therefore, which means and intends for it, regulates and orders it, be the principle of beauty to it? Of necessity. And what must that be? Mind, I suppose, for what can it be else?[14]

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[12]Stanley Grean, Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion, and Ethics (New York: Ohio University Press, 1967), p. 209.

[13]Indeed, disinterested appreciation is appropriate in the "contemplative delight" of the mathematical proportion and symmetry of worldly things, where the "admiration, joy, or love turns wholly upon what is exterior and foreign to ourselves." Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit," in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc., ed. John M. Robertson (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), Vol. 1, p. 296.

[14]Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, "The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody," in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc., ed. John M. Robertson (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), Vol. 2, p. 131.

Beauty thus appeals to rationality because it orders and regulates matter. Matter "which is void of mind is horrid, and matter formless is deformity itself.[15] But the "dead forms" of beauty - artifacts such as art and natural things - are to be distinguished from the "forms which form-" the human creator - and the supreme form which is the "form (the effect of mind) and mind itself." This triad is significant for Shaftesbury because in our judgement of the moral and the aesthetic, we demonstrate our love for God. In the case of aesthetic objects, we either appreciate the beauty of God directly in nature, or we experience beauty mediated through us in the form of art. Now because God is intrinsically good, he must be loved for His own sake, that is, disinterestedly.[16] Likewise, then, aesthetic judgements must be disinterested if we are to comprehend fully the

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[15]Ibid, p. 132.

[16]"For though it be natural enough (he would tell you) for a mere political writer to ground his great argument for religion on the necessity of such a belief as that of a future reward and punishment, yet, if you will take his opinion, 'tis a very ill token of sincerity in religion...to reduce it to such a philosophy as will allow no room to that other principle of love; but treats all of that kind as enthusiasm for so much as aiming at what is called disinterestedness, or teaching the love of God or virtue for God or virtue's sake." Ibid, p. 55. This remark is seems to be directed against Hobbe's "rational religion," which Shaftesbury says is "servile and mercenary" because it is interested service of God.

beauty in God's works. Disinterested contemplation is thus the key to understanding the universal form of beauty.[17]

Shaftesbury is clear that disinterested contemplation of art or nature is attention paid to the object of attention for its own sake. We cannot have an aesthetic experience if we are looking for "enjoyment elsewhere than in the subject loved."[18] That is, if art or nature should be the cause of an intellectual or emotional reverie, then we are not appreciating the beautiful

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[17] Grean notes that the paradox of serving one's true interest, God, in a disinterested way is resolved in the continual transcendence of self that is "not only the means *to* Deity, but *is* Deity." Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion, and Ethics, p. 35. It is only by means of disinterested attention to God that one discovers oneself and is made at the same time. Worship is thus an attempt to overcome the distinctions between God, nature, and man by attending to the beauty that underlies and unites them all. Stolnitz remarks that Shaftesbury urges "that genuine moral and religious concern are with what is intrinsic and that they are therefore terminal. They are not instrumental and therefore anticipatory. The whole selfishness-unselfishness controversy has not been transcended." "Of the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" p. 609.

[18] "The Moralists," p. 126.

qualities of the object. As he says,

> Imagine, then, good Philocles, if being taken with the beauty of the ocean, which you see yonder at a distance, it should come into your head to seek how to command it, and, like some mighty admiral, ride master of the sea, would not the fancy be a little absurd? [...] The next thing I should do, 'tis likely, upon this frenzy, would be to hire some bark and go in nuptial ceremony, Venetian-like, to wed the gulf, which I might call perhaps as properly as my own. Let them who will call it theirs, replied Theocles, you will own the enjoyment of this kind to be very different from that which should naturally follow from the contemplation of the ocean's beauty.[19]

Stolnitz points out that this passage is significant in the development of Shaftesbury's discussion of disinterestedness, since it appears without reference to either religion or morality. "What is new in the passage is that Shaftesbury opposes disinterestedness to the desire to possess or use the object."[20] The implication, then, one which subsequent aestheticians developed, is that aesthetic spectators must employ disinterested perception regardless of moral considerations. Shaftesbury thus distinguishes two kinds of perception, practical and aesthetic. Aesthetic perception subsequently became regarded as a unique form of attention.

Archibald Alison, in particular, focused on the attributes of the mind necessary for the appreciation of

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[19]Ibid, pp. 126-7.
[20]"Of the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" p. 611.

beauty. On his account, the mind must first assume a disinterested disposition in order for the faculties of aesthetic experience, imagination and emotion, to respond to the aesthetic object.[21] Unlike Shaftesbury, for whom "disinterested" meant the contemplation of beauty inherent in objects for its own sake, Alison's view of disinterestedness is, anachronistically speaking, more psychological. As Stolnitz points out, disinterestedness for Alison "denotes a way of organizing attention"[22] towards aesthetic objects.

Where Shaftesbury only held that the contemplation of beautiful objects or scenes must be disinterested, Alison added to aesthetic appreciation the additional requirement that we must "be in that temper of mind which suits"[23] the aesthetic object. It is not enough that the object is beautiful. Rather, the mind must be favorably disposed to an object, as if wiping itself clean, as a precondition to

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[21]Ibid, p. 616.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Archibald Alison, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste, 4th ed. (Edinburgh, 1815), Vol 1, p. 217, as quoted in Jerome Stolnitz, "Of the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" in Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology, eds. George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), p. 616.

any experience of beauty. Stolnitz puts it well:

> The whole century [the 18th] is a Copernican Revolution in aesthetics - whether an object is beautiful or sublime depends upon the experience of the spectator - which here reaches its clearest expression. An object can be aesthetic only when certain conditions of attention and interest have been satisfied.[24]

Shaftesbury's Neoplatonism led him to the rational, disinterested contemplation of beauty, a view in which the suspension of self-interest orients us to the perceived object. Alison carries out the Revolution by making the disinterested attitude a state of the mind which functions as a precondition to, not as a simple trait of, aesthetic experience. As Stolnitz summarizes it, Alison "was able to show *what* the aesthetic 'state of mind' is like only after his countryman [Shaftesbury] had shown *that* such a 'state of mind' exists."[25]

Stolnitz himself picks up this historical thread. In his Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism, he states that aesthetics refers to a special way of looking at an object: "We are defining the realm of the aesthetic in terms of a distinctive kind of 'looking.'"[26] For Stolnitz, aesthetic perception requires the willful adoption of an

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[24]"On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" p. 617.
[25]Ibid, p. 618.
[26]Jerome Stolnitz, Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1960), p. 29.

attitude towards aesthetic objects.[27] The defining feature of this attitude is selective attention, not passive reception. In keeping with Alison, Stolnitz holds that the aesthetic attitude "organizes and directs our awareness of the world."[28] It stands out against practical perception which is purposeful or interested, since our aesthetic attention is simply for the sake of enjoying an object itself. Stolnitz thus gives the well-known formulation of the aesthetic attitude as "disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone."[29]

[27]"Aesthetic disinterestedness is an achievement of will. It involves stifling the constant, sometimes importunate demands of self, focussing vigilant and discriminating attention on the object for its own sake, committing one's responses to the energies and vectors within the object." Jerome Stolnitz, "The Artistic and the Aesthetic 'in Interesting Times," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 37:4 (Summer 1979), p. 411.

[28]Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism, p. 33.

[29]Ibid, p. 35. Elsewhere, Stolnitz has given four formulations of aesthetic attention. The first two are of interest here, although the third will be a source of discussion in the third chapter. "'The aesthetic attitude' has been defined:

> 1) in terms of *purpose*: there is no 'interest' ulterior to the act of perception itself;
> 2) in terms of *attention*: there is close attention to the qualitative individuality of what is perceived;
> 3) in terms of *belief*: 'a consciousness of the difference between appearance and reality is lacking' [...] or, the percipient is aware of the difference between appearance and reality [...];
> 4) semiotically: the aesthetic object is not or does not function as a sign."

In his definition of aesthetic attitude, Stolnitz preserves both Shaftesbury and Alison's conception of aesthetic perception. Following Shaftesbury, Stolnitz initially takes disinterested to mean the opposite of interested, so that no ulterior motives play in our experience of it. Unlike practical perception, aesthetic perception focuses on and "isolates" the object without paying heed to its origin, purpose or interrelations with other things.[30] But as he notes, the degree to which we can become absorbed in an aesthetic object makes it clear that "disinterested" cannot just mean "un-interested." On the contrary, we become very interested in the due process of aesthetic perception. Aesthetic perception is simply not practically interested.

Stolnitz avoids speaking of this paradoxical interest without interest by referring to the interested absorption in aesthetic perception as "sympathetic" attention, leaving "disinterested" to mean "not practically oriented." By sympathetic attention, Stolnitz captures Alison's sense of disinterestedness. When we adopt an aesthetic attitude, we deliberately "prepare ourselves to

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See Jerome Stolnitz, "Some Questions Concerning Aesthetic Perception," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 22:1 (September 1961). p. 87.

[30]Ibid.

respond to the object...to relish its individual quality."[31] Sympathy in attention reflects the psychological precondition to aesthetic experience: "We must make ourselves receptive to the object and 'set' ourselves to accept whatever it may offer to perception."[32] Attention is not "just looking" without practical interest, but is a state in which our awareness is heightened and directed. Sympathetic attention enables us to discriminate fine details, since in the absence of ulterior motives, we are capable of more acute perception.

Stolnitz says that aesthetic attention may be thought of as contemplation in which "perception is directed to the object in its own right and that the spectator is not concerned to analyze it or to ask questions about it. Also, the word connotes thoroughgoing absorption and interest..."[33] It is important for Stolnitz that aesthetic contemplation is not reducible to aesthetic perception. For him, perception, as it is used in empiricist contexts, means no more than the apprehension of sense-data.[34] Perception is too narrow a term, in that it fails to capture the fact

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[31]Ibid, p. 36.
[32]Ibid.
[33]Ibid, pp. 38-39. Note here that although the mind must contribute to aesthetic experience, the contemplative attitude does not mean that aesthetic attention is analytical.
[34]Ibid, p. 41.

that most, if not all of our perception of the world is meaningful.[35] Hence, Stolnitz adopts the term sensation to indicate that perception is meaningful, and that what is perceived is regarded in its interrelations with other things.[36] For on Stolnitz's view, we could not hold a contemplative attitude towards an object unless it appealed to the mind in sensation.

4. The Explicit Argument Against Aesthetic Attitude.

The generalities of Berleant's arguments against the tradition of aesthetics have been taken up in the first chapter, but we will now consider them in greater detail, and in light of the above discussion of aesthetic attitude. In his "The Historicity of Aesthetics - I,"[37] and the second installment by the same title,[38] Berleant offers his most concise attack against the tradition of aesthetic attitude. Berleant's attack is three pronged, consisting first of the rejection of the notion that art consists of objects, second, that art objects are of a special kind, and third,

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[35]Ibid, pp. 41-2, and 61.
[36]Ibid, p. 41.
[37]Arnold Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," The British Journal of Aesthetics, 26:2 (Spring 1986), pp. 101-111.
[38]Arnold Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," The British Journal of Aesthetics, 26:3 (Summer 1986), pp. 195-203.

that the appreciation of art requires the adoption of a special attitude.[39]

When Berleant claims that most art consists of objects, he means the physical artifacts, the things which are commonly called art.[40] Berleant acknowledges that it may be difficult to say just what the art object is in the case of music or poetry,[41] yet such art is can be given roughly the same physical status as paintings or sculptures. One may, for example, claim that the art object in the case of the Resurrection Symphony or the "Ode to a Grecian Urn" is what is written on the page.[42] Now in order to distinguish the class of art objects from other objects, the features essential to art objects have been sought, but this search has been unsuccessful, since no truly compelling classification of art objects has been established. Nevertheless, Berleant thinks that the presumption that "art" refers to a distinct class of objects persists.

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[39]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," pp. 104-105.
[40]Ibid, p. 104.
[41]Ibid. See also Arnold Berleant, "The Eighteenth Century Assumptions of Analytic Aesthetics," in History and Anti-History in Philosophy, eds. T.Z. Lavine and V. Tejera (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 261.
[42]For a discussion of the possibility that art consists of physical objects, see Richard Wollheim, Art and its Objects, in Philosophy Looks at the Arts, 3rd ed., ed. Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 208-228.

The special status of art objects is dependent upon two factors. The first involves the fact that art is characteristically associated with a specific mode of experience, aesthetic experience. It is generally given that many objects, such as the Mona Lisa function in experience in some unique way. Second, the rarity of art objects, caused either by the skill of the artist or the rarity of the materials involved, makes art objects prized artifacts among other more common things. The special status of an art object is significant in the development of the aesthetic attitude, Berleant notes, because it provides the basis for identifying and separating art objects from the range of other objects.[43] Shaftesbury's conception of disinterestedness demands, at the very least, that attention can be trained upon a specific target. Unless the object of disinterested attention can be isolated from other objects in perception, no talk of attending to it for its own sake can make sense.

Berleant's insistence that disinterested appreciation is typically associated with a special kind of isolable thing does not always appear to hold. For Shaftesbury, landscape as well as art could be disinterestedly appreciated for its beauty. But a view of a

[43]Ibid, p. 106.

landscape is neither rare in the sense that art is, nor is it an artifact, and nor is it an object in the way that a sculpture is. Likewise, mathematical propositions or the tone of a singer's voice are not things in the way that a painting or sculpture is, yet on Shaftesbury's account, the beauty of each can be contemplated disinterestedly. Indeed, Shaftesbury's Neoplatonism leads him to hold that the less of the sensible in the beautiful is desirable since the unmixed forms of beauty appeal more directly to the mind. Here, Berleant would have perhaps be better to challenge traditional aesthetics for its predilection for *aesthetic objects*, emphasizing not their physical nature, but rather their presumed epistemological separation from *perceiving subjects*. A vista, a painting, or a performance of a play could each be regarded as the object of aesthetic experience. An aesthetic object, as we are calling it, could nonetheless have special status in experience, leaving open the possibility of disinterested appreciation. If this is the case, then Berleant's association of disinterested attention with object-oriented aesthetics would still hold. As it stands, Berleant weakens his position by restricting his analysis to physical object.

Berleant's objection to disinterested appreciation involves demonstrating that much of what connotes modern

art, even when it does consist of objects, consists of objects of no special value, rarity or workmanship. Marcel Duchamp's Fountain is, on Berleant's view, a brilliant demonstration of how art does not have to consist of objects of special status. Or is this so? A series of points can be made here. First, Berleant is content to refer to Fountain as an example of contemporary art. But if it is art, it has special status, at least socio-culturally if not ontologically. Indeed, this is evidenced by the amount attention in and out of print Fountain has received concerning why or why not Duchamp's urinal should be accepted as art. Second, if Fountain is a work of art, does the fact that it is readymade preclude disinterested attention, as Berleant seems to suggest? Stolnitz thinks otherwise:

> [A]s has often been pointed out, the avant-garde depictions and assemblages of utensils, commercial products, and industrial detritus (junked automobiles) do not tell against disinterested perception. They solicit such perception. This art proceeds by divorcing objects from their quotidian settings and thereby, as Bullough would say, 'putting them out of gear with our practical self.' Only then do we see them, perhaps for the first time, for what they are.[44]

Third, if Berleant wanted to avoid the physical object altogether, saying that it was Duchamp's gesture that made

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[44]"The Artistic and the Aesthetic 'in Interesting Times," p. 411.

Fountain art, would that not be the same as saying that the it is not the physical thing that constitutes the art, but rather the *aesthetic object*, the experience of which is not reducible to the physical thing? As we saw with respect to Shaftesbury, the epistemological sleight of hand in redescribing an art object as an experiential object makes its physicalness less conspicuous, but does not rule out disinterested appreciation.

These difficulties are raised, without hope of their immediate resolution, to point out that Berleant's critique of the objecthood of art is cursory at best. Even if it is the case that art has traditionally been thought to consist of objects of a special kind, it is unclear that the innovations of modern art undermine the objecthood of art. Without question, Berleant's reluctance to define both art and aesthetic experience only complicates matters, especially since he uses the terms anyway.

We now turn to the third and most important part of Berleant's critique of traditional aesthetics - the rejection of the special attitude required in the appreciation of art. We have seen that for Alison and Stolnitz, the aesthetic attitude is not simply disinterested attention to an object. When we attend to an object for its own sake, we must deliberately attend with "sympathetic"

attention. Stolnitz calls this a "positive" orientation to the object.[45] It is a stance we adopt towards an object where we are receptive to the intrinsic qualities the object has to offer. Notice here that the object is not an aesthetic object. In Shaftesbury's account of disinterested contemplation, the beauty inherent in the aesthetic object is retrieved by the mind that attends to it. But for Stolnitz, the adoption of an aesthetic attitude towards an object does not first require that an aesthetic object is beautiful. Instead, it is the attitude itself which makes the object aesthetic. Stolnitz remarks that the aesthetic attitude can be "adopted toward 'any object of awareness whatever,'"[46] meaning, as he says, that "any object at all can be apprehended aesthetically, i.e., no object is inherently unaesthetic."[47] The aesthetic attitude can be adopted equally well towards something mundane, garish or ugly as towards something rare, proportioned or beautiful. "Less lofty objects and even scenes which are ugly become the objects of aesthetic attention."[48] Thus, objects are not either aesthetic or unaesthetic; they are attended to aesthetically or non-aesthetically.

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[45]Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism, p. 42.
[46]Ibid, p. 39.
[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid, p. 40.

Berleant correctly takes the "positive" orientation of the aesthetic attitude as to be an *a priori* decision which determines aesthetic experience. But unlike the attitude theorists, who think disinterested attention opens possibilities for experience, Berleant believes it to be restrictive.[49] Because the adoption of a disinterested attitude requires the resolution of the mind to be aesthetically rather than practically engaged, Berleant supposes that theoretical or conceptual prejudices inform our recognition of the aesthetic. Now for Stolnitz, there can be no aesthetic experience without the aesthetic attitude. Berleant, on the contrary, holds that we may have aesthetic experience independent and despite of whatever we may conceive the aesthetic to be.

Since Berleant believes that aesthetic experience is had prior to analysis and reflection, the formative influence of the mind on aesthetic experience can only be

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[49]Stolnitz defends himself on this matter. He believes, like Berleant, that most aesthetic theories are wrongly founded on the historical and the moral. He claims that instead of proceeding *von Oben herab*, in the manner of the grand old theories of reality, his approach is based on empirical evidence. What is at issue, however, is <u>how</u> Stolnitz puts his theory to the "test of empirical evidence." (Ibid, p. 20)

seen as distorting. As he says,

> [w]hen intellectual, moral, or emotional elements begin to obtrude, experience becomes less aesthetic and more cognitive, homiletic, or affective. [...] The negation of *aesthetic* is, in every sense, *anaesthetic*.[50]

Elsewhere, Berleant remarks of the aesthetic attitude that there is "something distinctly anaesthetic in the displacement of perception by intellect, a sign, perhaps, of their unhappy inversion."[51] Berleant's play on words demonstrates his conviction that the conceptual mediation invoked by an aesthetic attitude detracts us from and possibly dulls our awareness of otherwise immediate aesthetic perception.

Berleant attributes this lack of perceptual awareness, this anaesthesia, to the philosophical conviction that the mind contributes to aesthetic experience. Shaftesbury's belief was that our ability to appreciate and create beauty was bestowed upon us by a divine and supremely beautiful mind. The capacity of the mind to contemplate with disinterested perception demonstrates the virtue of humans to participate in the good by attending to beauty as it appears in the world. For Alison, aesthetic experience requires a prior decision to be in a particular frame of

[50]Arnold Berleant, "The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 23:2 (Winter 1964), p. 186.
[51]Art and Engagement, p. 190.

mind, and for Stolnitz, directing aesthetic attention towards an object is what makes it an aesthetic object.

In light of these views, Berleant claims that aesthetic attitude is not merely an elucidation of a way of experiencing. On the contrary, he thinks that the proponents of aesthetic attitude regard aesthetic attention as an ontologically discrete mode of attention.[52] Berleant brings up the presumption of the ontological distinctness of the aesthetic attitude because he is interested in the way aesthetic attention conditions experience. Namely, the application of *a priori* principles to distinguish aesthetic from other modes of perception entails ontological distinctions at the level of the objects of such perception. That is, aesthetic attention determines in advance what we will consider to be an aesthetic object; aesthetic objects are an ontologically discrete class because they can be attended to with disinterested, sympathetic attention.

Berleant regards this as too much rationalism, and advocates a return to empiricism.[53] What this really means is that we should abandon the mediation of experience by the mind. For Berleant, the fact of the matter is that experience antedates contemplation. The introduction of a

[52]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 200. See also The Aesthetic Field, p. 93.
[53]Art and Engagement, p. 191.

rationalist structure such as the aesthetic attitude simply obstructs and regulates our experience. It is curious, however, that if Berleant intends to provide an empirical ground for an aesthetics of engagement, that he no where mentions the fact that there have been many empiricist programs in aesthetic theory. Berleant is content to criticize the views of the attitude theorists, yet he ignores those theories of taste which, in opposition to the rationalism of attitude theories, take their cue from empiricism. Representatives of this theoretical orientation include Burke, Hutcheson, Hume and Dickie. Berleant's references to these figures are few and far between. Where Berleant mentions Hume, he disparages about the amount of theoretical baggage required to support the empiricisms of Locke, Berkeley and Hume.[54] And where Berleant refers to George Dickie, he mistakenly categorizes Dickie's institutional analysis as a form of attitude theory, and utterly fails to reflect upon Dickie's more significant works on the philosophy of taste.[55]

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[54]Arnold Berleant, "Experience and Theory in Aesthetics," in Possibility of Aesthetic Experience, ed. M.H. Mitias (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), p. 95. Also, Art and Engagement, p. 14.
[55]"The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," pp. 108-109.

5. The Implicit Argument Against Taste Theory and Dualism in Aesthetics.

It is to be granted that Berleant is not offering a complete documentation of the history of aesthetics, but since his critique of rationalism takes up its historical roots, why the glaring omission of empiricist accounts?[56] We can provide the reasons for Berleant's neglect of the theories of taste, reasons Berleant fails to provide himself.

As an explanation of how we know that we are having aesthetic experience, empirical explanations, as we have seen, generally resort to two related explanations. The first is an appeal to a causal theory of aesthetic experience, where the aesthetic qualities that inhere in aesthetic objects are the source of distinct kinds of stimuli. On this view, mind independent aesthetic qualities cause aesthetic experiences for us. The second position involves a faculty of the mind, the faculty of taste for

[56]The theory of taste referred to here is that developed by Hume in his "Of the Standard of Taste," in Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology, eds. George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 592-606, and George Dickie, Art and the Aesthetic (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). Both receive their empirical footings from Locke. Dickie summarizes general traits of all theories of taste into five parts. 1. *Perception* whereby the world is known. 2. The *faculty of taste* which is the internal sense. 3. The *mental product* of the faculty of taste. 4. The *kind of object* to which the faculty of taste responds in perception. 5. Lastly, the *judgement of taste*, which is a reaction in virtue of the object causing pleasure. See George Dickie Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology, eds. George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), p. 566.

Hume, which is stimulated by certain perceptions. The attribution of a faculty of mind to the perception of aesthetic phenomena not only supports a theory of passive perception; the presence of a distinct faculty also explains how aesthetic experience is known to be aesthetic. Furthermore, a faculty of taste complements the idea that there could be aesthetic qualities in objects which would act upon this faculty.

Only in two of his more recent works does Berleant suggest why traditional forms of empiricism are unfit responses to aesthetic attitude. In "Experience and Theory in Aesthetics," he remarks that in British empiricism, experience is considered to be the product of discrete sensations.

> Now such units of perception are sensory ones and it is from this that experience is said to have a subjective ground. Is not sensation something that can be traced to the mind? Is it not a personal, inner awareness, an effect caused by impinging causes from the world outside? [...] [I]t is clear that such an account of experience is neither descriptive nor simple. In fact, it pre-judges our experience by imposing on it a division between the human person and the world that, for all its initial plausibility, rests on a particular historical and cultural tradition, a tradition not shared in other times and places.[57]

These remarks are repeated, almost verbatim, in Art and Engagement, where Berleant is more explicit about the

[57]"Experience and Theory in Aesthetics," p. 95.

dualism of conscious mind and external world that underlies empiricism.[58]

Berleant cites three reasons for abandoning dualism. First, he claims that the Cartesian division between mind and world is excessively complicated. He thinks that Occamist rigor shows that the introduction of the subject in the empiricist account of experience not only begs the question about the relationship between subjects and objects, but that it also employs a cumbersome and unnecessary theoretical structure.[59] Second, a phenomenological methodology could offer a presuppositionless account of experience not based upon a subject/object dualism. This method would pursue the unity of experience instead of employing divisive distinctions between perceivers and what is perceived.[60] Third, Berleant says that "an argument from art" can be made in support of an anti-dualist aesthetics.[61] The contemporary arts themselves demonstrate the inadequacy of dualistic aesthetic theory wherein subjects appreciate art at a distance (psychical or physical). This argument from art, we saw in

[58]Art and Engagement, pp. 14-15. Notice that Berleant's objection to the dualism inherent in British empiricism, *mutatis mutandis*, also informs his objection against the rationalist influences in aesthetic attitude theory.
[59]"Experience and Theory in Aesthetics," p. 96.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid.

the first chapter, is the datalogical basis of Berleant's aesthetics of engagement.

Berleant's second point is of interest here. Traditional empiricist metaphysics evokes a dualism between subjects and objects, either by reference to a causal explanation of aesthetic stimuli which presupposes an external world, or by reference to a faculty of the mind responsible for aesthetic experiences, a move which focuses upon the subjectivity of experience. Empiricism, so construed, depends upon a theory of the world which Berleant thinks is out of step with our actual experiences. He raises the possibility of a phenomenological method which would approach the unity of experience as it stands unmediated by any particular world view. This phenomenological method is thus meant to be just as responsive to attitude theory as theories of taste since both depend upon the same dualism it challenges.[62]

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[62]In Chapter 1, Berleant's empirical program in The Aesthetic Field, was described as the basis for the aesthetics of engagement in the later Art and Engagement. We must now observe that Berleant's empiricism is not a traditional form of empiricism. Berleant's use of "empirical" does not reflect an established philosophical program. Instead, it is meant to be taken literally, reflecting the primacy of experience in living and theorizing. Berleant thus interchanges "experience" with "phenomena", "empirical" with "phenomenal," and "empirical" with "phenomenological." Viz. The Aesthetic Field, p. 10. Berleant means much less by these terms than might otherwise be thought; the terms have no theoretical import beyond their restricted reference to brute experience. However, as in the case of "art" and "aesthetic," the words like "empirical" and

Specifically, then, Berleant thinks that aesthetics must not elicit the metaphysical trappings of the distinction between perceiving subjects and perceived objects where one is considered to be ontologically discrete from the other. Berleant says that we must take aesthetic experience in all its immediacy and regard it not substantively, as if we were searching for its essential features, but rather as a matrix of common and related experiences.[63] The matrix of experience is the domain of responses associated with the appreciation of art or nature, and it is these experiences which are relevant to aesthetics.[64] This matrix, or aesthetic field as Berleant calls it, loosely defines aesthetic experience, which "transcends psychophysical and epistemological dualisms, for it is the condition of an engagement of perceiver and object in a unified relationship that is forcefully immediate and direct."[65]

"phenomenological" carry philosophical overtones from which Berleant should distinguish his more literal uses.

[63]The Aesthetic Field, p. 94.

[64]Ibid, p. 95.

[65]Ibid, p. 150. See also Arnold Berleant, "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," Dialectics and Humanism, 15:1 (1988), p. 105: "Engagement opens those arts to an involvement that transcends the usual limits of subject and object, encouraging a mutuality of participation in the aesthetic situation that extends both object and perceiver in a unified domain."

An aesthetics of engagement, then, is an aesthetics that describes the fundamental unity of perceivers and aesthetic objects. In fact, it is only upon reflection that we make a distinction between ourselves and what we perceive. Experience itself betrays no such distinction. As Berleant says, "instead of overcoming the separateness of phenomena and the division of the world into what is subjective and what objective, this unity of aesthetic experience precedes that division."[66] The other feature of the unity of aesthetic perception which is not immediately apparent is that aesthetic perception forms an experiential unity with other modes of perception. It is as if aesthetic experience is part of a larger spectrum of experience, so that it differs from other modes of perception "by being quantitatively more intense,"[67] or, Berleant says, in its emphasis on "intrinsic qualities and lived experience."[68] The unity of aesthetic experience thus takes two forms: on the one hand, there is a perceptual unity between subjects

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[66]The Aesthetic Field, p. 150.
[67]Ibid, p. 81.
[68]Art and Engagement, p. 25. In the "Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," Berleant combines these notions somewhat: "An aesthetic quality thus suffuses all experience, sometimes coming to the fore and taking precedence over other factors in experience." (p. 104)

and objects, whereas on the other hand, aesthetic experience is continuous with other forms of experience.[69]

In answer to rationalist or empiricist dualisms, the aesthetics of engagement expresses a unified aesthetic field in which no one of the principle factors (appreciative, material, creative or performative) is separable from the others. Yet there is, nonetheless, an identifiable perceptual mode called aesthetic experience which pervades and delimits this experiential matrix. For Berleant, aesthetic experience is "apprehended immediately and unreflectively."[70] It is, he says, perceived directly as such before we have "deliberately filtered our experience through the formative influence of the conscious intellect."[71] Aesthetic experience is immediate, pure, direct and pre-reflective.

6. Aesthetic Experience and the Concept of Aesthetic Experience.

We noted in Section 2 that Berleant refuses to define "art" or "aesthetic object." He also fails to

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[69]Other aspects of the unity of experience Berleant mentions include the continuity of aesthetic objects with other objects as part of a experiential situation ("The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," p. 201), the continuity between humans and their environment ("The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics," p. 188; "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," p. 105).

[70]Art and Engagement, p. 92.

[71]Ibid, p. 191.

characterize aesthetic experience. Berleant's motivation for avoiding all definitions is that he thinks that the perceptual basis of aesthetics should be unmediated by theoretical determinations. But in his attempt to recapture the etymological sense of *aesthesis*, Berleant over emphasizes the distinction between perceptual experience and cognition. The distinction itself is a tendentious dualism between our perception and our analysis of our perception, and yet Berleant insists upon the logical and temporal priority of experience over analysis. It must be asked, however, if such a distinction is tenable, and if it is a desirable position in aesthetics. The first question will be answered immediately below; the second will be treated in the next chapter.

If experience is an immediate continuous wash that precedes reflective understanding, then it is difficult to understand how Berleant is able to distinguish one perceptual mode from another. An unmediated unity of experience means that experience is undifferentiated. But if it is undifferentiated, what sense can be attributed to "aesthetic?" Because Berleant lacks a definition of "aesthetic," he has no way of expressing the nature of such experience. If "aesthetic" experience means something, then one must be able to state how it differs from other modes of

experience. Invoking a distinction between aesthetic and practical perception requires a conceptual act. It is this conceptual act which Berleant is loath to make, or rather, is loath to admit he makes.

The use of "aesthetic" to pick out a discrete mode of experience follows the pattern of all term usage. In language or in thought, we must know when it is appropriate to use one description rather than another. In order to say or think that we are having an aesthetic experience, we must know what we mean when we say that it is aesthetic in character. That is, we must be able to express what is unique about aesthetic experience on the one hand, while being able to say why we know it from emotional experiences on the other hand. In addition, where our aesthetic and practical modes of experience overlap, as in the case of architecture, we must be able to make intelligible how a singular experiential occasion can have two identifiable traits.

Berleant speaks as if aesthetic experience is experienced as such. That is, he frequently makes remarks to the effect that experiencing *that* something is aesthetic is to experience something *as* aesthetic. Yet to speak of a preconceptual aesthetic experience in this way seems to beg the question about the source of our experience in an

aesthetic object. In effect, this manner of speaking tacitly attributes aesthetic qualities, the differentia of our experience, to some causal source. If we ignore, for the moment, the fact that Berleant does not hold such a causal account, it can be pointed out that the appeal to direct aesthetic experience does not preserve Berleant's distinction between the aesthetic and the conceptual. This approach demands that we recognize the aesthetic as such before it is known as aesthetic experience. But this is unintelligible. It would require that we could get back behind our knowledge and concepts to an experience which is not supposed to be ordered, and yet is sufficiently ordered that we know it as aesthetic experience. Clearly, aesthetic experience must be conceptually mediated if it is to be known as such.

Despite whatever failings at aesthetic attitude theory and taste theories may have because of their dualist metaphysics, they are more coherent explanations of our ability to meaningfully refer to aesthetic experience as a distinct perceptual mode. Moreover, because of the close relationship between the mind and the world of experience in aesthetic attitude theory, it especially is theoretically better equipped to explain how aesthetic theory relates to the experiences it is responsible for. Berleant's

aesthetics of engagement is untenable because it lacks the theoretical structure necessary to explain the existence of the aesthetic experience.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Introduction.

In the last chapter, it was shown that Berleant's description of aesthetic experience does not provide the grounds for distinguishing aesthetic experience from any other kind of experience. Berleant resorts to a doctrine of immediate aesthetic perception, one which commits him to a distinction between perception and analysis, and where perception logically and temporally precedes understanding. Berleant consistently maintains the distinction between aesthetic and other perceptual modes, a distinction which demands an understanding of the relevant differences between different modes of perceptual experience. Aesthetic theories typically account for these experiential differences in two main ways. On the one hand, they may turn to analyses of the objects (material and immaterial alike) of aesthetic perception in the hopes that the objects themselves will indicate the necessary if not the sufficient conditions for something to be a work of art or an aesthetic object. On the other hand, aestheticians may reflect upon aesthetic experience itself, again with the expectation that the unique character of such experience will provide clues regarding its defining conditions. Aesthetic experience is

generally pursued either in terms of a theory of taste or in terms of aesthetic attitude theory.

Berleant's explicit rejection of an aesthetic attitude forecloses on all appeals to rationalist explanations of how aesthetic experience is known as such where a contribution of the mind is believed responsible for the identification of aesthetic experience. Alternatively, Berleant's implicit attack against standard empirical accounts in aesthetics, couched in the critique of dualist metaphysics, rules out causal explanations and faculties of taste. Since his attack against traditional aesthetics takes exception to object-oriented aesthetics as well as the special attention traditionally awarded to art, Berleant's break with traditional methods in aesthetics is complete.

In Chapter 2 Section 6, it was suggested that the description of immediate aesthetic experiences is untenable because the isolation of the aesthetic as a distinct perceptual mode is not cognitively grounded. Without some organizing principle of thought, Berleant cannot specify one form of experience from another. In order to allay these doubts, Berleant must explain the basis in perception, phenomenologically, or ontologically, for differentiating perceptual modes. That is, he must provide a theory of aesthetic experience. A theory of aesthetic experience is

important for Berleant not only for the reasons just mentioned, it is also the case that his metatheoretical project, his aesthetics of engagement, requires a well-founded notion of aesthetic experience.

The aesthetics of engagement is described as a metatheory of aesthetics for two reasons. First, it depends upon the metatheoretical critique of the tradition of aesthetics found mostly in The Aesthetic Field,[1] in "The Historicity of Aesthetics - I & II"[2] and the papers which follow.[3] With respect to The Aesthetic Field, as we saw in Chapter 1, this critique is directed to the so-called "surrogate theories" of art, whereas in the articles, Berleant challenges the aesthetic attitude. In each case, theories of art and the aesthetic are challenged for methodological reasons, making engagement a metatheoretical notion. Second, the aesthetics of engagement does not satisfy questions about the nature of art, the aesthetic,

[1]Arnold Berleant, The Aesthetic Field (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1970).
[2]Arnold Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - I," The British Journal of Aesthetics, 26:2 (Spring 1986), pp. 101-111, and Arnold Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics - II," The British Journal of Aesthetics, 26:3 (Summer 1986), pp. 195-203.
[3]See, for example, Arnold Berleant, "Experience and Theory in Aesthetics," in Possibility of Aesthetic Experience, ed. M. H. Mitias (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), pp. 91-106, and Arnold Berleant, "The Eighteenth Century Assumptions of Analytic Aesthetics," in History and Anti-History in Philosophy, eds. T. Z. Lavine and V. Tejera (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), pp. 256-47.

and aesthetic experience - features which are standard to aesthetic theories. Rather, it nestles aesthetic experience into a larger doctrine of perceptual engagement, a metatheory whose compass exceeds the traditionally limited domain surveyed by aesthetics.

In this chapter, we shall explore one avenue of Berleant's metatheoretical position, observing as we proceed the consequences of his polemic against aesthetic theories. In Sections 2 and 3, Berleant's views on the unity of aesthetic perception and utility in architecture will be explored. In Sections 4 and 5, we will turn to examine the phenomenological nature of our aesthetic experience, placing special emphasis on the way that we experience literature. In the last section, it will be shown that in light of our phenomenological analysis of aesthetic experience, Berleant's expression of the continuity of aesthetic experience with practical activity in architecture has consequences sufficiently severe that it cannot reasonably be held. Here, the aesthetic attitude again plays a central role in the defense of our basic understanding of aesthetic experience.

2. Perceptual Unity and Architecture.

In "Aesthetic Function,"[4] Berleant discusses the notion of function in art. The function of art is described not so much in terms of utility, but is rather considered as a "description of the role of art in the full context of human activity."[5] Berleant begins by noting that the machine, considered to be paradigmatic of function and not of the aesthetic, is nonetheless pervasive in art. It can be found in art such as clocks, in machine parts as art, and in the products of machines as the material for art. The modern arts are thus reflective of the industrial age. Berleant is fascinated by the incorporation of the machine into the artistic (or vice versa) because he thinks it affords the fusion of the aesthetic and functional. "What is significant about all this is that mechanical function possesses a double appeal: It is eminently practical yet at the same time pleasing in its own right."[6]

Berleant claims that if the legitimacy of disinterested perception can be questioned, then interested (which is to say practical) aesthetic perception seems to be a credible perceptual mode. Put differently, in the absence

[4]Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetic Function," in Phenomenology and Natural Existence ed. Dale Riepe (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1973), pp. 183-193.
[5]Ibid, p. 184.
[6]Ibid, p. 186.

of a distinction between the fine arts which are meant to be contemplated disinterestedly, and the practical arts, which are appreciated for non-aesthetic reasons, there is no theoretical basis for denigrating the practical arts. Furthermore, Berleant holds that there is always an element of the practical in what has been considered fine art, since no such artistic creation is made without the skill of the artist. With recent art he observes, diverse skills have suffused art, witnessed by the presence of journalistic and illustrative practices in a variety of art forms.[7]

Nowhere is the fusion of the practical with the aesthetic fulfilled more than in architecture. As Berleant remarks, "the most outstanding instance of the creative amalgam of the practical and the aesthetic lies in architecture, where the function of the one is coextensive with the achievement of the other."[8] The perfection of a building is, on the one hand, its "complete utility," yet on the other hand, the building's well-functioning is also the measure of its "artistic success." "With the successful attainment of its practical function, architecture achieves its fullest artistic success."[9]

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[7]Ibid, p. 189.
[8]Ibid, p. 190.
[9]Ibid.

Functional and artistic success do not end with the building. In "Aesthetic Function," as well as in the later "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm,"[10] Berleant stresses that architecture is the starting point for the perceptual continuity of our environment. Functionally speaking, a building must suit its environment in its structural features, and it must also complement the practical possibilities and limitations set by its environment. Buildings are thus conditioned by their surroundings. But buildings are also environments themselves. Berleant does not hold a strict distinction between buildings and their environments. On the contrary, he holds that ecological architecture shows that buildings and their sites interact with one another to the extent that any sense of their division is overcome. Our practical engagement with our environment therefore extends uninterrupted from the building to the out of doors.

This practical continuity of the building and its environment is paralleled by a perceptual continuity between buildings and their environments. This is the main thrust of "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," where Berleant stresses that our perceptual experience of

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[10]Arnold Berleant, "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," in Dialectics and Humanism, 15:1 (1988), pp. 96-106.

architecture begins with the building and ends with the recognition that buildings and their sites are perceptually continuous. Essentially, this means that the environs of a building is perceptually extended from it.[11]

What is paradigmatic about our experience of the environment is that in the combination of the perceptual and the practical continuity of buildings and their environments, our perceptual and practical experience itself is revealed to be coextensive with the environment. In "Aesthetic Function," Berleant stresses the practical aspect, remarking that the "architectural environment illustrates at the same time how the mechanical function of a building and the organic function of the human body are absorbed and synthesized by the practical function."[12] Our response to our environment is primarily somatic, Berleant says, which means that our perceptual involvement with the world stems from a common spatiality.[13] The human body is the source of perceptual and practical activity, activities which coalesce in our interaction with architectural environments.

Berleant is clearly developing many related themes simultaneously. There is a sense in which architecture is

[11]Ibid, p. 102.
[12]"Aesthetic Function," p. 190.
[13]"The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," pp. 98 & 101.

suggestive of our active nature, stressing that we have involvements in the world. Or perhaps more precisely, that our relationship with our environment, in or out of doors, is participatory rather than contemplative. Berleant suggests that we can recognize the "human environment as a continuity of person and place, as a unity of action and perception that is mutual and reciprocal."[14] This continuity of persons with the environment is thematically related to Berleant's emphasis on the somatic and the sensual in the use and appreciation of architecture.

However, the theme to be emphasized here concerns the "mechanical and industrial features"[15] of architecture. These are of particular significance because the practical function of architecture delimits a "context of interrelation and dependence where art object and aesthetic subject, engaging in a creative exchange, are functionally inseparable."[16] The creative exchange is an aesthetic exchange, but the functional inseparability of people with architecture demonstrates that the practical and the aesthetic aspects are co-extensive and co-constituting.

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[14]Arnold Berleant, Art and Engagement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 90.
[15]"Aesthetic Function," p. 191.
[16]Ibid.

Berleant remarks that

> [w]hen an office building, a school, or a house becomes a structural environment within which we can carry on with the fullest ease the kind of activities for which it was designed, there occurs a beauty of operation which is at the same time a beauty of living.[17]

Berleant's label for the nexus of the practical and the aesthetic is "humanistic functioning,"[18] a term intended to first emphasize that in our practical relations with the world, the object and the perceiver are merged in practice, and second, that practice involves a perceptual merger of the object and the perceiver as well. The continuity between the perceiver and the object in experience justifies in Berleant's mind the close association of the practical and the aesthetic, and grounds the notion of aesthetic function in architecture.

3. Aesthetic Function.

It should be apparent by now that Berleant's objective in seeking the paradigm case of aesthetic experience is motivated by the desire to overcome the traditional view that separates practical interest from aesthetic appreciation. Accounts of disinterested appreciation, whether formulated by Shaftesbury, Kant,

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[17]Ibid, p. 190.
[18]Ibid, pp. 191-192.

Bullough or Stolnitz, always stipulate from the start that practical interests are forbidden in the correct appreciative attitude. Much of Berleant's critical work is dedicated to demonstrating that disinterested appreciation is not adequate to art. However, Berleant realizes that a critique of traditional practices are only truly compelling if the criticism is shown to open a new way. The complete critique of disinterestedness therefore requires the demonstration that interested appreciation, in the sense that Berleant means, is intelligible.[19]

Among the other arts discussed in Art and Engagement, architecture is special because it demonstrates the futility of disinterested appreciation, strongly suggesting instead a participatory mode of synaesthetic perception. It is not as if the other arts are not equally compelling in this regard, it is just that architecture serves this task very well. It also has two other didactic functions. The first, as we have just seen, is the idea that the practical and the aesthetic in architecture are

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[19]The reader will remember that for Stolnitz, interestedness in aesthetic attention signifies the positive or sympathetic attention directed towards the object. Interestedness in this sense is meant to explain how we can be attention can be absorbing without being practically interested. Berleant, on the other hand, is literal-minded in his rejection of disinterested appreciation, intending instead that the aesthetic engagement is co-extensive with our practical engagement in the world.

intimately related. This is a not a new suggestion. Echoes of it can be heard in the past, such as Louis Sullivan's famous dictum that "form follows function," but Berleant intends it as a major premise in his argument because it stands in direct opposition to disinterested appreciation. The second consideration here is that architecture, not traditionally considered a fine art, is endorsed by Berleant's belief that our architectural, or more broadly speaking, our environmental engagements reveal the paradigm of aesthetic experience. Locating the paradigm of aesthetic experience in an activity normally mariginalized by the advocates of the fine arts announces the capacity of an aesthetics of engagement to account for an entire artistic practice not given its due by aesthetic attitude theories. Of course, this harkens back to Berleant's argument from art, where disinterested appreciation was deemed impotent so far as the contemporary arts are concerned. It is perhaps notable that in his efforts, Berleant exceeds his own expectations by answering for an entire discipline, and not particular works.

Clearly then, Berleant's aesthetics of engagement depends heavily, both for the critique and the positive theory, on the success of the remarks he makes about aesthetic function in architecture. We must turn a critical

eye on the marriage of the aesthetic and the practical in architecture to see if it is as happy as Berleant claims. We will proceed by examining a recent defense of aesthetic attitude theory, one which, incidentally, takes a phenomenological approach.

4. A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience.

In his "The Aesthetic Experience and the 'Truth' of Art,"[20] Jeff Mitscherling defends the aesthetic attitude against George Dickie.[21] Mitscherling observes Dickie's complaint to be that the use of Bullough's term "psychical distance"[22] is an appeal to a non-existent state of consciousness. Psychical distance is Bullough's highly metaphorical term for disinterestedness, a term whose contrary signifies for Dickie no more than a form of inattention. For Dickie, the aesthetic attitude, disinterestedness, and here, psychical distance are all basically hooey: the phenomena these terms are intended to cover are not perceptual, they are motivational or

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[20]Jeff Mitscherling, "The Aesthetic Experience and the 'Truth' of Art," British Journal of Aesthetics, 28:1 (Winter 1988), pp. 28-39.
[21]George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," in Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology, eds. George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 800-815.
[22]Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Esthetic Principle," British Journal of Psychology, 5 (1913), pp. 87-118.

intentional.[23] Distinctions in our attention are the result of our motivations for attending to something in the first place. For Dickie, there is no perceptual difference in the way we listen to a piece of music if we are studying for a music exam or if we are merely relaxing with the stereo on: "'There is only one way to *listen* to (to attend to) music.'"[24] As a result, Dickie says that no special attitude is picked out by disinterestedness. On the contrary, it only explains a motivation for (or for not) paying attention to music.[25]

Mitscherling holds that a "phenomenological attitude-theorist"[26] such as himself must reject Dickie's position because denying the existence of distance (disinterestedness) forces the conclusion that fictional objects are just as real as real things. Mitscherling observes that if disinterested attention is not distinguished from other forms of attention, then we must believe that for children attending a performance of "Peter Pan" "their enthusiastic clapping indicates that they regard themselves as active participants in that world."[27] But as much as one may sympathize with poor Tinkerbell, it would be

[23]Mitscherling, p. 30.
[24]George Dickie, as quoted in Mitscherling, p. 30.
[25]Mitscherling, p. 30.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid.

a mistake, Mitscherling thinks, to ever believe that the world of "Peter Pan" is a world in which we could have any kind of power. As he says,

> Involvement, and 'belief' in that world and its inhabitants, there undeniably was, but an interested involvement and an interested belief that could never become complete, owing precisely to the *distance* between Tinkerbell's world and my own.[28]

There always exists a distance between this world, and the "world" of the play, and this distance is reflected in the aesthetic attitude.

Maintaining Dickie's position commits us to the view that the realm of represented objects is not the realm of aesthetic objects, Mitscherling tells us. It is, on the contrary, the realm of real objects. That is, unless we distance ourselves, aesthetic experience becomes, in fact, existential experience.[29] Or, more explicitly, the world represented by the text "ceases to be an object of our consciousness, becoming instead the world of our consciousness of objects."[30] This is to say that what makes an object aesthetic rather than existential would disappear without distance. A work of art may indeed be an existent object, like a novel or sculpture, but what makes it possible to attend to it as a work of art and not just

[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid, p. 31.
[30]Ibid.

another mundane object is distance. For Mitscherling, distance is the necessary condition in the realization that the world of a work of art is not coextensive with ours. Without distance, we would try to enter into the "irreal" world of a novel or play, falsely thinking that we would have some potency there. But since we only have potency in this (objective) world, it becomes apparent that the status of the events, characters, etc. are in some way separate from us. If these are to be regarded as aesthetic objects, then some kind of distance between them and us must be preserved.[31]

Having thus distinguished experiencing aesthetically from experiencing existentially, Mitscherling goes on to

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[31]We saw that Dickie thinks that there is neither any perceptual basis for disinterested attention nor does the presence of disinterestedness constitute grounds for distinguishing aesthetic experience from non-aesthetic experience. Mitscherling is sympathetic to Dickie's desire to dispense with disinterestedness, but does not approve of Dickie's method for doing so. Instead, Mitscherling offers an account of the "intentional structure of an act of attending to" (p. 32) which he regards as purposeful. This is intended to show that all attention is purposeful. Mitscherling's position is flawed, however, because it depends upon taking disinterested to mean "not-interested." As Stolnitz has pointed out, sympathetic, disinterested attention is purposeful in the sense that we may be very interested in the object of our attention. Such attention only requires that we suspend our practical projects when we attend to the object - a kind of distancing. Mitscherling's literal take on "disinterestedness" is not sensitive to the history of this term, and is counter-productive, since as we shall see, the suspension of practical purpose (but not of intentional purpose) is in strict accordance with Mitscherling's thesis that the irreality of aesthetic objects suppresses the existential experience of them, and hence, the practical use of them. See Chapter 2, Section 3.

characterize aesthetic experience, hoping that in the process it will be shown just how obviously it differs from other kinds of experience. He begins by suggesting three ways that attention can be paid to Joyce's Ulysses. The first is the use of Ulysses for its perceived status by a desperate bachelor seeking to impress a date. The bachelor hopes that by leaving the book in a strategic place, it will give its owner (who is not its reader) an air of intellectualism or culture. Mitscherling concludes that such attention to Ulysses is not aesthetic:

> If we were following Adorno, we might call it the 'attitude of the consumer': I am regarding Ulysses as a mere 'commodity', an 'impressive-looking' work of art. Such an attitude does not facilitate an aesthetic experience of Ulysses.[32]

The second mode of attention concerns young Mitscherling using the only passage of Ulysses he has read for the purposes of answering an undergraduate essay assignment the night before it is due. Our hero has a job to do, and he searches in Ulysses for the material to complete it. Following Ingarden, Prof. Mitscherling reflects that he was attending to Ulysses with an "inquiring attitude," a view in which the text is regarded for its

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[32]Mitscherling, p. 33.

instructive value, not its aesthetic value.[33] Here again, the text is not experienced aesthetically.

The third case of attention concerns Judge Woolsey's 1933 decision to lift the censorship ban on Ulysses in the United States. In order to reach his judgement, Mitscherling says Woolsey had first to decide if Ulysses was obscene, and then second, to judge its merits as a work of art.[34] Mitscherling admits that Woolsey probably had to put himself in the inquiring mode to answer (presumably) the first question. The second question, however, could only be answered if Woolsey allowed himself to become an "aesthetically disposed reader," meaning, in effect that he had to

> allow the work to engage him in an experience to which, after the cessation of that experience, he could later turn in his attempt to determine the effect the work had on him during the time that he was engaged in that experience. In a word, [...] Woolsey had to immerse himself in the *truth* of that work of art.[35]

In becoming an aesthetically disposed reader, Woolsey became interested in the world of Ulysses, which means that he was willing to engage the work on its own terms.

Mitscherling claims that Ulysses is not obscene because its readers can distance themselves from the events

[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid.

and ideas portrayed, no matter how vulgar these may be. The implication is that if it were obscene, or if it were an aphrodisiac, we would have to experience it existentially, which is to say that the representations in Ulysses would have to become part of our life-world. But since they are representations belonging to another world, that of the text, distance is preserved, and we experience aesthetically. Mitscherling emphasizes this point by noting that if distance collapsed, and the events portrayed were experienced existentially, then we would feel revulsion and would be repelled by the more vulgar elements of Ulysses, just as we would in real life. As he says, "[i]n our real world, these negative qualities have an existential value, and we avoid them because we have an existential interest in [avoiding] them." In reading the text, this does not happen. Rather, despite whatever displeasure we may have reading about such things, we are compelled to read on because

> in the irreal world of the work we have an aesthetic interest in these same qualities, and we thus recognize them as possessing aesthetic value, a value that is determined with respect to the world of the aesthetic object as a whole, which...first arises in the aesthetic experience.[36]

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[36]Ibid.

Because we do not respond to the events of Ulysses existentially, by fleeing in the face of it or by taking it up as a possibility for our own being, Mitscherling concludes that we must be able to distinguish, that is, distance, the literary world from our own world. Distance, then, is the condition of for the possibility of aesthetic, over against existential, experience.

Mitscherling's account of the aesthetic attitude required for aesthetic experience squares well with traditional accounts of aesthetic attitude because of his insistence that the work of art must be taken on its own terms. In other words, a proper attitude enables us to appreciate the features intrinsic to the work of art.

> We can be aesthetically interested in a work only if we are able to understand the world it wants us to see in it (or *through* it), and we can understand that world only if we allow it to unfold itself before us in whatever manner it will. ...[W]e must allow it the freedom to do as it will; that is, we must *distance* it.[37]

We must be, as in the case of Stolnitz's disinterested, sympathetic attention, intensely interested in the world of the work of art, without seeing it as the extended domain of our own projects.

What is different about Mitscherling's account is that he casts the aesthetic attitude in phenomenological

[37]Ibid, p. 36.

terms. He appeals not to the usual rationalist metaphysics which grounds most attitude theories, but instead examines aesthetic experience in simple phenomenological terms. This allows him to speak freely about the world that art objects open (without becoming ensnared in the usual metaphysical trappings of fictitious objects and the like), and invites him to speak of the truth of art in its ability to "unfold its world before us."[38] Moreover, the world of a text is not reduced to representation of what might be called the real world. It stands on its own, unique in our experience.

5. The World of the Text.

Mitscherling's novel defense of the aesthetic attitude furnishes us with a method for distinguishing existential from aesthetic experience. It would now be instructive, before returning to Berleant, to consider in greater detail the structure of the world of the text. Mitscherling is interested in pursuing the truth of a work of art which he maintains is disclosed in aesthetic experience. He locates the truth of art not in the world of practical activity, nor in the irreal world of the work of art, but rather in the aesthetic experience itself as experience. That is, the truth of art is the condition for

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[38]Ibid.

the possibility of aesthetic experience, a potentiality for what Mitscherling calls "aesthetic understanding."[39] This understanding, once actualized in the act of appreciating a work of art, is conditioned by the Gadamerian "effective historical consciousness," or more specifically in this case, "aesthetic consciousness."[40] Mitscherling notes that for Gadamer, historical consciousness means "'that understanding is never truly subjective behaviour toward a given "object," but towards its effective history - the history of its influence; in other words understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.'"[41] Consequently, aesthetic understanding is never purely a subjective matter. It proceeds from the "being of the world of the work *qua* aesthetic object, an object and a world that first come into being in our concretinization, our understanding or interpretation of them."[42]

Mitscherling's account of the truth of art is primarily motivated by ontological considerations. Indeed, his claim is that we can experience aesthetically, that is, understand a work of art, only if we begin with the ontology of the work of the art. This, as we have seen, involves

[39]Ibid, p. 37.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1975), p. *xii*, as quoted in Mitscherling, op. cit., p. 37.
[42]Mitscherling, p. 37.

entering into the world of the work, just as Judge Woolsey had to immerse himself in the world of the Mulligans. We may now extend the discussion of our aesthetic experience of the world of the text by considering some of Ricoeur's observations about the nature of the textual world.

In Ricoeur's "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text,"[43] Ricoeur investigates the possibility that the object of the human sciences resembles a text, and consequently considers the adoption of a hermeneutical methodology for them. Ricoeur's development of a text-interpretive paradigm is of chief interest here. Ricoeur attempts to transcend Dilthey's division between explanation and understanding by offering a dialectical reading of the two.[44] In the second figure of the dialectic, "From explanation to understanding," Ricoeur examines the process whereby we move from a superficial to a deep understanding of a text.

All interpretation of texts results from the fact that the referential function of texts exceeds "the mere ostensive designation of the situation common to both speaker and hearer in the dialogical situation."[45] Two

[43]Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 197-221.
[44]Ibid, p. 209.
[45]Ibid, p. 215.

possibilities thus arise in interpretation. First, we can adopt the "instructive" attitude, mentioned above. If we do this, we would be concerned to elicit the structure of the text in the manner set out by the structuralists, Saussure, Dilthey and Levi-Strauss. On this view, texts are read as if they are cut off from their ostensive reference, and are regarded as totalities or systems of signifiers that seemingly stand without signifieds. In other words, the text of the structuralist is world-less; meaning is suspended for the sake of a systematic reading.

Structural analyses are studies of the system of language, and in the case of Levi-Strauss, analysis seeks to pattern the narrated myth. Ricoeur notes that structuralist readings are concerned with language as a whole, as a self-enclosed system. Accordingly, "the text no longer has an outside, it has only an inside."[46] Reduced to its structural invariants, these texts are not very meaningful because their object, language itself, is worldless. Language is what grants the possibility of world making by way of reference making in dialogical situations.[47] On the other hand, Ricoeur observes that structural analyses do

[46]Ibid, p. 216.
[47]Ibid, p. 216. See also, Paul Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 145-164.

develop a kind of "surface semantics" in which the function of the myth is disclosed.[48] Ricoeur thinks that such surface semantics, instructive as they may be, hint at the more profound function of myths which lies in their ultimate reference to the human condition.[49]

The explanation of the structure of the narrative function of a myth must therefore give way to an understanding of the meaning of the myth or a text in general. For Ricoeur, deep interpretation of a text is the disclosure of the non-ostensive references of the text, that is, what the text is about.[50] This meaning is not hidden away in the text, and it is certainly not buried their by authorial intentions. On the contrary, the meaning of the text precedes the work, it is "disclosed in front of it."[51] What Ricoeur means is that what is understood in a text is the world that is created by the text. This world opened by

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[48]Ibid, p. 217.
[49]Ibid. The meaningfulness of a myth lies in its mediation of "meaningful oppositions concerning birth and death, blindness and lucidity, sexuality and truth." (p. 217) These are some of the ostensive referents of myths. At the same time, however, myths, or any other text for that matter, always implicate their readers in the dialogical relationship of reading. Reading a text is thus always meaningfully self-referential. See Paul Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," trans. Kathleen McLauglin in Philosophy in France Today, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 175-197, especially Section 3.
[50]"The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," p. 218.
[51]Ibid.

the text, and the references therein, is held "at a *distance* from the *world* articulated by everyday language"[52] where references are generally ostensive and are "shown" in speech.

Ricoeur says that the world of the text is not opened up by the ostensive references that in one way or another make up the "situation" of the text. Instead, the world of the text has more important implications for our being, since it

> designates the non-situational references which outlive the effacement of the first [the situational] and which henceforth are offered as possible modes of being, as symbolic dimensions of our being-in-the-world.[53]

The ostensive references to our lived situation that are made in everyday dialogue can no doubt be included in a text, but it is the "enlargement" of the world through the meaningful use of non-ostensive references which enlarges the text beyond a mere map of our situation. Texts have the unique ability of suggesting a place in which we could live, but do not live. This is what makes them so compelling - they appear possible, and yet are always kept at a distance from us.[54] This is precisely their irreality - they are

[52]Paul Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-128.
[53]Ibid, p. 202.
[54]"Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 112.

domains in which it would appear that we could project our "ownmost possibilities," and yet they are forever elusive. Suffice it to say that art, more than anything else, is better able to construct and sustain these irreal worlds. Texts (by which we are not restricting ourselves to literature) which open up such worlds may therefore be considered works of art, opening as they do, the possibilities for (aesthetic) experience.

6. Aesthetic Function and the World of the Text.

In Chapter 2, we saw that Berleant does not describe the nature of aesthetic experience by way of a definition or any other means. He assumes that aesthetic experience is immediately known to us as such, and that any attempt to theorize about the conditions of it leads one inexorably to set *a priori* criteria for aesthetic experience. It was objected that in the absence of criteria for distinguishing the features salient to one form of experience and not another, there are no grounds for supposing a distinction between different experiential modes. Aesthetic experience cannot come conceptually unmediated because in the very act of recognizing aesthetic experience as such, we set it off from other experiences by means of a conceptual distinction. Berleant nonetheless invokes "aesthetic" as a qualifying

mark of some a distinct kind of experience, a move which is unwarranted and unjustifiable in his scheme. It cannot be held otherwise that the deployment and dependence upon a term, regarded even by Berleant to be so central to our experience, only to have it remain ineffable at all costs is wholly unsatisfactory. What is more, and to make matters worse, Berleant is committed to a metatheoretical position which prohibits all attempts to delimit kinds of experience. As already suggested, this is enough to cast serious doubt on the intelligibility and stability of Berleant's aesthetics of engagement.

These difficulties are readily recognized as belonging to the province of aesthetic theory because they concern the front line arguments about the nature and scope of aesthetic experience in its manifold relations to other experience, art, and human existence. It is normally expected of aesthetic theory that it provide something like a description of our aesthetic experience or our experience of art, if not going further to explain how such experience is possible. But we have noticed that Berleant's aesthetics quickly shifts from a critique of aesthetic theory to a metatheoretical account of the unity of experience and its implications for the history of aesthetic theory.

One of the major objectives of Berleant's metatheory is to demonstrate the continuity between different experiential modes. This is motivated by Berleant's view that traditional accounts of aesthetic experience have always resulted in unfortunate ontological distinctions, such as between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, as a result of philosophical influences. Berleant's belief is that if an aesthetics of engagement can show that experience is an *undifferentiated continuum*, then obstructive ontological distinctions disappear. It is in this light that the proof of the perceptual unity of aesthetic and practical experience in architecture becomes all important. If practical and aesthetic experience can be regarded as coextensive, even if only to *some degree*, then Berleant would succeed in overcoming disinterested aesthetic attention.

Disinterested aesthetic attention is the target of Berleant's claims about the unity of perception. Above all, Berleant is interested in showing that distanced contemplation is an unsuccessful and anachronistic model of aesthetic appreciation. Against a reflective, mindful aesthetic attitude, the aesthetics of engagement is meant to stress the proactive or interactive nature of our aesthetic

experience. Against an aesthetic theory, Berleant offers a metatheory of aesthetic action.

We shall now observe the dire consequences of the notion of aesthetic function as the logical outgrowth of Berleant's unity of perception. The merger of aesthetic experience and practical purpose in architecture is paradigmatic of all aesthetic experience, for the reasons outlined above. If paradigmatic of all aesthetic experience, aesthetic function would be well suited to literature, film, dance, etc. That is, in film or in literature, our aesthetic and practical experience coalesce. For architecture, the combination of "form and function," or the aesthetic and the practical seems reasonable enough at first glance; a successful architectural undertaking ends in the creation of a functional and aesthetically pleasing structure. A building is an environment which houses both an aesthetic experience and practical activity.

But do literature or film similarly house both aspects of the paradigm of aesthetic experience? Clearly no, for reasons we will now pursue. If it were the case that the aesthetic and the practical were coextensive in a novel, would it not be reasonable to suppose that, at any given time, we would be justified in anticipating this experiential unity from future encounters with novels? Or,

put differently, would it not be reasonable to expect that aesthetic and practical interests could be satisfied in reading? Let us reflect, for a moment, on the extent to which practical action[55] penetrates our interest in aesthetic experience.

Suppose Jones picks up a novel written by a writer famous for her magnificent turn of phrase, her adeptness with imagery, a writer who displays keen wit just as easily as she handles profound themes. Jones, if he knew something about the author and her position in the world of literature, would approach the novel with the expectation that an aesthetic experience may be had if he reads the novel. It is a unremarkable observation that in general our interest in reading literature is motivated out of aesthetic considerations. As for practical interests, we may be interested in a particular work or literature in general for ulterior motives. We may seek to educate ourselves, or to pass an English course. But these motivations are like the "instructive" attention paid to the text, and seem to operate outside of our engagement with literature.

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[55]Admittedly, "practical activity," remains ambiguous. On the one hand, it could mean that buildings provide the conditions for practical activity, or, on the other hand, that buildings themselves are used. The former suggests that we mediate our action through architectural structures, whereas the latter suggests a more direct working upon the upon the building as an end in itself.

For Berleant, all aesthetic experience is interactive in the sense that active contributions of perceivers complete aesthetic situations. For architecture, we complete a building by being active in it. Interacting with architecture requires doing something in it. In a novel, however, there is less of a sense that we can do anything, apart from fulfill our imagination. But even that lies, more properly, in the domain of the aesthetic than in the practical. A proper analogue of practical activity in architecture must be found in literature.

The sorts of examples that qualify are somewhat ludicrous. Suppose Jones, in reading the novel, is happily engaged in the fictitious realm of the characters, and finds the mood, the ideas and the images of the work to be aesthetically pleasing. Suddenly Jones finds that he is disturbed by the protagonist's decision to go on a trophy hunting expedition, and, convinced that the world would be a better place if people did not kill for sport, decides that he will intervene in the protagonist's plans. Jones is clearly motivated to do something practical in the situation of the novel. He feels he is justified in his intentions, and, already knowing a few relevant things about the protagonist, has devised a strategy to interrupt the hunting expedition.

Another slightly different example may be in order. Suppose Jones is reading a compelling story about a innocent person convicted of a killing who is facing the death penalty. The character is portrayed such that a tremendous amount of sympathy is generated for him. Jones is moved by the story, and stops reading half-way through because the idea that the innocent victim of justice will be executed is intolerable. In fact, Jones cannot stand it so much that he begins a nation-wide lobbying group to abolish the death penalty before finishing the book, thinking that it will save the wrongly-accused murderer.

In each case, Jones has a practical interest in the story in the sense that he believes that action on his part, either in the situation of the story, or within his own situation, will have a bearing on the rest of the story. But of course, we know that it is patently absurd to think that we could ever act such that our actions would have consequence for the development of the story. We cannot do anything practical in novel in the way that we do things in buildings.

"Aesthetic function" suggests that buildings are not just places in which practical activity merges with aesthetic surroundings, but that the building itself is what is used. The use of a feature of a building, then, like a

well placed stairway, reveals the aesthetic, interactive nature of buildings. But no feature of a novel can be used in this way. One cannot drink absinthe in the cafe with Van Gogh in a story about the painter, just as little as one can move the furniture about a fictitious room. It is equally impossible to use a nail that appears in a novel to hang a picture in my living room.

The belief that we can have practical influence in a novel is the result of thinking that the world opened up by the text is an extension of our own lived world. It depends upon the belief that the way in which we experience and interact with the objects and events of a fictitious world is continuous with the objects and events of a real world. But extending our practical interests into the literary world is only possible if the literary world is something to be experienced existentially. This is to say that all aspects of the literary situation would have to become objects of our situation, and potentially available for our projects.

They are not, however, and the belief that they could be stems from confusing the world of the text with this lived, concrete world. The fictitious realm is not separate from this world in the sense that it is unreal in comparison to this real world. On the contrary, the world

of the text is irreal. It is suggestive of possibilities that are not existent for us, but which could be imagined to be existent. Indeed, it is part of the lure of fiction that it present worlds that in some sense could have been if circumstances were different. Literature fascinates us because it presents existential possibilities for our own being, possibilities which we know we will never actually have to face existentially. As Ricoeur notes, "fictional discourse 'suspends' its first order referential function" to things which can be used and shown in our everyday situation, releasing as it does a "second order reference, where the world is manifested no longer as the totality of manipulable objects but as the horizon of our life and our project."[56]

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[56]"Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 112. If anything practical was to emerge from the world of the text, it is the recognition that human action itself is a text, and is subject, therefore to textual interpretation. As Ricoeur remarks in "The Model of the Text,"

> like a text, human action is an open work, the meaning of which is 'in suspense.' It is because it 'opens up' new references and receives fresh relevance from them, that human deeds are also waiting for fresh interpretations which decide their meaning. All significant events and deeds are, in this way, opened to this kind of practical interpretation through present *praxis*." (p. 208)

This hermeneutical observation is neither implied or entailed by Berleant's notion of aesthetic function.

Having seen that practical purposes are not co-extensive with the aesthetic experience of literature, let us now examine Berleant's notion of aesthetic function from another tack. If practical interests are co-extensive with aesthetic experience, then in some sense of other, we should be able to realize practical purposes on the occasion of an aesthetic experience. This much follows in principle from Berleant's remarks. The idea here is that an aesthetic experience of a building lends itself immediately to doing something in or with the building. As initially plausible as this may be for architecture, our aesthetic experience is not co-extensive with practical projects. Moreover, it is not a desirable position to recommend. The consequence of this view is that when we have an aesthetic experience, it is always a possibility, if not a necessity that some practical interest in the object of our experience may attend the aesthetic experience. For example, an aesthetic experience of a porcelain bowl is coextensive with our interest in serving salad in it. Or the appreciation of a painting is co-extensive with our interest in using it as a highly decorative bulletin board. It is trivial and uninteresting to point out that salad can be served in a rare bowl, that a painting can be a bulletin board, or that a sculpture can prop the door open. Art objects can have a

manifold of uses. Yet the use of a work of art for utilitarian ends does violence to our conception of what art is for, a conviction most are not going to readily give up.

In saying that the practical and the aesthetic are merged Berleant advocates a thorough-going technicization of art. Because it would require some theory about the nature of aesthetic experience, Berleant will not, and, as a result, cannot separate the aesthetic from the practical. All aesthetic experience, therefore, is indistinguishable from matters of utility. But since Berleant stresses that our nature, at root, is active, the aesthetic can only be regarded as practice. Berleant affords it no other nature.

If the aesthetic is no more than the practical, and if the aesthetic experience is just the experience of having used something, then aesthetic experience would disclose no more than a set of techniques for interacting with the world. But as much as art and aesthetic experience are part of our experience in the world, the richness and significance of aesthetic experience stems from the fact that it is ontologically discontinuous with everyday, practical affairs. More importantly, however, is the fact that if we recognize the distance of the aesthetic from the practical, we furnish the ground for hermeneutical approach to aesthetics. As Gadamer and Ricoeur have so consistently

pointed out, it is only through a dialogical openness to art, and not through technical closure, that we can actively understand ourselves.

CONCLUSION

Berleant's objective is to liberate aesthetics from the confines of theory by returning to the perceptual basis of aesthetics. He believes that Baumgarten's original division between knowing and sensing has been blurred by the pernicious influence of philosophical programs. These always involve, in Berleant's mind, rationalist philosophies, which have two unfortunate features. On the one hand, they depend on a dualist metaphysic, whereas on the other, experience is always conceptually mediated.

We have seen that there is good reason for supposing that experience, in order to be rendered intelligible, requires conceptual mediation. Some concepts must be employed as the condition of the possibility of knowing that we are having one kind of experience and not another. In this regard, Berleant overemphasizes Baumgarten's distinction between *aesthesis* and *noesis*, and ignores Baumgarten's rationalism in the process. Sense experience cannot stand on its own - there are no percepts immediately apprehended independent of a mind which knows and organizes them. This being said, however, we need not commit ourselves to rationalist philosophy in order to explain the basis of our knowledge of the world. In fact, an appeal to phenomenology can easily explain how we can discern an

aesthetic experience as such. A subject/object distinction would nonetheless be employed in the explanation of aesthetic experience, but it is one of the features of phenomenological methods that they do not require a dualist, realist metaphysic as a ground. Moreover, a phenomenology of aesthetic experience does not constitute an *a priori* decision about aesthetic experience. It would attend to our experience as it is known, a feature which should appeal to Berleant.

Berleant does not take a phenomenological route, and instead insists that aesthetics is grounded in the unity of perception. His desire to keep theory out of aesthetics leads him, as we have seen, into a metatheory of perception in which no distinctions can be justifiably made between various modes of perception. The result, one which Berleant himself recommends, is that practical purposes and aesthetic experience are merged. Yet on this view, there is no way to prevent all aesthetic experience from being turned into a practical project. That is, the aesthetic may be reduced to the practical - a technicization of art. It has been shown that such a program destroys the irreality of the text where practical interests have no truck. Hermeneutically speaking, "aesthetic function" as the paradigm of aesthetic experience obliterates that experience.

If Berleant had adopted hermeneutical (*cum* phenomenological) approach, he would have found no need to dispense with theory in aesthetics. A hermeneutical aesthetic theory, as we have seen, attends to aesthetic experience, but is conceptually equipped to explain the nature of that experience. Moreover, a Ricoeurian hermeneutics is simultaneously able to free the world of the work of art from our everyday situation, while providing the metatheoretical ground for integrating aesthetic experience into our existential situation.

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