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IS PSYCHOLOGY RELEVANT TO AESTHETICS? A SYMPOSIUM

INTRODUCTION

MURRAY SMITH

The symposium published here began life as a somewhat unusual ‘author meets critics’ session at the British Society of Aesthetics annual conference, St Anne’s College, Oxford, on 16 September 2016 – unusual inasmuch as the focus was not on a single book, but on two books exploring different but related themes. In addition, rather than encompassing all of the issues these two books address, the session focused on one general question that both books explore in some depth: is psychology relevant to aesthetics?

When George Dickie posed the very same question in 1962, he answered with a resounding ‘no’, and many others have taken and still hold a similar view. But a naturalistic approach to aesthetics, drawing on the knowledge and methods of the sciences and especially the cognitive sciences, has a long history and is experiencing a resurgence in contemporary aesthetics. Dickie, who was responding to an earlier wave of naturalism over the first half the twentieth century, concludes his essay with a kind of invitation and challenge: no-one, he argues, has ‘made clear how any specific psychological information is relevant to [aesthetic] problems. Not only has this matter not been made clear in any specific instance, but no one appears to have any idea what sort of procedure should be followed to establish the relevance relation under discussion.’¹ The BSA ‘double header’ panel took up Dickie’s invitation, exploring two distinctive, positive answers to the question he had posed.

Bence Nanay’s *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* explores various ways in which philosophy of perception is a useful tool in relation to a number of questions in aesthetics, with special emphasis on the concept of attention.² Nanay argues that attention plays a crucial but under-explored role in a number of aesthetic phenomena, including our engagement with art. In order to apply the conceptual apparatus of philosophy of perception, including those parts of it concerned with attention, however, we need to be conversant with the psychological findings about attention and about perception and the mind in general. In other words, Nanay proposes an indirect use of psychology in aesthetics: aesthetics would benefit (and has historically benefited) from closer attention to the philosophy of perception. And the philosophy of perception we draw upon should

1 George Dickie, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?’, *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962): 302.

2 Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

be consistent with and informed by the empirical sciences of the mind, especially psychology. In short, the relevance of psychology for aesthetics is mediated by philosophy of perception. Many case studies of such a methodology are given in his book, from the distinction between focused and distributed attention to debates about the cognitive penetrability of perception and cross-cultural variations in a range of perceptual phenomena.

Murray Smith's *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* aims to articulate a 'third cultural', naturalized aesthetics integrating humanistic with scientific methods, with a particular focus on aspects of emotional response to films and other aesthetic objects.³ Smith argues that we are best placed to understand and explain our experience of artworks – including our emotional responses to them – by exploring the interconnections among the three different types of evidence at our disposal in relation to mental phenomena in general: phenomenological, psychological, and neuroscientific evidence. This model of 'triangulation' is explicated by Smith via case studies on such 'art-affects' as suspense, empathy, the startle response, and the expression and perception of emotion in the face. In seeking to relate these distinct types of evidence to one another, Smith makes the case that we need to pay attention to both the personal and subpersonal levels of psychological description – to our acts and intentions and reactions *and* the psychophysiological systems that subserve them (the distinct visual pathways for action and object recognition, the body clock, the neural mirror system, the 'affect programmes' underpinning our basic emotions, and so on). And in a manner parallel with Nanay, Smith argues that philosophical theorizing in relation to artistic creation and appreciation cannot proceed in isolation from psychological research. Insofar as the arts not only exploit but extend and stretch our ordinary perceptual, cognitive, and emotional capacities, affording us experiences that generally do not arise in ordinary settings, aesthetic theory must at once be attentive to the psychology of ordinary human behaviour, and work towards a psychology of specifically aesthetic behaviour. Triangulation, then, articulates the 'relevance relation' that Dickie seeks: psychology is relevant to aesthetics because aesthetic experience is a species of conscious mental activity, and such activity is best illuminated by seeking consilience among the three types of evidence available to us.

While the two books have somewhat different foci, both discuss aspects of Dickie's sceptical arguments concerning psychology and the aesthetic attitude,⁴ and both pay notable attention to film. Smith's book sets out its arguments about film alongside parallel exploration of other media and artforms; Nanay's study ranges widely across the arts and other domains of aesthetic experience, while paying considerable attention to film. Both books orient themselves towards metaphysics and

3 Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

4 Indeed Smith refers to Nanay's arguments in this regard: *ibid.*, 31–32.

epistemology, broadly construed, rather than towards questions of value.⁵ Sherri Irvin and Elisabeth Schellekens each provide a commentary which reflects on aspects of both books, commentaries which – among other things – make salient the shared concerns and points of convergence between the two books, including a focus on aesthetic attention and experience, and (as Schellekens puts it) the ‘metaphilosophy of aesthetics’.⁶ As Schellekens also notes, both books seek to establish ‘generous frameworks of communication and reference’ with the sciences and other branches of philosophy with which they engage, in contrast to the parallel but rather separate conversations of the past.⁷ To that extent, the ambition of both books is to create a space for an authentic third culture. Nanay and Smith each provide a response to the two commentaries, once again reflecting on the points of similarity and difference between their respective books, as well as responding to the comments of Irvin and Schellekens.

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- Smith, Murray. *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

5 Bence Nanay, ‘Responses to Irvin and Schellekens’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): xxx.

6 Elisabeth Schellekens, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics? Some Comments on Nanay’s *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* and Smith’s *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): xxx.

7 *Ibid.*, x.

FILM, ART, AND THE THIRD CULTURE – PRÉCIS

MURRAY SMITH

*FACT*⁸ takes as its starting point a historical coincidence: at the time of the completion of the book, sixty years had passed since the publication of C. P. Snow's first published intervention on the topic of the 'two cultures', in 1956. Snow's arguments on this topic were to ignite a major intellectual debate across the next decade and beyond, highly visible in the public sphere on both sides of the Atlantic. A Cambridge physicist turned novelist and politician, Snow's career journey was integral to the view he advanced: that there was a pernicious, and worsening, divide between the 'cultures' of the natural sciences on the one hand, and the humanities ('literary intellectuals') on the other hand; and that the divide was harmful both intellectually and in terms of the practical relevance and benefits of academic research (what in Britain is now officially termed 'impact'). Snow did envisage, however, the possibility (and indeed existing pockets of) a 'third culture', in which scientists and humanists were 'on speaking terms'.⁹ This vision of a third culture, I argue, mirrors in the public sphere the naturalistic tradition in philosophy – a tradition that, while consolidating itself under that label in the twentieth century, can be traced all the way back through the Enlightenment to Aristotle.

Naturalistically conceived, philosophy is closely aligned with science and empirical enquiry. Within the sphere of analytic philosophy, naturalism is a highly-influential, indeed probably the dominant, approach to philosophy. It has exerted some influence on aesthetics, especially in recent years, but it has been less visible in aesthetics and the philosophy of art than, say, in the philosophies of mind, science, and even ethics. Chapter 1 of *FACT*, 'Aesthetics Naturalized', reviews some of the history and sets out the case for a naturalized aesthetics. *Theory construction*, as distinct from conceptual analysis, is fundamental to a naturalistic approach, I argue – where theory construction involves a constant interplay between conceptual clarification and empirical enquiry, in contrast to the strict separation of these two activities in (at least orthodox) conceptual analysis. (It is interesting to note that Dickie, in writing of the 'myth of the aesthetic attitude' in another important essay published not long after his 'Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?', was in effect pursuing theory construction by holding the concept of the 'aesthetic attitude' to an empirical

8 Jerrold Levinson's poetically-licensed acronym for my *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017 – see his commentary on the book, 'FACT is a Fact of Both Art and Life', *Projections* 12 (2018): 60–70. Levinson's piece appears as part of a symposium, comprising eleven commentaries on *FACT* along with my response.

9 C. P. Snow, 'The Two Cultures: A Second Look' (1963), in *The Two Cultures*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71.

as well as conceptual standard. For that is exactly what is implied by the word ‘myth’; if the ‘aesthetic attitude’ is a myth, it is no more deserving of a place in our thinking about aesthetic experience than is miasma in our thinking about the transmission of disease.)¹⁰ Chapter 1 also introduces the idea of *thick explanation*. While thick description – a well-established method in the humanities – involves a richly-contextualised description and interpretation of a human behaviour or practice, thick explanation involves the integration of the personal and subpersonal levels of description (rather than treating these as mutually exclusive or incompatible perspectives on the mind).

Chapter 2, ‘Triangulating Aesthetic Experience’, sets out an approach to aesthetic experience consistent with theory construction. The method of ‘triangulation’ involves the integration of the three kinds of evidence available to us in relation to the mind in general: phenomenological, psychological, and neurophysiological evidence. As Schellekens observes in her commentary on *FACT*, when combined these elements give us the kind of thick explanation limned in Chapter 1; and in doing so ‘the door is opened to admit, at least in a limited and principled fashion, the first-person perspective within a scientific approach to the mind’.¹¹ In the context of philosophy of mind, such triangulation occupies a middle ground between, on the one hand, radical functionalism (which gives little or no weight to the significance of neural evidence), and neurofundamentalism (which holds that, in the long run at least, the brain will tell us everything there is to know about the mind). If the eliminativism of the Churchlands constitutes an example of the latter, some of the late Jerry Fodor’s skeptical writings on brain scanning provide an instance of the former. A further important feature of triangulation is that no one of the three forms of evidence is held to be more important than any other, each form of evidence, considered in isolation, having its limitations. Across the chapter, I explore and test the model of triangulation in relation to various films and a related range of aesthetic experiences, with case studies on suspense and empathy. While suspense and empathy certainly arise outside of aesthetic contexts, they are pervasive enough within the arts that we might consider them *basic aesthetic emotions*.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the two types of evidence at stake in the model of triangulation which might seem most distant from one another, and most in need of defence as elements of an explanatory scheme: phenomenological and neuroscientific evidence. Chapter 3, ‘The Engine of Reason and the Pit of Naturalism’, considers in detail various neuroskeptical arguments, from both the philosophy of mind and philosophical aesthetics. These arguments, and various responses to them, are considered through case studies on the startle response and affective mimicry,

10 George Dickie, ‘The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964): 56–65.

11 Elisabeth Schellekens, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics? Some Comments on Nanay’s *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* and Smith’s *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): x; Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 117.

demonstrating the contribution made by neuroscientific findings (especially concerning mirror neurons) to these psychological and aesthetic phenomena. Chapter 4, ‘Papaya, Pomegranates, and Green Tea’, turns its attention to the burgeoning field of consciousness studies, and the complex history of debate about the nature of mind and conscious experience lying behind this contemporary trend. I explore the way consciousness has been represented in various traditions of filmmaking, and the ineliminable centrality of conscious *qualia* to aesthetic experience.

Chapters 1 through 4 constitute Part I of the book, ‘Building the Third Culture’. Taken together, they aim to set out and defend the idea of a third culture, as well as a set of principles and methods through which such an intellectual culture can be realised. Part II of *FACT*, ‘Science and Sentiment’, sets these principles and methods in motion in relation to the affective and emotional life of cinema – the ways in which films both represent and elicit emotions – as well as sustaining the theory building of Part I.

Chapter 5, ‘Who’s Afraid of Charles Darwin?’, explores the expression of emotion in film, through gesture, posture, the voice, and above all the face, against the backdrop of Darwin’s *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (1872). Here I consider the vicissitudes of Darwin’s evolutionary account of emotion, including the rehabilitation and refinement of a Darwinian perspective in the hands of contemporary psychologists such as Paul Ekman and Dacher Keltner. The chapter explores the treatment of emotional expression in a range of filmmaking traditions, as well as arguments in early and classical film theory concerning the (assumed or hoped for) universality of emotion in film, especially in the ‘silent’ era prior to the introduction of the ‘talkies’. Chapter 6, ‘What Difference Does It Make?’, continues to explore contemporary research on and theories of emotion, with a particular emphasis on the role of culture in emotional experience. Rejecting Hobson’s choice – and the false dichotomy that stands behind it – between a narrowly biological account of emotion and a ‘culturalist’ perspective according to which biology plays no significant role, I defend a *biocultural* view of emotion (and by extension, of aesthetic experience). The emotion of disgust, for example, may have evolved in the first instance as a barrier against contact with and ingestion of physically harmful substances (faeces, vomit, rotten food) which hardly vary across cultures. But the bodily systems supporting such ‘core’ disgust can also be recruited by our higher-order belief systems, such that we can experience disgust in relation to much more variable sociocultural acts and objects. (In a similar spirit, Nanay argues that the ‘the top-down influences on our perception that make perception very different in different time periods and different parts of the world [...] force us to take the cultural variations of our aesthetic engagement seriously, paving the way to a truly global aesthetics’.)¹²

12 Bence Nanay, ‘Précis of *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): x.

Chapter 7, ‘Empathy, Expansionism, and the Extended Mind’, focuses on empathy and a family of related affective states, continuing the exploration of such states begun in Chapters 2 and 3, and developed in the final section of Chapter 5. Here the emphasis is both ‘downward’, in the direction of the neural mirroring systems which subtend aspects of empathy, and ‘outward’ towards the environment – the world beyond the skin and the skull into which the mind extends itself, according to advocates of the theory of the extended mind. I argue that the overlapping practices and institutions of storytelling, depiction, and ‘fictioning’ (creating fictions) form a major aspect of the extended mind, greatly enhancing our ability to represent and reflect on the problems – many of them ethical problems – arising from interpersonal and larger social interactions. Elaborating further on the biocultural underpinning of the theory of emotion developed across Part II, I link these practices and institutions, and the idea of the extended mind more generally, with *niche construction*: the capacity of species to adapt the environment to its needs (even as those species are subject to the pressures of natural selection, that is, to the pressure to adapt to the environment). Culture, one might argue, is nothing other than niche construction writ large.

Chapter 8, ‘Feeling Prufish’, pushes beyond the ‘garden variety’ emotions (happiness, fear, anger, and the like) which form the basis of most discussions of emotion in both the philosophy of mind and philosophical aesthetics. A comprehensive theory of emotion in film and the arts more generally needs to account for both generic emotions, which often form the basis of specific genres of art – as in the cases of comedy and horror, for example – and the more peculiar blends of emotion to which individual works often give expression. To the extent that the theory presented achieves this, it also shows how any tension between the particularizing tendency of art, and the generalizing impetus of both the sciences and of philosophy, can be reconciled. A naturalistic account of the role of emotion in art is well-placed to explain both the patterns and regularities in the world of aesthetics and the arts, as well as the particularities of individual works which at once emerge from, and stand out against the backdrop of, such regularities.

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PROUST WASN'T A NEUROSCIENTIST

MURRAY SMITH

Bence Nanay and I can count ourselves lucky, at least three times over, in relation to the symposium published here. We were fortunate first of all, and above all, to find two expert and generous commentators in Sherri Irvin and Elisabeth Schellekens. Our next wave of luck came with the acceptance of the panel by the BSA conference committee, chaired by David Davies and Dawn Wilson. Fortune favoured us a third time with the invitation to publish the papers from the symposium in *Estetika*; our thanks to Hanne Appelqvist for giving her blessing to the plan as the incoming editor of the journal. .

Turning now to the issues raised by our commentators: in her commentary, Irvin recognises the centrality of the triangulation model to the project advanced in *FACT* – the effort to co-ordinate evidence from introspection and phenomenal reflection, psychology, and neuroscience in the study of the mind in general, and in relation to aesthetics and aesthetic experience in particular. In commenting on the model and the book, Irvin points to a number of ways in which we share common ground. In agreement with both Irvin and Schellekens – and indeed I believe with Nanay – I take the clarification and explanation of aesthetic experience to be central to the enterprise of philosophical aesthetics. Irvin also registers the ‘anti-reductivist flavour’ of *FACT*, notwithstanding the seriousness with which I take (neuro)science.¹³ One way in which this is manifest, as Irvin notes,¹⁴ is in my concern with the overreaching and ‘over-interpretation’ widespread in cognitive neuroscience, where very bold claims and speculative edifices are built on the basis of preliminary and often very limited neural evidence. The most sustained critique of this tendency is to be found in Chapter 2 of *FACT*, where I coin the expression ‘neural behaviourism’ to describe and refer to that strain of neuroscience which treats neurophysiological evidence as if it speaks for itself – as if it is meaningful *without* being intermapped onto evidence from experience and psychological theory.

But Irvin has doubts about the the level of confidence that I place in neuroscience (or at least the neuroscience currently available to us): the findings of contemporary neuroscience, she states, ‘tend to be pretty primitive’ and ‘coarse-grained’.¹⁵ More specifically and more fundamentally, Irvin challenges my view that there is an ‘interdependence’ among the three types or levels of evidence

13 Sherri Irvin, ‘The Nature of Aesthetic Experience and the Role of the Sciences in Aesthetic Theorizing: Remarks on the Work of Nanay And Smith’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): xxx.

14 Ibid., x.

15 Ibid., x.

which makes it impossible to hierarchize their significance. She argues that, at least with respect to aesthetic experience, there is an asymmetry among the levels which makes phenomenological evidence – the evidence of experience itself – the most significant kind of evidence available to us. She holds this because ‘when it comes to art and aesthetic experience, the phenomenological is irreducibly not just one of the legitimate targets of our interest, but the primary one’.¹⁶ Irvin also contends that, so long as we hold that mental properties supervene on neural properties, psychological evidence takes priority over neural evidence. I’ll return to the topic of supervenience shortly. But the immediate point to take stock of is that, on Irvin’s view, in contrast to mine, there is a clear hierarchy among the three types of evidence ingredient to triangulation, in which phenomenology is at the top and neurophysiology at the bottom (neural evidence is ‘subservient’ to the other kinds of evidence).¹⁷

Note, however, that there appears to be a strong and a weak version of Irvin’s objection to the role of neuroscience in aesthetics. Certain passages in her commentary imply that the problem is (or might be) that neuroscience is too early in its development as a science either to make much of a contribution, or for us to know whether it might make such a contribution, to our understanding of aesthetic experience: ‘the suggestion that the three levels exist in “a tail-chasing form of interdependence” strikes me as premature: the present coarse-grained state of much neuroscientific knowledge doesn’t permit it to have a very robust explanatory role. It remains to be seen whether the apparent primacy of the experiential level will recede as the underlying neuroscience becomes more sophisticated.’¹⁸ Other passages imply a stronger, more conceptual objection, based on the fact that both our experiences and our psychological capacities supervene on neural states and processes. Given this, Irvin argues, ‘the prospect of neurophysiological data making an independent contribution to aesthetic theorizing, even once the science is far more advanced’ is in doubt.¹⁹

Here it is important to introduce two rejoinders to the strong version of Irvin’s objection. The first concerns the peculiar status and role of experiential evidence in the model of triangulation advanced by *FACT*. Such experience, I argue, plays a dual role in theories of aesthetic experience: it functions as both *explanandum* and *explanans*.²⁰ How can that be? As Irvin stresses, our aesthetic experience – whether of artworks, natural phenomena, or the facets of everyday experience – is the very thing which theories of aesthetic experience seek *to explain*. But I contend that, additionally, what we have to say about aesthetic experience – the way it feels to us; the way we characterise it – plays a role in our *explanations of* such experience. This is one of the peculiarities of the science of

16 Ibid., x.

17 Ibid., x.

18 Ibid., x.

19 Ibid., x.

20 Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 62.

the mind which marks it off from all other domains of science, where the pursuit of the ‘view from nowhere’ is an appropriate governing ideal. That ideal of course has an important place in the cognitive sciences as well. But unless we take the stance that the ‘view from somewhere’ – the data of first-personal experience – is entirely epiphenomenal, and perhaps even if we do take that stance, experiential evidence is bound to figure in our explanations, even if such evidence is defeasible.

To take one example from *FACT*: according to the orthodox theory of suspense, suspense arises when in engaging with an unfolding sequence of events, we hope for certain outcomes, fear for others, and crucially, lack knowledge of the outcome. But this gives rise to the problem of ‘anomalous suspense’²¹ – the apparent experience of suspense in contexts where we do know the outcome of the narrative in question (either because it is a well-known real-world narrative, or because of repeated engagements with specific fictional narratives). Various solutions to this problem are possible, some of which hold that the emotion we experience in such contexts really is suspense. But if we wish to defend the idea that suspense *is* or *can be* experienced where we already know the outcome of a narrative, experiential evidence will be relevant. Thus when my body tightens up at the prospect of the hijacking of the flight depicted in *United 93*, and it feels to me like I am experiencing suspense in relation to that possible event, that counts as one form of evidence in favour of the hypothesis that I am experiencing suspense.

We need to be careful here with regard to what the evidence of experience is evidence *of* – what exactly is the explanandum? There are two candidates: our experience itself, and the psychological capacity associated with the experience. Can our experience be evidence of our experience? There is something worryingly circular about that thought. Our experience (*qua* experience) just is constitutive of what we want to explain, and in that sense, we can’t be wrong about our experience. But we can be mistaken about the psychological skill or capacity the exercise of which creates the experience. As I note in *FACT*, our ordinary experience gives us the impression that our visual system affords us a uniformly coloured and detailed visual field. But as research on peripheral vision and on inattention and change blindness shows, it doesn’t!²² (The same may be true of suspense; our experience of what feels like suspense in anomalous cases, like those noted above, may be misleading; the jury is out.) Thus it is cogent to think of our visual experience as evidence for our skills – misleading evidence, as it turns out in this case – in a way that it isn’t cogent to think experience as evidence of experience.

My second response to the strong version of Irvin’s objection focusses on the role of supervenience. Irvin and I are in agreement ‘that the phenomenological and the functional/cognitive

21 Richard Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

22 Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 61, 235nn11–13.

supervene on the physiological'.²³ But we differ on the significance of this relationship. While I grant that there is an ontological hierarchy among the levels,²⁴ I insist on two further points. First, that the more basic level of neurophysiology in the ontological hierarchy should not lead us to make any fallacious inferences about the (ir)reality of psychological states or conscious experiences: the ontological hierarchy gives us no reason to think that the mind in general or consciousness in particular are any less real than the brain states on which they supervene. Although Irvin does not address this point, I am confident that here, too, we are in agreement.

Where there is a difference, if not a disagreement, between us concerns the nature of triangulation. At least by implication, Irvin treats triangulation as an ontological claim; that is what the supervenience relation describes. But I frame triangulation in *methodological* terms: 'no item within these bodies of evidence is insulated from revision or rejection – so elimination of even long-established, cherished beliefs and theories is certainly possible. In addition, no straightforward methodological hierarchy among the three levels of analysis is established: no one of the three types of evidence necessarily overrules the others.'²⁵ The idea here is that, in our search for an understanding of the mind and of aesthetic experience, we can begin with evidence of any type – experiential, functional, neural – as all of them will (or at least can) lead us into the space of explanation, where any given piece of evidence may intersect with any other. I grant that, given supervenience, differences at the base level of the brain may not manifest in differences at the supervening level of the mind; but of course they can and often do, and that is all that is necessary to 'license' attention to neural evidence from a methodological point of view. The example of mirror neurons is telling in this respect: mirror neurons were initially discovered by accident when the neuroscientists involved were running experiments designed to test for a quite different set of hypotheses about brain function in macaque monkeys.²⁶ But once this unexpected and anomalous neural data was on the table, hypotheses about the functional and experiential states it might be underpinning could be (and were) framed. Note that this is why I precisely don't claim that 'neurophysiological data [makes] an *independent* contribution to aesthetic theorizing',²⁷ but rather that it exists in a relation of *interdependence* with functional and experiential states. This interdependence claim cuts both ways as far as neuroscience is concerned – neural evidence is given a significant role, but it degenerates into meaningless 'neurobabble' if cut loose from experiential and functional evidence and interpretation.

One might also make this methodological point in epistemological terms: triangulation bears upon how we gain knowledge of the mind – how we discover its mechanisms, processes, and other

23 Irvin, 'Nature of Aesthetic Experience', x.

24 Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 234n6.

25 Ibid., 60.

26 Ibid., 64–65.

27 Irvin, 'Nature of Aesthetic Experience', x (my emphasis).

characteristics. It leaves the ontological hierarchy, described by the supervenience relation, intact. Ontologically, a tiger is a tiger because of its genetic make up; but we get to *know* if a tiger is a tiger by looking at its observable features and behaviour. What cuts ice epistemically may be ontologically blunt.

What more can be said in support of the methodological and epistemological value of triangulation in general, and the neural level of evidence embedded within it in particular? In a striking passage which resonates strongly with those trends in contemporary philosophy of mind which accord substantial weight to the body and the brain – such as embodied and 4EA accounts of the mind – Darwin recorded the following thought in one of his notebooks:

To study Metaphysic, as they have always been studied, appears to me to be like puzzling at Astronomy without Mechanics. – Experience shows the problem of the mind cannot be solved by attacking the citadel itself. – The mind is a function of the body. – We must bring some stable foundation to argue from.²⁸

We might consider Darwin's idea here in connection with the literature on *biological motion*. It is now well-established within perceptual psychology that our minds are adapted to detecting the distinctive contours and rhythms of biological motion, as it is manifest in the movement of humans and other animal species. Among the possible forms of motion, biological motion is quite distinctive, and quite different from the artificial, technologically-enhanced forms of motion we humans have invented. (Of course, it is a racing certainty that some future technologies will emulate biological motion, for various purposes.) And the distinctiveness of biological motion is ineluctably tied up with – one might even say constituted by – the bodily forms of animals. Darwin is inviting us to make the leap and accept that the mind, just as surely if rather more subtly, is tied up with the form of the body and the brain (the brain being nothing other than a particularly intricate part of the body): 'The mind is a function of the body.' John Searle, Patricia and Paul Churchland, and a great many other contemporary philosophers of mind would agree. Searle, for example, has argued that 'the brain is a biological organ, like any other, and consciousness is as much a biological process as digestion or photosynthesis'.²⁹ The mind cannot be understood without an understanding of its architecture, and the architecture of the mind depends at least in part on the architecture of the brain (or the brain-and-body). We can speak not only of biological motion, but of *biological cognition*.

28 Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836–1844: Geology, Transmutation of Species, Metaphysical Enquiries*, ed. Paul H. Barrett et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Notebook N, 564; quoted in Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 57, 64.

29 John R. Searle, 'Consciousness and the Philosophers', review of *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, by David J. Chalmers, *New York Review of Books*, 6 March 1997, 50.

On this view, the brain is the vehicle of biology, the organ that evolved in the human species in such a way as to create a behavioural and cognitive gulf between *homo sapiens* and all other species. But we should not take talk of biological cognition to exclude culture as another shaping force in human cognition. As I argue in Chapter 6, phylogenetically speaking, culture emerged from our biology and then developed as an additional domain in which human cognition is forged, in tandem with underlying biological processes; according to one version of this view, human evolution has occurred through ‘gene-meme co-evolution’.³⁰ From an ontogenetic and development point of view, the psychology we are left with must be understood in *biocultural* terms; talk of ‘biological cognition’ is not intended to deny or obscure the importance of culture in cognition.³¹ Culturally-shaped cognition is to biological cognition as artefactual motion is to biological motion: both artefactual motion and cultural cognition build on affordances in their respective domains, for movement in the physical world and thought in the space of biological cognition.

Schellekens, like Irvin, puts the nature of aesthetic experience at the centre of her response, recognising the centrality of the issue to both *FACT* and *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*. She notes that both books are concerned with what is ‘phenomenologically distinct about aesthetic experience’,³² arguing that this is a crucial litmus test for any naturalistic account, since (Schellekens contends) naturalism tends to be reductive, erasing the very distinctiveness that it must capture and explain in order to succeed. Irvin, as we have seen, remarks on the efforts I make to resist such reduction, giving rise to the ‘anti-reductivist’ aroma of *FACT*. Schellekens captures my characterisation of aesthetic experience very effectively, drawing on the term *retrospection* to evoke both the idea of ‘savouring’ rather than merely having an experience, and to point to the *complex temporality* and *reflexive intentionality* implied by this conception of aesthetic experience. ‘This “savouring” or “retrospection”,’ Schellekens writes,

combines a whole host of states and abilities both in what we might call its production, its phenomenology and its aftermath. It is not only reflective and emotionally laden, it is also self-reflective and affectively enjoyed *as* reflection or retrospection. We have an experience, and at the same time an experience of that experience: aesthetic experiences are enjoyed, felt and retrospected upon in a special way *qua* objects of a special form of self-consciousness which is distinctive of aesthetic attention.³³

30 Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

31 Consider, for example, the case of sociomoral disgust alluded to in my ‘*Film, Art, and the Third Culture – Précis*’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): x.

32 Elisabeth Schellekens, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics? Some Comments on Nanay’s *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* and Smith’s *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): x, also x.

33 Ibid. x. Chapter 7 emphasizes the retrospective dimension of aesthetic experience, especially as it bears on empathy (Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 196–97). There may also be a connection between the retrospective aspect of aesthetic experience and the ‘lingering effect’ of such experience, as discussed by Nanay and Schellekens. See Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16–17; Schellekens, ‘Is

In her commentary, Irvin sounds a note of dissent – or least notes an important qualification – on this topic, to the effect that ‘savouring does not necessarily imply enjoyment, but it does imply really tasting as opposed to just absently swallowing’.³⁴ While the pleasurable character of aesthetic experiences of which Schellekens writes – such experiences are ‘enjoyed’ – appears to have a kind of normative weight, neutral or negative aesthetic experiences are surely not only possible, but part of the landscape of actual aesthetic experience. True, we ought to seek positive aesthetic experiences, but often enough they fail or disappoint. Likewise we ought to seek the right and the good – but things don’t always work out that way. ‘Disvalue’ is an aspect of both ethics and aesthetics.³⁵ So what is basic to aesthetic experience in this respect is keen and self-conscious attention to the quality of the experience, however pleasurable or otherwise the experience turns out to be.

Schellekens’s description, taken alongside Irvin’s qualification, captures very well the *kind* of aesthetic experience I strive to theorize in *FACT*.³⁶ But Schellekens worries, if I can pursue the metaphor introduced by Irvin, that all may not be well underneath the aroma and the flavour of the account. The description of the phenomenon to be explained – aesthetic experience – may be attractive; the naturalistic theory advanced to explain it is greeted more cautiously. Schellekens worries in particular that I am ‘trying to fit too much into the account of what is supposed to be our distinctly aesthetic phenomenology’.³⁷ I take it that Schellekens’s worry here arises from the very ‘thickness’ of the thick explanation that, as we have seen, she rightly adduces goes hand in hand with the methodology of triangulation. If everything from neural networks and mental modules to selection pressures and evolutionary niches to affect programs and extended minds goes into the theoretical mix, what hope is there that the intricate structure of retrospection is going to survive, let alone be discerned and explained?

Here again it is important to hang on to the explanandum–explanans distinction. The introduction of those items which seem most alien to descriptions and explanations of aesthetic experience, including neuroscientific evidence, reference to subpersonal mechanisms and processes, as well as the adaptive unconscious and implicit bias, play their role in the engine room of explanation. They bear upon what Schellekens refers to in the quotation above as the ‘production’

Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?’, x; Bence Nanay, ‘Responses to Irvin and Schellekens’, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2019): x.

34 Irvin, ‘Nature of Aesthetic Experience’, x.

35 On this point, see my review of *Aesthetic Pursuits: Essays in the Philosophy of Art*, by Jerrold Levinson, *Philosophy* 93 (2018): 467–69.

36 Paisley Livingston has queried whether the conception of aesthetic experience explored in *FACT* is, in fact, too narrow and too demanding. See Paisley Livingston, ‘Questions about Aesthetic Experience’, *Projections* 12 (2018): 71–75; and my response, *Projections* 12:2 (Winter 2018): 111–136.

37 Schellekens, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?’, x.

of aesthetic experience. Generally speaking, none of these factors show up in our conscious experience, even if their consequences do; and so none are part of the content of aesthetic experience. ‘Exactly what do we find behind the “door to the first-person perspective within a scientific approach to the mind”?’ asks Schellekens.³⁸ We find, exactly, the contents of experience – what is available, with all its fallibility and fragility, to introspection and phenomenological reflection. The point is ‘simply’ that, to reiterate one that I make above in response to Irvin, such reflection is not only the *target of explanation*, but one type of evidence that we can marshal within the *explanation of* that very target phenomenon. It is easy to understand how, given this dual role, it might seem like I am cluttering up the space of aesthetic experience itself with a lot apparatus that doesn’t belong there. That is why the explanandum–explanans distinction is so important in this context.

Relating my exploration of Edgar Reisz’s *Heimat* to Nanay’s treatment of certain works by Paul Klee, Schellekens suggests that these analyses may ‘affect’ our experience of the artworks concerned.³⁹ As far as *FACT* is concerned, however, *affecting* the appreciator’s experience is not my primary goal. That’s the job, in the first instance, of the artist via the artwork, and in the second, of the critic through their criticism of the work. As a theorist, I would substitute the word ‘explain’ for ‘affect’; explanation, once again, is the name of the game in theory construction. I insist upon drawing firm lines between three roles we can play in relation to artworks, and the distinct activities playing these roles entail: *making* artworks is distinct from *appreciating* them, and both are distinct from *explaining* them. That is not to deny that there are points of connection and similarity; nor that the same individual can occupy these different roles with respect to the same artwork at different times; nor that at a very abstract level, all three activities might be absorbed into some super-category (of all phenomena related to the aesthetic). The distinct activities of making, appreciating, and explaining also relate to Irvin’s sceptical attitude to the relevance of neuroscience, when she argues that

we do not need to descend to the physiological level to make sense of [various examples examined in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*]: as Smith notes, artists know how to manipulate audience attention and exploit unique features of the perceptual system in order to produce distinctive aesthetic effects, and their knowledge is derived not from neurophysiology but from careful observation of how certain kinds of effects captured on film are productive of particular kinds of experience.⁴⁰

38 Schellekens, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?’, x, citing Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 117.

39 Schellekens, ‘Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?’, x.

40 Ibid., x.

As far as the activity of the artist is concerned, I agree. That is why Proust was *not* a neuroscientist.⁴¹ But the theorist is engaged in a different activity, and that is why drawing on the findings of neuroscience – if not actually doing some neuroscience – takes on a relevance and justification for the theorist that it lacks for the artist.

So Proust wasn't a neuroscientist in the sense that he didn't need to draw upon neuroscience (or any scientific psychology) in order to create his works; nor do we need to appeal to neuroscience or scientific psychology in order to appreciate them. But if we want to *theorise* and *explain* why Proust's techniques and novels work as they do – and especially if we want to generate thick explanations – then neuroscience (and scientific psychology in general) will be a useful resource. Nonetheless, multi-levelled theories such as the one advanced in *FACT* do face a problem of *explanatory bloat* – if we can move sideways into context, as the advocates of thick description urge, and downwards into the physical structures subvening mental states and processes, as I contend by defending a parallel notion of thick explanation, where do we draw the line for what is to count as explanatorily relevant?

The problem of explanatory bloat calls for a principle of explanatory *relevance*. I can't offer one here; but I can suggest the outline of such a principle through an example from *FACT*. There I make the case that in shaping our responses towards the antagonist in *Saboteur*, through the mechanism of affective mimicry, 'an aspect of the biology of emotions is enlisted [by Hitchcock] in a cultural and political cause'.⁴² And I offer this up as a prime case of thick explanation. But not, I hope, an indigestibly thick explanation. The explanation cuts a path across the biological and cultural levels, identifying a particular set of causal factors: Hitchcock intuitively understood – he was no more a neuroscientist than Proust – through his experience as a filmmaker, how the expressions and movements of performers affected audiences, as is evident from both his filmmaking practice and his reflections on his craft in interviews. And he was alert to the various constraints and pressures his films were subject to (including those of the Production Code Administration, World War II, and more broadly, the Hollywood system).

Schellekens also suggests that 'questions arise for anyone who seeks to both naturalize (and in that sense at least normalize) *and* customize the aesthetic at the same time'.⁴³ Earlier in the same passage she suggests that the alignment of naturalized aesthetics with scientific psychology might

41 In *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011), Jonah Lehrer makes the case that many of the discoveries of cognitive neuroscience – for example with respect to memory, language, and visual perception – were prefigured in the work of artists such as Marcel Proust, Gertrude Stein, and Paul Cézanne. I have no objection to the rhetorical conceit of Lehrer's title: that artists convey in artistic form an understanding of aspects of the human mind, and that often psychology confirms the wisdom of the arts. But we need to be wary of collapsing the very different kinds of enquiry and knowledge afforded by the arts and sciences. Proust illuminated the mind, but his path to that illumination wasn't via the scientific study of the brain – as Lehrer well knows, of course.

42 Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, 146.

43 Schellekens, 'Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?', x.

be taken as an advantage, insofar as its ‘explanations are grounded in information, facts, evidence, or data which in some sense apply across aesthetic agents, regardless of all the purely personal, idiosyncratic qualities which can make us such unreliable aesthetic judges’.⁴⁴ Schellekens’ remarks on this topic resonate with the focus of Chapter 8, which seeks to reconcile the traditional emphasis on the particularity of art with the impetus towards generalization characteristic of scientific and philosophical theorizing. There I argue that the incompatibility between art and these explanatory enterprises is more perceived than real: a naturalistic theory of art can both reveal those recurrent patterns, widespread practices and shared experiences which are manifest in the aesthetic universe, while at the same time setting into relief the unique and particular aspects of individual artworks and other aesthetic objects. (Note that Nanay explores the presumed ‘uniqueness’ of artworks, the ‘completely new and often very rewarding experiences’ that they afford,⁴⁵ and the implications of such uniqueness for aesthetic evaluation in Chapter 6 of *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*. He concludes, similarly, that the explanatory resources available in the philosophy of perception and vision science can shed light on uniqueness in the aesthetic domain.)

The same principle applies to the idiosyncrasy of individuals. Scientific psychology doesn’t deny that individuals vary in a myriad of ways; indeed some branches of psychology – like personality psychology – focus on this very fact. Human variability – individual and cultural – is a feature of human existence which, one way or another, any scientific approach to human behaviour has to take into account. And so this recognition must have a place within a naturalized aesthetics. It is true that, when we assess the design features of an artwork, we are seeking to understand how the work draws on certain human capacities and existing knowledge in order to create a certain kind of experience. But it is no strike against the theory to admit that, where particular perceivers lack the appropriate background knowledge, or the perceptual or cognitive or emotional capacities, or the right disposition to engage with the work, then the qualia the work is designed to elicit will not emerge and the experience will not be had. In fact any other conclusion would be inconsistent with the scientific temper of naturalistic philosophy, since the background knowledge, the mental capacities, and the appropriate disposition are all causal preconditions for the work to work as it has been designed to work.⁴⁶ Both Nanay, in *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Perception*, and Todd Berliner, in his recent *Hollywood Aesthetic*, make the point via appeal to *expertise*.⁴⁷ Nanay draws on evidence to show that while the visual attention of experts ranges across the entire composition

44 Ibid., x.

45 Nanay, ‘Précis’, x.

46 Nanay is similarly emphatic that engaging with the discoveries of the empirical sciences of mind – which is to say, adopting a naturalistic stance – compels us to take cultural variation in aesthetics seriously (ibid., x). In this sense naturalism is not only compatible with the recognition of variation; where the evidence is there, it pushes us in that direction.

47 Todd Berliner, *Hollywood Aesthetic: Pleasure in American Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

of a depiction, lay viewers tend to restrict their attention to a focal object.⁴⁸ Berliner, meanwhile, notes that the ability of a viewer to appreciate properly and to find aesthetic pleasure in a film hinges on their level of expertise with the kind of film in question.⁴⁹ In the context of a tradition like Hollywood filmmaking, where seeking a wide audience is central to the practice, making works which accommodate viewers possessing different degrees of expertise is an important skill. But the crucial point here is that there is no tension between naturalism and the recognition of variability of response across individuals and groups.

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48 Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 26–27.

49 Berliner, *Hollywood Aesthetic*, 192.

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