An Aesthetic Attitude:

An East – West Comparison of Bullough and Nishida

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ABSTRACT

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“This paper is an examination of the aesthetic attitude theories of Edward Bullough and Kitaro Nishida, establishing key characteristics of an aesthetic attitude theory. These characteristics comprise a complete definition of an aesthetic attitude, which accounts for all types and levels of aesthetic experience, aesthetic judgments, and aesthetic participants.”

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Dedicated to Richard A. and Helen S. Evans
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INTRODUCTION

In modern aesthetics, there has been an ongoing debate between those who believe the aesthetic nature of an experience is dependent on some properties of the object of experience, or the attitude of the agent. This paper will examine two versions of an aesthetic attitude theory: English Psychologist, Edward Bullough’s theory of ‘Psychical Distance,’ and Japanese Zen Philosopher, Kitaro Nishida’s theories of ‘muga’ and ‘pure experience’ as related to aesthetics. Through these examinations, four key characteristics of an aesthetic attitude theory – Attention, Motivation, Aesthetic Sensibility, and Emotional/Felt Content – will be developed. It is the contention of this paper that these four characteristics constitute a complete definition of an aesthetic attitude, which consistently accounts for all types and levels of aesthetic experience, aesthetic judgments, and aesthetic participants.
CHAPTER 1
Bullough, ‘Distancing,’ and ‘Disinterestedness’

1.1 Psychical Distance:

a. Distance and the fog.

Edward Bullough’s view of what is commonly called the aesthetic attitude is contained in his conception of “Distance” and more specifically “Psychical Distance” (PD) (Bullough 1912, 88). He clarifies the basic idea of PD by means of an example, a fog at sea (88-89). In this example we are to imagine a ship at sea that is enveloped in a thick visually impenetrable fog. In such a fog the ship would seem isolated, the perceived stillness and quiet adding to the seeming isolation. This situation, when experienced by a person on the deck of such a ship, would inevitably generate feelings of unease and anxiety toward unseen danger.

However, Bullough thinks this situation can also generate “intense relish and enjoyment” (88). To achieve this we are to abstract away the “practical unpleasantness” of the situation, and see it from a different outlook. Bullough analogizes this to a mountain climber, who, during the exercise of his or her hobby, abstracts away the physical labor and danger of the activity and gains intense enjoyment from the climbing. In the case of the fog at sea, we are in a similar way to abstract away the fear of unseen danger and direct our attention “to the features “objectively” constituting the phenomenon.” In this way the transparent white of the fog, the smooth texture of the water, and the “strange solitude and remoteness from the world, as it can be found only
on the highest mountain-tops” may cause the experience to take on a “concentrated poignancy and delight” as to be completely changed from the anxious, frightening original experience. Bullough says that this change of outlook, often occurring suddenly, is like “when our practical interest snaps like a wire from sheer over-tension,” and we can experience things with “the marveling unconcern of a mere spectator” (89).

b. The operation, and significance, of Distance.

Bullough says that this shift in outlook is due to the metaphorical insertion of ‘Distance’ between “our own self and its affections” or objects that are the sources of our affections (89). In the case of the fog, Bullough says, the change in outlook is produced by “putting the phenomenon, out of gear with our practical… self.” This amounts to looking at the phenomenon outside of the context of our own personal desires and ends, observing the phenomenon ‘objectively,’ in the sense that we should interpret even our subjective reactions to the phenomenon as objective “characteristics of the phenomenon.” Bullough brings his basic idea of Distance, if not the more intricate workings of PD as a whole, into sharp focus here. By way of a distinct change in our outlook we metaphorically distance our ‘practical self’ from the phenomenon and are able to observe and judge the experience aesthetically. However, according to Bullough, though the basic idea of Distance may sound simple, the way Distance works is complex, having a negative and positive aspect. The negative “inhibitory” aspect comes from “the cutting-out of the practical side of things and our practical attitude [toward] them,” and the
positive from “the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by” the negative inhibitory aspect.  

Due to the nature of the distanced outlook, it is fundamentally different from our normal outlook. Bullough says that as a rule we are not ordinarily aware of the aspects of phenomena “which do not touch us immediately and practically, nor are we generally conscious of impressions apart from our own self which is impressed.” Thus, according to Bullough, the experience of seeing phenomena from their usually unnoticed side happens as “a revelation” (90). This kind of revelation is exactly that which is present in an aesthetic experience, and is why, “in this most general sense, Distance is a factor in all Art.” That Distance is a factor in all Art is Bullough’s main reason for claiming that PD is an aesthetic principle, that it provides a criterion for the beautiful as opposed to the merely agreeable, and that it is an essential characteristic of the “artistic temperament” and the more general “aesthetic consciousness.”

A key characteristic of Bullough’s concept of Distance is also one of the key characteristics of any aesthetic attitude theory, ‘disinterestedness,’ not allowing our practical concerns to influence our aesthetic judgments. Disinterestedness has been included as a basic characteristic of aesthetic judgment since Kant.  

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1 The interplay between the negative and positive aspects of Distance could be seen as not only a change in outlook but also as ontologically productive. Specifically the positive aspect could be interpreted not as seeing things in a new way, but as seeing entirely new objects that are distinct from objects observed from the normal outlook. This would explain assertions that while one may be in the presence of a piece of art, the same person may not be “seeing the art,” but only observing the physical object.

or desires of the individual is not impartial, and so not a pure aesthetic judgment. Disinterestedness in one form or another will factor heavily in the remainder of our discussion.

c. The peculiar character, and ‘antinomy,’ of Distance.

To have an aesthetic experience, according to Bullough, we have to distance our self metaphorically from the phenomenon which we are experiencing. However, Bullough says that this does not mean that the experience is impersonal, in the way that a scientist’s research can be said to be impersonal, unemotional, or strictly intellectually motivated. “On the contrary, it describes a personal relation, often highly emotionally colored, but of a peculiar character” (91). The peculiar character of this relation comes from the way in which “the personal character of the relation has been…filtered.”

Bullough says that the experience has been cleared of the practical side of its appeal by the insertion of Distance, while not losing its original constitution. He says that a good example of this is drama. The characters and situations appeal to us as if they were real, except that side of their appeal that would normally affect us in a directly personal way is “held in abeyance.” In other words, we keep all of our emotions involved, and so we can feel the emotional reactions the drama is supposed to solicit. But, during the experience, we only allow the drama to affect us in an indirect, as opposed to a direct highly personal, way. Usually this is explained by way of the knowledge that these characters and situations are imaginary. However, Bullough says that the assumption (that these things are imaginary), upon which this explanation is based “is not necessarily the condition, but often the consequence, of Distance” (92). He means that Distance, by changing the
relation we have to the characters (by filtering out the practical side of the relation), makes the characters “seemingly fictitious,” not that the fictional nature of the characters changes our feelings about them. Thus, the operation of PD is a personal yet distanced relation in which we are emotionally involved in the experience, but not practically, or directly personally, invested in it. This personal, yet distanced relational character of PD, according to Bullough, points to an oddity that “appears to be one of the fundamental paradoxes of Art:” what Bullough calls ‘the antinomy of Distance’ (AoD).

In this section we have our first reference to another possible basic characteristic of an aesthetic attitude, that of emotional content or aesthetic feeling. We will explore this characteristic further in subsequent chapters.

d. *Othello* and antinomy explored.

Bullough thinks it is obvious that to have a favorable experience toward a work of Art, we must be in some way “prepared for its particular kind of appeal,” that without some kind of predisposition, certain objects will remain “incomprehensible [to us], and to that extent unappreciated” (92). He says that this is a proportional relationship or concordance. In that, how successfully or intensely an object will appeal to us is directly proportionate to how completely it corresponds to our “intellectual and emotional peculiarities and the idiosyncrasies of our experience.” However, Bullough says, this principal of concordance requires a qualification, which he illustrates with an example: that of a spectator of a performance of ‘*Othello.*’
We are to imagine a man, who has reason to suspect his wife of infidelity, attending a performance of *Othello*. On the above principal of concordance, the man should appreciate the character and conduct of the character Othello the more they coincide with his own feelings. But in reality, Bullough says, the concordance with his own feelings will likely “render him acutely conscious of his own jealousy,” and by a reversal of perspective or outlook, unable to appreciate the play. Bullough says that this reversal is a consequence of the loss of Distance (93). Thus, the qualification on the principal of concordance must be that the coincidence between our self (feelings, affections, experience) and the phenomenon must be “as complete as is compatible with maintaining Distance.” In the case of this particular spectator, he will indeed experience *Othello* more keenly in proportion to the level of concordance, “provided that he succeeds in keeping the Distance between…the play and his personal feelings.” Thus, according to Bullough, what is “most desirable is the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance.” In other words, for our aesthetic experiences to be genuine and meaningful to us, we must bring our emotional faculties to bear on the experience, but at the same time distance the experience just enough as to prevent our personal investment in the phenomenon. This brings to mind a balancing act, or some other act of precision. And, that an aesthetic experience must be highly personal, yet we must also distance our self from the experience, is the basic definition of ‘the antinomy of Distance.’

e. Distance is variable, and can be lost.

Bullough says that the AoD presupposes “the variability of Distance” (94). He explains that Distance “admits naturally of degrees,” and varies according to the
‘character’ of the object, “which may impose a greater or smaller degree of Distance,” and according to the ‘distancing-power’ (the ability to maintain Distance) of the individual. So, according to Bullough, there are two sets of conditions affecting the degree of distance in any given situation: “those offered by the object and those [realized] by the subject.” And further, persons not only differ from each other in their ability to maintain Distance in any given situation, but the same individual will differ in his or her ability to maintain Distance when presented with different objects or situations.

According to Bullough, this gives an extensive explanation of differences in aesthetic experience, and of how aesthetic appreciation can be lost due to a loss of Distance. The loss of Distance can occur in two ways (94). The first is by ‘under-distancing,’ which is a failing of the agent (of his or her distancing-power) to maintain Distance at the appropriate level for the experience in question. The second is by ‘over-distancing,’ which occurs when an object’s characteristics render it discordant with the observer’s experience to such a degree as to appear artificial, empty, or absurd.

As stated above Distance is variable with respect to the individual and to different situations. This means that in theory any object can be sufficiently distanced as to be aesthetically appreciated. And that the point at which Distance will be lost, and so with it aesthetic appreciation, will be different for each person with respect to each situation. To use Bullough’s term, each person will have a ‘Distance-limit’ for any given situation, under which aesthetic appreciation can occur. This limit will be much greater for an artist, who is trained to look at things aesthetically, than it would be for a layperson with less experience (95).
In the previous three sections Bullough gives us his version of another of the key characteristics of an aesthetic attitude theory, that of an openness or sensitivity to the object of the experience. This takes the form of a learned sensibility, so one individual will be better able to experience and properly judge a particular aesthetic object than another due to their previous experience.

1.2 Dickie’s Objections:

a. A confusion of types.

George Dickie is well known for rejecting Bullough’s theory of Distance, and, indeed rejects all aesthetic attitude theories. One of George Dickie’s objections to Bullough’s conception of PD is that there is a problem with Bullough’s idea of ‘the variability of Distance.’ Specifically, Dickie states that the variability of Distance “involves a confusion of types” (Dickie 1961, 236). This confusion lies between the characteristics or appeal of an object, and a characteristic of the experience of the object. Dickie says that Bullough fails to distinguish these two, and so draws a confused conclusion that Distance, as a characteristic of experience, admits of degrees (237). Dickie admits that the appeal of an object may vary by degrees. However, he thinks that when ‘Distance’ refers to a characteristic of the experience of an object, it does not vary such that one experience is more distanced than another. The experience is either distanced or it is not.
As evidence of Bullough’s confusion between characteristics of an object and characteristics of the experience of the object, Dickie cites this passage from Bullough, in which he is discussing exactly what type of distance is important for his inquiry:

It is not, however, in any of these meanings [spatial or temporal distance] that ‘Distance’ is put forward here, though it will be clear in the course of this essay that the above-mentioned kinds of distance are rather special forms of the conception of Distance as advocated here, and derive whatever aesthetic qualities they may possess from Distance in its general connotation. This general connotation is ‘Psychical Distance’ (Bullough 1912, 88).

For Dickie it makes no sense to think of actual spatial or temporal distance, which are characteristics of objects, as species of general ‘Psychical Distance,’ which is a characteristic of the experience of an object. He says that their difference in nature, physical vs. psychological, means that these cannot be thought of as of the same type, differing only in generality (Dickie 1961, 238).

It is not clear, however, that Bullough confuses characteristics of objects with characteristics of experiences as Dickie says. First, in the discussion of the variability of Distance, Bullough distinguishes the two ways in which Distance can vary as “according to the distancing-power of the individual, and according to the character of the object” (Bullough 1912, 94). The second clause Dickie does not have a problem with. However, the first clause does not support Dickie’s criticism either. Bullough is saying that individuals, when presented with objects for aesthetic consideration, will have, based on
their experience with the type of appeal of the object as well as other experience, different levels of aptitude for maintaining a distanced attitude. This is clearly a distinction to be made regarding the abilities of the individual, not one or another aspect of an experience. In Dickie’s favor, his interpretation of the distanced aspect of the experience as an all or nothing relation is correct. This is clear, or at least can be implied, from Bullough’s numerous examples of an individual losing Distance. The experience is either distanced or not, though the degree to which the individual is able to distance themselves can be more or less for individual distanced experiences.

Dickie may be indirectly drawing evidence for his conclusion about Bullough’s confusion of types from his discussion about increasing and decreasing Distance (94-95). Saying that the individual must decrease Distance, and that an individual will have a ‘Distance-limit’ in any given situation, could be interpreted as regarding the distanced aspect of the experience directly. As in, the experience, not the object, is distanced to a degree and the individual must meet it with a certain amount of counter-distance. But given that Bullough is clear that he is talking about the ability of an individual to maintain a distanced attitude toward an object, and the lack of any instance of Bullough explicitly claiming that it is the experience itself which can be more or less distanced, that Bullough actually meant to be interpreted in this way seems implausible.

Finally, the language that Bullough uses when he describes spatial and temporal distance as “special forms of [PD]” is problematic. The use of this phrase is ambiguous as Dickie points out. And he is correct in saying that it can be interpreted as saying that spatial and temporal distance are species of PD, which would make physical
characteristics of the same kind as psychological. However, given Bullough’s further descriptions in the remainder of the paper, and the next clause of that same sentence, where these kinds of distance derive their aesthetic qualities from PD, a more charitable reading would be that spatial and temporal distance, in the context of an aesthetic experience, are special forms of PD, only in as much as they gain their aesthetic qualities from the successful maintenance of a distanced attitude by the observer.

b. The aesthetic attitude is a myth.

A more lengthy, and if found to be correct, more damaging criticism, is one launched by Dickie not only at Bullough but at aesthetic attitude theory in general. It is the view that the aesthetic attitude is a myth, and that concepts such as ‘Distance’ and ‘disinterestedness’ are simply reducible to paying close attention to an object (Dickie 1964, 56-65). Dickie aims this criticism at, not only Bullough, but also Jerome Stolnitz, Eliseo Vivas, and others. However, the general criticism applies to all aesthetic attitude theories such that it applies to Bullough equally as well as to the others mentioned. I will only address this criticism with respect to Bullough’s view of PD.

Dickie begins with the Othello example. Citing Sheila Dawson in addition to Bullough, Dickie states that because of the description of the inability of the spectator to maintain Distance during Othello due to his pre-occupation with his own wife’s behavior, and the subsequent discussion of ‘under’ and ‘over-distancing’, that Bullough implies “a species of action—distancing—which may be deliberately done and which initiates a state of consciousness—being distanced” (57). Dickie’s question is whether this kind of
action and state of consciousness really exist. He says that he has experienced things aesthetically, but does not recall ever committing any special actions or being induced into any special state. He admits that he is normally oblivious to certain aspects of things, but he attributes this to a lack of attention. Likewise, Dickie thinks that the idea of putting an object “out of gear” with our practical interests, as a metaphor for distance, simply equates to paying attention to the object, and not to your practical concerns. And, according to Dickie, if distancing and being distanced simply equate to paying close attention, then what is the point of positing special actions and special states of consciousness to account for aesthetic judgments? There isn’t any, because they do not exist.

Dickie then turns to the conception of the aesthetic attitude posited by Stolnitz: that of attending to objects ‘disinterestedly’ (58-64). For Stolnitz, ‘disinterested’ means without concern for any ulterior purpose (Stolnitz 1960, 35). This conception of being disinterested is analogous, and endemic, to Bullough’s conception of being distanced from ones goals and affections. So, I will treat Dickie’s objections to Stolnitz’ view as equally leveled against Bullough.

Dickie thinks that for it to make sense to talk about attending to an object disinterestedly, we must be able to talk about attending to an object interestedly (Dickie 1964, 58). As in one attending to something “with no ulterior purpose” (disinterestedly), and attending to something “with an ulterior purpose” (interestedly). Dickie points out that what at first seemed to be a perceptual distinction (attending in a certain way) is actually a motivational or intentional distinction (attending for or with a certain purpose).
To illustrate this point, he uses the example of two people listening to music: one for the purposes of studying for an exam (in music theory or some-such), and the other for sheer enjoyment. Dickie admits that there is a distinct motivational difference between the experiences of these two persons. However, he says that the *listening* in both experiences is the same. He says it is “important to note that a person’s motive or intention is different from his [or her] action.” According to Dickie, there is only one way to attend to an object, though that attention may be more or less close, may have a variety of different motives and intentions for doing it, and a variety of ways of being distracted from it. He illustrates further by using an example from J.O. Urmson of supposed interested attention, that of two spectators of a play (Urmson 1961, 131-143). In this example both spectators are “delighted” at their experience of the play. However, one is delighted because he produced the play and it is very profitable, and the other is the father of one of the performers, and is delighted because of the success of his child. For Dickie, the producer’s thinking about profits and the father’s thinking about the success of his child are not instances of interested attention to the play. According to Dickie they are instances of being distracted from the play and so not attending to it, though this inattention need not be total, and may be so fleeting as not to miss or lose anything from the experience (Dickie, 59). So, what “attitude-aestheticians are calling attention to is the occurrence of irrelevant associations which distract the viewer from the [object]. But distraction is not a special kind of attention, it is a kind of inattention” (58).

In this way Dickie concludes that:
…“disinterestedness”… cannot properly be used to refer to a special kind of attention. “Disinterestedness” is a term which is used to make clear that an action has certain kinds of motives. Hence, we speak of disinterested findings (of boards and inquiry), disinterested verdicts (of judges and juries), and so on. Attending to an object, of course, has its motives but the attending itself is not interested or disinterested according to whether its motives are of the kind which motivate interested or disinterested action (as findings and verdicts might), although the attending may be more or less close (60).

Dickie states that “after the aesthetic attitude has been purged of distancing and disinterestedness” it becomes simply attending closely to an object (64). He calls this “the vacuous version” of the aesthetic attitude. For if the aesthetic attitude simply equates to paying close attention, then it ceases to say anything interesting and loses all of its significance to aesthetic theory. It becomes a myth and so not an aesthetic theory at all.

Dickie is correct that if the aesthetic attitude simply equates to close attention then it is not very valuable to aesthetic theory. However, Dickie also acknowledges the motivational aspect of any experience. While acknowledging this important aspect of any experience, he bases his dismissal of aesthetic attitude theory solely on the nature of the attention involved in aesthetic experience. Our next two writers (and myself as well) disagree with Dickie’s conclusions. However, he does highlight another key characteristic of aesthetic experience and so any aesthetic attitude theory: attention.
1.3 Responses to Dickie:

a. Saxena

Sushil Kumar Saxena, formerly of the University of Delhi, has two main problems with Dickie’s criticisms of the aesthetic attitude. The first is that ‘interested’ attention is not the same as distraction (Saxena 1978, 84). As we discussed above, Dickie states that while ‘interested attention’ is simply distraction, this distraction may not be total and may be so fleeting as to not detract from, or cause one to miss any part of, the experience of the object (Dickie, 59). Saxena asks if this is such a harmless occurrence (as to not detract from the experience), how can ‘distraction’ be used to properly describe the experience of a musicologist who listens to a piece of music to report on its technical accuracy, and so is likely to miss the evocative, elevating quality the piece may possess? It seems that it would be necessary for the musicologist to remain completely undistracted to achieve his or her desired end. And that the missing of non-technical characteristics of the piece would not be attributable to the musicologist being distracted from them, because the musicologist was never attending to those characteristics at all. Saxena says that attending “with an ulterior purpose is at once to attend from a particular point of view; and this,…, determines our notice throughout, and necessarily entails indifference to some other aspects of the [object] (Saxena, 84).” From this Saxena concludes that ‘interested’ attention is not the same as distraction.

Secondly, Saxena challenges Dickie’s conclusions about the number of ways one can attend to an object (84-85). As discussed above, according to Dickie, there is only
one way to attend to an object, though that attention may be more or less close, may have
a variety of different motives and intentions for doing it, and a variety of ways of being
distracted from it (Dickie, 58). Saxena cites Dickie’s use of examples which contrast
motivational differences between experiencers of an object, i.e. the two people listening
to music: one for the purposes of studying for an exam, and the other for sheer
enjoyment.³ Saxena asks if one is attending for a specific purpose with regards to
technical information, and the other is attending simply for general enjoyment, how can
the attention of each be regarded as of the same kind? For, attending is “an application of
the mind.” It is getting oneself ready to be aware of, or know, the object, and includes
choosing a particular point of view. And if the awareness can be more or less close, and
can reveal this or that characteristic of the object, then all attention cannot be of the same
kind (Saxena, 85). The attention of each of the listeners is the same in the general sense
that they are both attending to an object. However, according to Saxena, the motivational
content of the attention of each of the listeners differentiates their respective instances of
attention into different types.

b. Kemp

Garry Kemp of the University of Glasgow also objects to Dickie’s treatment of
attention in the context of the aesthetic attitude (Kemp 1999, 393). He first objects to
Dickie’s assumption that all instances of close attention are alike, i.e. that there is only
one way to attend closely to an object. As discussed above, Dickie concludes that the

³ Saxena uses another example from Dickie, of two people reading a poem, one for historical content and
the other for sheer enjoyment. However, for the sake of continuity I use the example I used previously in
section 1.2b, which makes the same point.
interested attention is simply distraction, and so the aesthetic attitude is identical with close attention (Dickie, 64). And because there is nothing particularly aesthetic about close attention, there is no aesthetic attitude. Kemp thinks that Dickie’s contention that interested attention is simply distraction is false, and that this is most clear when the object being attended to is a piece of art (Kemp, 393). Like Saxena he points to the example of the student of music listening for technical information. He says that this is obviously not a case of distraction, as the student’s full attention to the music would be required to meet his or her desired end. Yet the student is not in an aesthetic attitude either, and so is diverted from the potential aesthetic experience but not from the music.

Kemp says that Dickie’s assertion that the attention, or way of listening, is the same between the music student and the casual listener and only the motivation differs, is problematic. Specifically Kemp thinks that even if the attention of the two were alike, Dickie is missing the point because the motivational difference “is all that the aesthetic attitude theorist requires” (Kemp, 394). He states:

The aesthetic attitude theory need not be…couched in terms of perception [or attention], as Dickie assumes…That it is the ‘attitude’ that possesses the distinguishing feature of being disinterested does not imply that the perception [or attention] is itself what possesses that feature…Insofar as perceptions [and instances of attention] are interested or disinterested, it is probably more plausible to say that they are so only in virtue of the purposes which guide [them]. In any case the main claim of the theory can without evident loss be put by saying that
attention [or perception] is aesthetic precisely when it is not pragmatically
motivated.\textsuperscript{4}

Kemp says that the existence of instances of pragmatically motivated attention
does nothing to prove that there are not instances of close attention which are not
pragmatically motivated. And even if Dickie is right to say that the distinction between
interested and disinterested cannot be a purely perceptual distinction, this is missing the
point (Kemp, 395). Kemp says that there is certainly a distinction to be made. The
purpose of the aesthetic attitude is to characterize a kind of experience. However, not all
experiential distinctions are purely perceptual. In the context of the aesthetic attitude the
distinction is motivational.

1.4 Preliminary Conclusions:

In our discussion so far we have examined Bullough’s version of an aesthetic
attitude theory, seen one set of objections, and some answers to those objections. Along
the way we have briefly noted four characteristics that are important to Bullough’s theory,
and may be important to any aesthetic attitude theory:

1. Motivation: That one not be motivated by one’s own interests is important for
maintaining an impartial point of view toward any object. However, it remains to
be seen if in the context of an aesthetic attitude desires always eliminate such an
attitude.

\textsuperscript{4} Kemp’s italics.
2. Emotional/Felt Content: Aesthetic experiences do involve the emotions and feelings of the agent, but to what extent an aesthetic attitude depends upon this content is not yet clear.

3. Openness/Sensitivity: One who is more prepared, through education or other experience, for a particular kind of experience, could possibly garner more enjoyment from the experience and would be more qualified to relate that experience in a meaningful way to others. This kind of sensitivity would vary between individuals, and seems to explain some of the perceived differences between aesthetic objects and agent’s observations of them.

4. Attention: To experience any object one must pay attention to it. In the case of aesthetic experience it seems even more important to attend to an object completely, as distraction from the object would detract from one’s ability to appreciate the object for itself alone.

We will discuss each of these characteristics at length in chapter 3. However, first we will discuss another conception of an aesthetic attitude theory, that of Nishida Kitaro. In our examination of Nishida’s theory we will see whether there is agreement with the characteristics of an aesthetic attitude we have noted in Bullough, and what additions and changes Nishida’s work suggests.
CHAPTER 2

Nishida and Muga

2.1 Muga (無我):

*Muga* is a central philosophical notion of *Zen* Buddhism, and in one form or another is ubiquitous within *Zen* literature on aesthetics. It can be translated in a variety of ways, however, in the context of aesthetics it can be translated as “ecstasy,” “no-self,” “no-ego,” or “selflessness.” Nishida describes *muga* as “when one forgets one’s own interest such as advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss… when we are not in the least restricted by thought of self” (Odin 1987, 216). This immediately sounds similar to Bullough’s idea of ‘distancing.’ However, when examined more thoroughly *muga*, in the context of aesthetics, is more complex.

Suzuki Daisetzu Tetitaro, a contemporary of Nishida, in his book *Zen and Japanese Culture* continuously returns to the idea of *muga* either in its basic or one of its derivative forms. In the section of the book devoted to *Zen* and swordsmanship, Suzuki describes *muga* as not being without thoughts, ideas, feelings, and so forth, but as “letting your natural faculties act in a consciousness free from [particular] thoughts, reflections, or affections of any kind” (Suzuki 1993, 127). Later in the same section Suzuki quotes one Shigeyoshi Takano, who describes *muga* as corresponding to what Buddhism calls a state of emptiness, in which all thoughts and feelings, which are likely to hinder the freest operation of [our faculties], are thoroughly purged (Suzuki, 205). And discussing beauty itself, Suzuki states that beauty is only possible “where no mutually excluding
oppositions take place, or rather when the mutually excluding oppositions of which we are always too conscious… are taken up even as they are into something of a higher order” (Suzuki, 355).

Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, a student of Nishida, discusses seven characteristics of Zen art in his book *Zen and the Fine Arts*. One such characteristic, which is tied to if not the very meaning of *muga*, is ‘Freedom from attachment’ (Hisamatsu/Tokiwa 1971, 34-36). This conception can be stated as being unconstrained in thinking and action. Hisamatsu makes it clear that this goes beyond mere rational or volitional freedom, which he describes as being free within the confines of certain rules. According to Hisamatsu Zen freedom (*muga*), is freedom in the sense of not being under any rules (36). It is concerned with what has form, yet remaining formless, or “the freedom [for thought and action] to take on any form because of not having any form” (58).

These conceptions of *muga*, in the context of aesthetics, contain more than Bullough’s ‘distancing’ from ones affections. There is the added dimension of the Zen freedom described above, in which there is total freedom of thought and action. This immediately brings to mind Kant’s idea of ‘free play’ of the cognitive powers, under which they are not limited by a definite concept or rule of cognition. This is something more than the ‘distancing’ or the objectifying quality of an aesthetic experience we have discussed thus far. And moving forward in our discussion it will be important to keep in mind this added dimension to the meaning of *muga*, as compared to the western concepts of ‘distancing’ and ‘disinterestedness.’

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2.2 An Explanation of Beauty:

a. Beauty is not simply pleasure.

Nishida’s gives his first conception of beauty in a paper entitled “Bi no Setsumei” (“An Explanation of Beauty”), years before An Inquiry into the Good, his first major philosophical work. He begins by discussing the theory that beauty is nothing other than a kind of pleasure (Odin/Nishida 1987, 215). He thinks pleasure is certainly involved in an experience of beauty. However, he denies the completeness of the ‘beauty is pleasure’ theory. He says if pleasure were a complete definition of beauty, then every time one experiences pleasure he or she would experience beauty. One does not experience beauty every time one experiences pleasure. Therefore, pleasure is not a complete definition of beauty. From here Nishida moves into what he believes is the fundamental characteristic of the experience of beauty.

b. Beauty comes from muga.

Following explanations of beauty from German Idealism, particularly Kant, Nishida believes that the pleasure associated with beauty is pleasure detached from the ego, or what Nishida calls ‘aesthetic pleasure’ (216). Nishida says this pleasure is “a pleasure of the moment, when one forgets one’s own interest such as advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss.” This characterization of one’s state during aesthetic pleasure, according to Nishida, is the very definition of the Zen doctrine of muga. Nishida says that only this muga is essential to beauty, and when pleasure is present in the

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absence of this *muga* it cannot arouse a sense of beauty. He says that when we are not restricted by thoughts of self, not only does pleasure give rise to a sense of beauty, but any object, even those that seemed unpleasant originally, can provide aesthetic pleasure. Further, when one has an experience of beauty, the fact that one feels aesthetic pleasure in proportion to the intensity of the emotional reaction to the object is due to our emotions being unrestricted in a state of *muga*. From this Nishida concludes that if one wishes to experience an “authentic sense of beauty,” one must confront things in a state of pure *muga*.

Here, very early in our discussion of Nishida, it appears that Nishida’s theories also contain a motivational aspect similar to that found in Bullough. Both agree that one’s interest is held in abeyance during aesthetic experience. To what extent this agreement extends will become clearer as our discussion proceeds.

c. Beauty is intuitive truth.

Nishida next discusses what sort of thing produces the sense of beauty. This time following Baumgarten, Nishida says that beauty is a kind of truth, intuitive truth (217). He says that Baumgarten was correct when he said that beauty is not identical with logical truth. Nishida says that if it were true that the thing that produces a sense of beauty is logical truth, then one could hold a simple anatomy chart at the highest level of art, which would be absurd. Nishida says that the kind of truth that produces a sense of beauty comes not from a process of reasoning, but as a sudden emotional reaction. The reason we feel drawn into aesthetic experiences, or sympathize with characters in a story,
is not because we have reasoned our way to a connection using logical theories, it is because we have connected to it emotionally. This is intuitive truth, which is beyond the scope of logical truth and discrimination. It is “truth that is attained when we have separated from the self and become one with things.” In other words it is truth that is only revealed when an object is confronted in a state of muga.

In addition to the motivational aspect of an aesthetic attitude, our noted characteristic of Emotional/Felt content also appears in this early section of our discussion of Nishida. To determine the relationship these characteristics share we will have to develop a clearer picture of muga in the context of aesthetics. Regardless, Nishida’s use of the Zen concept of muga to elucidate the Japanese sense of beauty is akin to the western aesthetic conception of an aesthetic attitude. For it to become clear what muga amounts to and to what degree it differs from western aesthetic conceptions, specifically Bullough’s, we must examine Nishida’s foundational theory and his later thoughts on aesthetics.

2.3 An Inquiry into the Good:

a. Pure Experience.

The foundations of Nishida Philosophy can be found in Nishida’s first published book, An Inquiry into The Good. In this work Nishida explains his core theory of ‘pure experience.’ This theory would motivate Nishida’s writing throughout his career. Later, Nishida would refine this theory while developing his theories of ‘absolute will’ and
finally ‘absolute nothingness.’ However, it can be said that much if not all of Nishida Philosophy, including his thoughts on aesthetics, is built upon his theory of pure experience.

Nishida’s most basic definition of pure experience is the state of experience just as it is, without deliberative discrimination (Nishida/Abe 1990, 3). He says it is identical with direct experience, but direct experience in a specific sense. Direct experience for Nishida is experiencing one’s present state of consciousness directly, free of deliberative reflection and subject/object discrimination (4). And because it is a state free of deliberation, pure experience is a state free of deliberative judgments and so free of meaning in the basic sense. For, meaning is attributed to (or abstracted from) objects via deliberative judgments. Pure experience is the present consciousness of facts just as they are. It could be interpreted as a state of active knowing as opposed to active deliberation about the nature of a certain bit of knowledge, wherein the object of knowledge is subordinated to the knower and to the deliberations.

According to Nishida, the kinds of phenomena that qualify as candidates for pure experience are: sensations and perceptions, mental images and representations, feelings and the will, in fact all mental phenomena (5). As pure experience is one’s direct state of consciousness, it is simple to see how sensations and perceptions would be included in it. But, other mental phenomena may not be as easily included. To understand why Nishida includes all mental phenomena as candidates for pure experience it is important to

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7 See Nishida’s later works: *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* (1917) (English Version, SUNY Press 1987), and *From the Actor to the Seer* (1927).
understand Nishida’s concept of ‘purity’ and the related concept of ‘unity.’ The purity of
an experience derives from the strict unity of one’s consciousness (7). In Nishida’s sense
one’s consciousness is unified when the present experience occupies consciousness free
of deliberative discriminations (conscious, overt deliberations). When this unity is broken
by deliberations one’s present consciousness enters into relations with other
consciousnesses (past experiences), generates meanings and judgments, and ceases to be
pure experience. When one has an ordinary everyday experience it is usually consciously
located within a system of relations with other experiences via deliberative
discriminations. While one is driving to a place one has never been, one is constantly
consciously deliberating as to the correctness of one’s directions, mentally mapping one’s
surroundings, watching for important signs and signals, etc. For Nishida these different
deliberations are establishing relations between one’s present state of consciousness and
previous states of consciousness, in essence making deliberative judgments (9). The
present experience of driving is subordinated into a disunified system of judgments, and
so it is not a pure experience of driving.

Having an experience devoid of deliberative discriminations can sound as if the
experience is devoid of content. But Nishida is clear in saying that an experience devoid
of deliberative discriminations is not to say there is no discriminative content (8-9). He
gives the example of experiencing the color blue. In this example one recognizes the
color as blue without deliberation. This is due to the system of consciousness (mind and
memory) developing over time through differentiation (7-8). Over time through
experiences and deliberations one’s system of consciousness becomes more complex. We
divide experiences and differentiate them as to their content. And as this system develops certain parts become internalized, in this case colors, and can be recognized without the need for further deliberations. Nishida says that these kinds of internalized recognitions then become distinctions in the experience itself, and not deliberative discriminations on the part of the agent. This explains how when one practices an activity to a degree of expertise, what was once conscious becomes unconscious (10). In the above example of a pure experience of driving one would be an experienced driver travelling a very regular route in a vehicle with which one is intimately familiar. All of one’s movements would be automatic, no deliberation required.

That Nishida’s system of consciousness develops over time through differentiation, internalizing certain recognitions, some to the point of expertise, gives us his explanation of human learning. But included in this idea is the possibility for a learned aesthetic sensibility which we earlier noted as the form in which we find our openness/sensitivity characteristic of an aesthetic attitude. Containing the possibility, however, is not the same as giving clear agreement with this characteristic. And here we are discussing Nishida’s thoughts on pure experience, and have yet to see what this means for his conception of muga as it pertains to aesthetics.

b. Thinking.

Pure experience, being identical with direct experience, coincides with one’s faculty of attention (6). This helps bring Nishida’s idea of unity into clearer focus. For one’s consciousness to be unified one must not only be attending to the experience, but
one must also not be attending to anything but the experience. That pure experience coincides with attention also helps to explain how mental images and representations can be included in pure experience. For mental images and representations can certainly occupy present consciousness. Further, Nishida states that in the context of pure experience and one’s present state of consciousness, there is no hard and fast distinction between perceptions and mental images and representations, merely a relative one (13-16). This is because perceptions and mental images are both subject to one’s faculty of thought, or are processed through one’s thinking. According to Nishida, thinking and perception share an important characteristic, that they are both constitutive activities by which one forms one’s ‘unifying reality.’ By this he means that perception and thinking work together to establish the relations between one’s experiences, be they of sensations, mental representations, etc. that make up one’s system of consciousness (11). This unifying reality underlies all of one’s experiences and judgments, and is perpetually in a state of development. In this way there is a relative difference between perceptions, being (judged to be) related to external objects, and mental images and representations, being (judged to be) related to internal states. From the perspective of one’s system of consciousness or unifying reality there is no hard and fast distinction between them (13).

According to Nishida, thinking is the process by which one’s system of consciousness develops (16). As stated above this developmental state is perpetual. We cannot choose to stop our thinking. In this way, Nishida states that the distinction between thinking and experience is also merely relative (19). As thinking, be it conscious or unconscious, in a general or more specialized sense, is present at all times during
experience as the mechanism by which one processes experiences, there cannot be any hard and fast distinction between thinking and experience. Because of this, Nishida thinks that for pure experience to take place, thinking must be allowed to function freely in a unified present consciousness. Nishida says that when thinking is developing and operating freely, it is based entirely in unconscious attention. And that thinking only becomes conscious when its advance is hindered (13). As in our example of an ordinary experience of driving, one who is distracted by trying to find a place to which one has never been is consciously thinking, i.e. in a disunified state of consciousness developing relationships between experiences. Their thinking is not operating freely in Nishida’s sense. In this situation one is consciously directing their thinking at every step. In contrast, one who is having a pure experience of driving is not consciously directing their thinking. It is being allowed to function freely on its own in a unified state of consciousness, according to the relations present in the experience itself that have been internalized by the driver.

In this section we get Nishida’s thoughts on the process by which one’s system of consciousness develops. He states that this process coincides with one’s attention, in that to experience something one must pay attention to it. Further, to have a pure experience one has to attend to the experience alone, allowing one’s thinking to operate freely, unhindered by conscious deliberations. This is very much like the attention characteristic of an aesthetic attitude we noted in Bullough, in that one must not be distracted by other concerns.
c. Will.

If thinking is the process by which one’s system of consciousness develops, and one’s present state of consciousness coincides with one’s attention, how is this process directed? In other words, what directs one’s attention? Nishida says that when a consciousness emerges, a unifying activity in the form of a feeling of inclination accompanies it (8). He says that this activity directs our attention and is unconscious when the unity of consciousness is strict and undisturbed from without. This unifying activity, for Nishida, is the will. He says that we usually think of the will as some kind of special power. However, according to Nishida, in actuality the will is no more than the experience of shifting from one mental image or representation to another. “To will something is to direct attention to it” (21). Nishida says that free will is generally thought to consist of the ability to determine our desires and to not be interfered with or obstructed during their fulfillment (25). It is thought that one can desire anything, but to Nishida this simply means that it is possible for one to desire. According to Nishida one cannot determine one’s desires. They are essentially imparted to the individual at specific times. One can only predict what one will desire next, one cannot determine or even know it with certainty. Nishida says that when one acts in accordance with one’s imparted desires one feels free, and when one acts in opposition to these desires one feels compulsion. In this way Nishida states that freedom is synonymous with the systematic development of consciousness, in which the will freely directs perception and thinking without any obstruction or compulsion.
Freedom in Nishida’s sense is necessary for pure experience. As stated above the direction of the will is unconscious when the unity of consciousness is strict, i.e. when our attention is not divided by deliberations and discriminations. It can also not be disturbed from without, i.e. outside interference that forces one to form conscious deliberations or judgments. As in our example of a pure experience of driving, one cannot have a pure experience if one is constantly deliberating, but the pure experience could also be interrupted by some unforeseen danger like a deer darting into the path of the vehicle. This would disturb the unity of consciousness from without, causing one to make conscious judgments as to how to maneuver and avoid disaster. Nishida makes this clearer with his discussion of goals (23). He says that when attempting a goal that is not an actuality, we must consider various means. If we fail to discover the appropriate means we must alter the goal. However, Nishida says, when the goal is close to actuality, as in habitual conduct (internalized representations), the desire immediately turns into performance. In our example, during the pure experience the driver’s desires are immediately performed. However, when disturbed from without the driver must consider various means to deal with the situation, hence deliberations, judgments, and disunity.

In regard to our inquiry into muga as an aesthetic attitude, here we get further development toward our characteristic of attention. Nishida’s unified consciousness requirement for pure experience is, at least in one aspect if not its entirety, attending to an experience without distraction. Distractions can come from within, our own deliberations and concerns, or from without, interference from other sources. In this section we also get a look at Nishida’s thoughts on the Zen freedom aspect of muga. He says that freedom is
synonymous with the systematic development of consciousness, in which the will freely
directs perception and thinking without obstruction or compulsion. Obstruction and
compulsion come from distraction. This also contributes toward our noted
openness/sensitivity characteristic of an aesthetic attitude. In that certain preconceived
notions and concerns could interfere with the free operation of one’s consciousness and
so the purity of one’s experience. This would translate to a lack of the
openness/sensitivity necessary to experience certain objects aesthetically.

d. Intellectual Intuition.

If thinking is the process by which one’s system of consciousness is developed,
and the will is that which directs this process, what then motivates it? In other words,
what is the starting point of this process and what keeps it moving and developing? For
Kant, from whom Nishida takes his lead much of the time, intuitions are the basic inputs
in thought and experience, which are processed through thinking to develop concepts and
so motivate the thinking process.8 Nishida takes Kant’s lead here again, saying that the
process of intuition is identical to ordinary perception (30), i.e. intuitions are passively
taken in and processed through thinking into one’s system of consciousness, hence
motivating the thinking process. He goes further, stating that because thinking is
established on and motivated by intuition, intuition is also the base for all relations, which
are established through thinking, and the will which directs the thinking process (33-34).
However, while Nishida seems to agree to an extent with Kant’s basic conceptions of
intuition, he is specifically interested in a special kind of intuition, ‘intellectual intuition.’

Nishida says that intellectual intuition is intuition of ideal objects, objects that can only be known dialectically (30). In other words it is an intuition of an object or idea that is outside one’s ordinary perceptual experiences. Examples of this would be the intuitions of artists (ex. aesthetic value, beauty), scholars (ex. historic/intrinsic value, justice), and people of religion (ex. spiritual value, sacredness).⁹ In saying that the process of intuition is identical to that of perception, Nishida points out that perception is not a purely simple activity. The activity of perception is compositional and contains ideal elements (31), i.e. our perceptions are mediated by the internalized representations in our system of consciousness (past experiences). In Nishida’s example of a pure experience of blue, the viewer is able to recognize the color without deliberation because the mental image or representation of blue has been previously internalized. In this way blue has become one of the ideal elements in this viewer’s system of perception.¹⁰ Nishida says that these ideal elements structure one’s experiences, and the degree to which they do so will vary with the talents and degree of experiential development of the individual. So, one who independently recognizes the color blue does so only by virtue of having previously internalized the mental image or representation of blue, which structures his or her perception upon subsequent instances. According to Nishida the same is true of intellectual intuition. He says that with the advance of experience, and so the development of the system of consciousness, that which at first could not be known or only gradually come to be known dialectically, can come to appear as intuitional fact. These would become internalized representations and also function as ideal elements

⁹ My examples.
¹⁰ These ideal elements would be analogous to what Kant called ‘concepts.’
which structure one’s experiences. Nishida would have us think of the ideal elements in experience as fundamentally the same as any other element. However, unlike ordinary elements in perception which can be built up quantitatively, the ideal elements in experience instead only become qualitatively more profound.

There is a danger here that one could take any idle fantasy and process it into an internalized representation, and continue to do so until one’s system of consciousness contains an inordinate number of purely fictional, or at least highly questionable, representations. Nishida heads off this problem by appealing to his idea of unity. He says that the difference between an idle fantasy and a genuine intuition is in the scope of their unities, in their relations to other things (31). One mental image or representation which is arrived at dialectically in the unity of consciousness, and is determined to be incongruous with one’s greater system of representations, would be an idle fantasy. While another, which one determines to be congruous with a portion or the entirety of one’s greater system of representations, would be a genuine intuition, and the greater the system of representations with which this intuition is unified, the stronger one would feel about its veracity. This of course would also extend to the greater overall system of consciousness (other individuals), and so the more an intuition is congruous with not only one’s own subjective representations but to those apparent of others as well, the more veracious it would appear.

For Nishida, intellectual intuition is important for pure experience and the overall development of consciousness because it is that which deepens and enlarges one’s state of pure experience. It is a manifestation of a greater unity not only in one individual’s
system of consciousness, but in the overall systematic development of consciousness as a whole (32). When a scholar achieves a new idea, an artist a new ideal, an ethicist a new motive, a religious person an new awakening, it is a manifestation of this greater unity. He says that our consciousness is not simply sensory. We possess what he calls an ‘idealistic spirit,’ which seeks unlimited unity (an ever growing and expanding system of consciousness which has no ultimate boundary). Unlimited unity is provided in the form of intellectual intuition (the ability to expand one’s system of consciousness to include the dialectical). Having the knack of an art or an aesthetic spirit, according to Nishida, are examples of a developed sense of intellectual intuition. He gives the example of a painter who is inspired and whose brush moves spontaneously. According to Nishida behind this creative activity lies a unity of consciousness in the form of intellectual intuition, a pure experience. He says that intellectual intuition can be found at the base of all disciplined behavior, and is thus a very common phenomenon. Nishida points out that some call it simple habit or organic activity, but from the perspective of pure experience it is the state in which subject/object distinction is removed, when intellectual intuition is freely motivating the thinking process guided by the unobstructed will. It is the fusion of knowing and willing. He says pure experience is the mutual forgetting of the self and the object, in which the self does not move the object and the object does not move the self. The opposition of subject and object is abstracted out of this unity, and artistic inspiration attains it.

Here Nishida explains that one not only develops by internalizing representations of objects and relations, but also abstract ideals such as justice, sacredness, aesthetic
value, etc… When he says that intellectual intuition is found in all disciplined behavior he means that how one performs any familiar action is structured by the ideal they have internalized for that action. Through practice, instruction, or trial and error one will develop an ideal as to how an action should be performed and internalize it. In the case of aesthetics one would develop an ideal of aesthetic value, for example, and this ideal would structure any subsequent aesthetic experiences, be they creating, criticizing, or simply experiencing an aesthetic object. This has obvious links to our noted openness/sensitivity characteristic of an aesthetic attitude, i.e. the broader or more developed the internalized ideal of aesthetic value the more open or sensitive one would be to a wider variety of aesthetic objects. Further when Nishida says that having an aesthetic spirit is having a developed sense of intellectual intuition, this equates to not only an openness/sensitivity to new objects but also to new, and/or altering one’s existing, abstract ideals.

This and the preceding three sections also have some impact on the motivational characteristic of an aesthetic attitude. We have seen that pure experience is lost if our attention is divided due to interference from distractions in the form of deliberations, be they sourced within or without. Self or pragmatic interest would certainly count as such an internal distraction. However, here in this section we have seen that one’s internalized ideals do not endanger pure experience in the same way, and are actually a requirement for having a pure experience. This is very similar to Bullough’s antinomy of Distance, according to which the maintenance of Distance involves the entirety of one’s emotional content and experience, while holding in abeyance any personal interest in the experience.
For Nishida, to have a pure experience one must bring all of their internalized representations to bear on the experience with the exception of holding back any particular internal representations, and avoiding any external interference, that would distract one from the immediate experience. For our motivational characteristic of an aesthetic attitude this would seem to equate to, or at least involve, Kemp’s requirement that one not be pragmatically motivated.

To sum up Nishida’s theory of pure experience, it is the direct immediate experience of one’s consciousness, in which one’s thinking/perception is freely motivated by intuition, structured by one’s internalized representations, and guided by a will that is unobstructed by distraction. It is as he said at the beginning of this chapter, the direct state of experience just as it is. This is the very definition of the *Zen* freedom we noted as a characteristic of *muga* in the first section of this chapter. We have also seen a small part of Nishida’s thoughts on aesthetics as they relate to this theory. However, to achieve our goal of a more robust explanation of *muga*, and to discover the full extent of how Nishida’s aesthetic ideas differ from Bullough’s, we must continue into Nishida’s later work on aesthetics, *Art and Morality*.

2.3 Art and Morality:


Nishida says that the content of aesthetic experience is aesthetic feeling, which is a subjective state (Nishida/Dilworth 1973, 5). However, aesthetic experience also possesses an “objective quality,” in that, similar to mathematics, aesthetic experience is
universal across all consciousnesses (individuals). Nishida says that to understand aesthetic experience, one must clarify this universal quality (6).

It can be thought that aesthetic experience is always subjective. For Nishida this is an inference form thinking that feeling is always “a momentary personal condition” (8). But according to Nishida, feeling (which is not limited to what we commonly think of as emotions) is a directional variety of consciousness. It is trans-individual, trans-temporal, trans-spatial, and thus universal across all consciousnesses. For Nishida, feeling is the foundational function of consciousness upon which all other functions are based, and so the fundamental condition for the establishment of consciousness itself (14).

b. Feeling as Content.

If pure experience is a state in which one directly experiences one’s consciousness, what does this state amount to? In other words how does this state obtain? Nishida says that it obtains in feeling (14). Feeling, as the foundation of consciousness, is also what Nishida calls “the dynamic content of consciousness” (15). One cannot direct attention toward an object without feeling something toward it. Feeling need not only refer to the strong overt emotions like love, anger, or happiness for example. Feeling is also more subtle, such things as confusion, curiosity, ambivalence, and satisfaction are also feelings. For Nishida, there is not a single moment that feeling is

\[11\] Nishida uses the term “objective” here to denote the universal quality of aesthetic experience, to avoid confusion I will use the term ‘universal’ in its place.

\[12\] In Art and Morality, Nishida uses the phrase “the immediate synthesis of act and act,” being the act of consciousness and the act of knowing, to describe the immediate experience of ‘absolute will’ which is derived from his theory of pure experience. I will continue to use the term ‘pure experience’ for the sake of uniformity.
not present in any experience. All activity is filled with feeling (23). And in a state of pure experience, when one’s consciousness is unified and operating freely, one experiences pure feeling, the direct experience of the content of consciousness (15).

Nishida says that pure feeling is pure consciousness, and that there is no special aesthetic consciousness apart from this. “Pure feeling, pure consciousness, is always aesthetic” (15). It is aesthetic feeling. He says, it is not that feeling is aesthetic merely as sensory content. But, that when one is directly experiencing pure feeling, objects come to life, and become aesthetic. Further, Nishida says that because aesthetic feeling is universal [and relatable] across all consciousnesses, and aesthetic experience obtains in aesthetic feeling, feeling as the content of pure experience explains the universal quality of aesthetic experience (14).

Here we see a difference between Bullough and Nishida when it comes to the involvement of emotional/felt content in aesthetic experience. Bullough gave us the idea of bringing all of one’s emotional experience to bear on an aesthetic experience while keeping personal interest in abeyance, the antinomy of Distance. Nishida on the other hand takes this a bit further. He agrees that one must not be personally interested, but instead of simply bringing one’s emotional experience to bear on an aesthetic experience, Nishida says that the felt content is the experience itself. And according to Nishida it is only the purity of the experience which makes it aesthetic.
c. Unaesthetic Feeling.

Obviously all feeling cannot be pure and therefore aesthetic. So what is unaesthetic or impure feeling? Nishida says it is feeling that makes personal advantage or disadvantage primary. Feeling that takes what he calls “the form of desire” (16). This occurs when the actualization of a feeling becomes heteronomous with ones desires. In a pure experience one’s thinking and perception are freely motivated by one’s intuition and guided by an unobstructed will, personal interest being one of the primary ways in which one’s will can be obstructed. When feeling takes the form of desire one’s consciousness is distracted from the pure experience and toward the actualization of the particular feeling. The experience is no longer primary, the fulfillment of desire is. This immediately gives way to the distinction of subject and object and to conscious deliberations toward a way in which to fulfill the desire (17). One experiences the object in an interested way, making their advantage or disadvantage primary, as opposed to experiencing the object directly, i.e. aesthetically. Of course having goals/plans/interests during an aesthetic experience need not necessarily threaten the purity of the experience provided those goals do not take the form of desire. For example, an artist having a certain form in mind during the creation of a work need not make their personal advantage or disadvantage primary.

Nishida’s requirement that desires and goals in aesthetic experience not take ‘the form of desire’ is a more specific condition for our motivational aspect of an aesthetic attitude. ‘Disinterested’ becomes far less vague when defined as not making personal advantage or disadvantage primary.
d. Intuition Revisited.

As we saw in *An Inquiry Into the Good*, similar to Kant, Nishida takes intuition to be that which motivates one’s consciousness. Intuitions are the basic inputs in thought and experience, everything that one experiences is originally taken in as intuition. And there we discussed intellectual intuition, which is a particular kind of intuition, that of dialectical objects. Nishida develops these ideas further.

Nishida says that the basic source of feeling is the same as that of thought and perception which are based in feeling, intuition. It is the basic source of the establishment of consciousness (feeling), and its content (Feeling, perception, and representation, the latter two of which are based in feeling.) is what is given to us (19). In this way aesthetic feeling (pure feeling) is also intuitive, it is the direct experience of intuitive content. Nishida says that the intellectual content of a perception or representation does not become an aesthetic object, but the content of pure experience (feeling) becomes aesthetic content. For Nishida, aesthetic content is not an objective space, which is an intellectual object, but a subjective space that functions internally. Aesthetic feeling is not something that can be objectively separated from consciousness. It is an active unified organic experience within subjective consciousness.

e. Productive Illusion.

Nishida points out that since Kant aesthetic experience has been considered ‘disinterested’ (28). Nishida agrees. He says that aesthetic experience can be thought of a kind of illusion, ‘productive illusion’ (29). Productive illusion is a state in which present
experience appears as illusory, but affects consciousness as if it were not. By assuming this state all practical concern is removed, but one still experiences consciousness in a direct, highly personal way. When experiencing a productive illusion, Nishida says one takes a position, one of fully realizing the artificiality of what is presented while allowing it to affect one’s consciousness freely. He calls it a trans-intellectual position outside of truth and falsity (or reality and fantasy if you prefer), a kind of ‘conscious self-delusion.’ ‘The true’ and ‘the artificial,’ as mutually exclusive opposites, become meaningless in this context. The artificiality or illusory appearance of the experience does not impede one from the aesthetic experience, because one does not allow it to. A productive illusion is a ‘conscious illusion,’ where one is conscious of the artificiality of an experience but allows it to affect his or her consciousness as if it were not.

Nishida’s concept of productive illusion is immediately similar to Bullough’s concept of distancing. Bullough states that the insertion of distance, through the removal of practical interest, allows one to view their experience with “the marveling unconcern of a mere spectator.” This is nearly identical, if not entirely, to one, through the removal of practical interest, experiencing a productive illusion as Nishida says. For experiencing something as an illusion entails that one view it with the unconcern of a spectator. And both Bullough and Nishida are clear that experiencing something as distanced or illusory does not entail the exclusion of felt content or an intensely personal connection with the experience, Bullough through his idea of the antinomy of Distance, and Nishida through his concept of purity, internalizing representations, and the ‘productive’ aspect of productive illusion.
2.4 Muga Defined:

Having examined much of his thoughts on aesthetics, and the foundations of his philosophy, we are now prepared to give a concrete definition of muga in the context of aesthetics according to Nishida. We started with a basic definition as a state in which one forgets one’s own interest and is not restricted by thoughts of self. We were then given the idea of Zen freedom, complete freedom of thought and action, as a key characteristic of muga. Being unrestricted by interest or thoughts of self is contained in the idea of Zen freedom. And a state of Zen freedom is obtained in Nishida’s state of pure experience, in which one’s thinking/perception is freely motivated by intuition, structured by one’s internalized representations, and guided by a will that is unobstructed by distraction. In this state, one experiences intuitive content directly in the form of aesthetic feeling, and views experiences from the perspective of productive illusion. Taking into account all of Nishida’s writings which have been discussed here, this is a concise definition of the state of the muga which Nishida says is necessary for aesthetic experience.

Throughout this chapter we have noted similarities and differences between Nishida and Bullough’s aesthetic ideas. In the following chapter we will further discuss these differences and similarities, and finally take what we can from both Bullough and Nishida’s views to form a more complete definition of an aesthetic attitude.
CHAPTER 3

An Aesthetic Attitude

3.1 The Four Aspects:

a. Attentive.

In chapter one, we examined Edward Bullough’s theory of ‘Psychical Distance’ (PD). His theory of PD states that aesthetic experience is only possible by the metaphorical insertion of ‘Distance’ between the practical self of the observer and the object of experience. In section 1.2b we examined one of George Dickie’s objections to all aesthetic attitude theories, including Bullough’s theory of PD. Dickie’s objection is that all aesthetic attitude theories can be reduced to paying close attention to the object of experience. He says that when aesthetic attitude aestheticians describe one’s attention as ‘interested’ or ‘disinterested’ they are actually describing states of distraction or close attention respectively, and that ‘interested attention’ and ‘disinterested attention’ are not real states. In subsequent sections we saw Garry Kemp and Sushil Kumar Saxena disagree with Dickie, stating that it is precisely the motivational content of one’s attention that makes an experience aesthetic. Regardless, all of these writers agree that close or undistracted attention is essential to aesthetic experience.

While Bullough does not explicitly state that undistracted attention is essential to aesthetic experience, it is implied. He says that in a distanced state one looks at a phenomenon outside of the context of one’s own personal interest, observing the phenomenon ‘objectively,’ in the sense that one should interpret even one’s subjective
reactions to the phenomenon as objective “characteristics of the phenomenon” (Bullough 1912, 89). This distanced state is entirely distinct from how one normally experiences reality. Further, Bullough describes how distance can be lost due to the observer not being able to maintain distance, or due to the characteristics of the experience being so unfamiliar to them as to be incomprehensible (94). If one is unable to maintain distance, then one’s interest is not held in abeyance. If an experience is incomprehensible one is unable to experience it as it is. In both of these instances the agent is distracted from the experience in question. In the first, one is distracted by one’s interests. In the other, one is distracted by the effort to comprehend the experience at all. This implies that the absence of distraction is required to observe the experience ‘objectively’ in Bullough’s sense.

In our discussion of muga in chapter two, we saw that Nishida is very clear that undistracted attention is necessary for aesthetic experience, by way of his unified consciousness requirement (Nishida/Abe 1990, 7).¹³ For unity is broken either by distraction in the form of one’s internal deliberations and discriminations or by outside interference (8).

That undivided attention is necessary for aesthetic experience and so for an aesthetic attitude is the least questionable of the four aspects we have been discussing which seem to operate for these authors. To have a complete experience of anything at all, the most obvious first criteria is that one gives it their complete attention. However, in the case of aesthetic experience it is important to note that one’s undivided attention is not

¹³ Having established the conjoined relationship between Nishida’s concepts of ‘pure experience’ and ‘aesthetic experience’ in chapter 2, I will from this point use the term ‘aesthetic experience’ exclusively when referring to either.
static. During an aesthetic experience of an art work for example, one’s attention is given completely to the work but not holistically at all times. One’s eyes and attention moves freely between characteristics of a work, and the recognition of these characteristics enrich the experience of the work as a whole. This would seem to be in conflict with Nishida’s idea of unity, for if our attention is moving between the characteristics of a work are we not discriminating, which opposes the unity of consciousness. Are we being distracted from the whole of the work by the characteristics of the work? Here it is important to recall what Nishida says about discriminatory content (7-8). If one has a sufficiently complex and developed system of consciousness, having internalized relevant representations through prior experience, the discriminative content in an aesthetic experience becomes part of the experience itself and does not threaten unity. This is directly in line with Bullough’s idea of the loss of PD by over-distancing. If a work, or even a characteristic of a work, is totally outside the experience of the observer, to the point where comprehension is difficult, then, in Nishida’s terms, one is distracted by deliberations and the experience ceases to be aesthetic. However, if through prior experience the observer has become familiar with similar works or characteristics, over-distancing does not occur and distance is maintained.

b. Motivational.

According to Bullough, assuming a Distanced state cuts out the practical side of, and one’s “practical attitude” toward, experience (Bullough 1912, 88-89). In other words Distancing involves holding in abeyance all practical interest. It involves being
‘disinterested.’ As we saw in chapter two, disinterestedness is also a key characteristic of Nishida’s conception of *muga* in the context of aesthetics (Odin/Nishida 1987, 215). For personal interest causes distraction in the form of internal deliberations as to the fulfillment of one’s interest, which eliminates the unity of consciousness (undivided attention) and so aesthetic experience (Nishida/Abe 1990, 7-9).

In section 1.2b, we saw how Dickie concluded that interested attention is not attention at all but simply distraction, therefore ‘disinterested attention’ and so any aesthetic attitude theory only amounts to close attention (Dickie 1964, 64). Dickie says that ‘disinterestedness’ is properly assigned to make clear that certain actions, like verdicts made by judges, have certain kinds of *motives* (60). He says that attending does have its motives, but the attending itself is not properly interested or disinterested. Our final two writers from chapter one, Kemp and Saxena, rebutted Dickie, concluding that ‘interested’ and ‘disinterested’ when applied to attention do not denote differences in the attending itself, but in the point of view of the observer, in his or her motivation (Kemp 1999, Saxena 1978).

Dickie is correct that attention itself cannot be interested or disinterested. Disinterestedness applies directly to motivation not perception. However, in Dickie’s own examples of disinterested verdicts of judges, juries, and so forth, there is more to say. When judges and juries preside over a legal proceeding and render a verdict we certainly want their verdict to be disinterested in the interest of justice. However, during the

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14 Bullough’s idea of ‘Distance’ includes holding all practical interests in abeyance, which is a version of the very definition of being ‘disinterested’ as used by Stolnitz and others (Stolnitz 1960, 35). As such I will be using the term ‘disinterested’ when referring to that aspect of Bullough’s theory of PD.
proceedings we also want the judge and jury to be undistracted and attending closely to support the ultimate goal of a disinterested verdict. And in the interest of the ultimate goal of a disinterested verdict, what would one expect the judge and jury’s attitude or point of view from which they are attending closely and undistractedly to be? Certainly one would expect a judge and jury to attend to legal proceedings from a disinterested point of view, to maintain their impartiality throughout the proceedings. And if it was ever determined that said judge and jury had not attended to the proceedings from a disinterested point of view, then it would cast some doubt on the impartiality of their final verdict. Analogously in the case of aesthetics, an aesthetic experience implies at the least a tacit aesthetic judgment, that there is something aesthetically valuable about the object of the experience. And an aesthetic judgment, be it tacit or obvious, if found to be based upon an experience in which the observer’s attitude or point of view was not disinterested, could be questioned as to its validity. So Saxena and Kemp’s support of interested and disinterested attention, when interested and disinterested apply to the attitude or point of view of the observer and not the attending itself, seems correct and supported by Dickie’s own example and admission that “attending to an object, of course, has its motives…” (Dickie 1964, 60).

Being interested or disinterested is many times explained by reference to the agent’s desires, and rightfully so. One’s desires are certainly a component of one’s more general personal interest. However, are all desires such that their mere presence in consciousness renders any attitude or point of view interested and so eliminate the possibility of aesthetic experience? We saw in section 2.3c that Nishida addresses this
very issue with his requirement that desires and goals during aesthetic experience do not take “the form of desire” (Nishida/Dilworth 1973, 16-17). A goal or desire during experience takes ‘the form of desire’ when it takes personal advantage or disadvantage as primary. For instance a film producer who attends a showing of his or her latest film to check up on his or her investment is making their personal advantage or disadvantage primary. But a normal patron attending the same showing who desires to have an aesthetic experience must make the experience itself primary to be successful. Desires can be present. They simply must not be made primary. This distinction allows for goals during aesthetic experience such as an artist’s pre-conception of a work during creation, an observer’s general desire for aesthetic fulfillment, and a critic’s goal of ultimately providing quality criticism. And in answer to our original question about desires, no, all desires do not endanger aesthetic experience, only those that as Nishida puts it “take the form of desire.”

Including this characterization of the relationship of desires to personal interest, the discussion of disinterestedness earlier in this section, and the previous section’s discussion of attention, we have a definition of the relationship between motivation and attention in, and a preliminary definition of, an aesthetic attitude. One maintains an aesthetic attitude toward an experience when they are able to maintain close undistracted attention which is motivated from a disinterested point of view.
c. Openness/Sensitivity (Learned Aesthetic Sensibility).

In section 1.1c-e we were introduced to Bullough’s ‘antinomy of Distance’ (AoD) (Bullough 1912, 91-95). According to AoD one will only be able to have an aesthetic experience if the object of that experience is in concordance with the agent’s feelings, affections, and previous experiences to some degree. Thus if an object of experience is completely outside of an agent’s previous experiences, having no frame of reference, it would remain incomprehensible and so eliminate the possibility of aesthetic experience. However, AoD also involves a qualification, that aesthetic experience is possible, when the object of experience is in concordance with the agent’s feelings, affections, and previous experience, only if the agent is able to maintain Distance, the main characteristic of which, in this case, is disinterestedness. This, combined with Bullough’s assertion that AoD presupposes that Distance is variable with respect to an agent’s ability to maintain Distance, and with respect to the character of the objects of experience (how well an object concords with an agent’s previous experience), gives us a variable “learned sensibility” taking the form of an openness or sensitivity to content in aesthetic experience.

For Nishida one internalizes representations through experience, which include not only representations of objects and relations, but also abstract ideals (Nishida/Abe 1990, 30). These internalized representations then structure subsequent experiences. In the case of aesthetics one would through experience internalize an ideal of aesthetic value, in addition to many others related and relevant to aesthetic experiences (balance, line, form, color, harmony, artistic representation, expression, etc…). These internalized
representations would amount to each person’s unique aesthetic sensibility. This sensibility will be more or less refined between individuals and at different times for the same individual because one’s system of consciousness (internalized representations) is perpetually developing (11).

From Bullough’s principle of concordance in AoD and Nishida’s characterization of the development of consciousness through internalizing representations, we get a clear view of a learned aesthetic sensibility. Over time through experience with aesthetic objects and experiences, one develops ideals and concepts which structure any subsequent aesthetic experiences. When presented with a potential aesthetic object, the more the object is in concordance with the agent’s current ideals and concepts, while maintaining a disinterested point of view, the easier it will be to assume an aesthetic attitude and have an aesthetic experience. This aesthetic sensibility of course could be cultivated through formal and informal education, and those with training from others with a cultivated sensibility would presumably exhibit a more refined sense, which ultimately amounts to an openness or sensitivity toward a wider variety of aesthetic content.

d. Emotional/Felt Content.

Sections 1.1c and 1.1d contain Bullough’s thoughts on the role of emotional or felt content in aesthetic experience and specifically his AoD (Bullough 1912, 91-92). As stated in the previous section AoD means that to have an aesthetic experience, the experience must accord with an agent’s feelings, affections, and past experiences to some
degree, and the agent must be able to maintain a disinterested point of view. And that how intensely an object will appeal to an agent is directly proportional to how completely it corresponds to his or her “intellectual and emotional peculiarities” and past experiences. This amounts to bringing one’s emotional faculties and past experience to bear on an experience while keeping at bay those experiences and feelings which would be incompatible with maintaining a distanced attitude toward the particular experience in question. For Bullough the involvement of emotional/felt content in aesthetic experience is a threshold phenomenon, too little and there is no ground in which the experience can take hold, too much and the agent loses all objectivity, able only to react to their direct personal interest in the object of the experience.

Nishida’s views on the involvement of emotional/felt content in aesthetic experience first appeared in sections 2.2b-c (Odin/Nishida 1987, 216-17). In this section Nishida states that an aesthetic experience occurs because we have connected to an object emotionally, and that the intensity of the experience is proportional to that emotional connection.¹⁵ In sections 2.3a-e we saw Nishida’s further thoughts on emotional/felt content (Nishida/Dilworth 1973, 5-15). According to Nishida feeling is the intuitive, foundational function (content) of consciousness. Aesthetic experience obtains in aesthetic feeling. The purity of feeling is what makes it aesthetic. And feeling is pure when one’s consciousness is unified and operating freely (undistracted from within or without).

¹⁵ Nishida uses the phrase “an experience of beauty” as can be seen in chapter 2 of this paper, but in light of the remainder of the discussion of Nishida, and for the sake of clarity I will be using “aesthetic experience” exclusively throughout the remainder of the paper.
Bullough’s characterization of the involvement of emotional/felt content in his AoD is that of a gradation or balancing act. One must bring one’s emotions and experience to bear on the experience in a particular way. The experience is separate, as the base upon which one must balance one’s feelings and experience to obtain a valid aesthetic experience. Tip the scale too much in one direction or the other and the experience becomes either incomprehensible or the object of one’s direct vested interest. Nishida’s view is fundamentally different, because it does not separate the experience from the feelings of the agent. For Nishida one cannot separate one’s feelings from experiences, because experience by its very nature is felt. Aesthetic experience, for Nishida, is pure experience. It is experience free from the internal and external distractions which obscure and complicate it most of the time. Non-aesthetic or “normal” experiences have as their base a pure or aesthetic experience. However, our everyday distractions and processes generally color, obscure, or interfere with these experiences to a degree which renders them non-aesthetic. For Bullough, one must balance their feelings and previous experiences with the current experience in a particular way to have an aesthetic experience. For Nishida, one must eliminate the obstacles of internal and external distractions which obscure the aesthetic experience.

It is also worth noting the similarity between Bullough’s idea of losing distance via under-distancing, and Nishida’s idea of “the form of desire” (Bullough 1912, 94, and Nishida/Dilworth 1973, 16, respectively). Each of these equates to becoming directly emotionally interested in the experience at hand. One’s well being becomes predicated on the experience going a certain way, making personal advantage or disadvantage primary
instead of the experience itself. Using Bullough’s example of the spectator of *Othello*, the spectator becomes irate because of the perceived similarity between the suspicions of *Othello* and the spectator’s suspicions about his own wife. Because of his inability to maintain distance the experience is viewed by the spectator as a violation against his well-being. And viewing any experience as a violation against us immediately makes our personal advantage or disadvantage primary. In general terms, one’s previous experiences and sensibilities establish limits under which one can view things without direct personal interest. And when those limits are exceeded it is felt as a violation and is perceived as bad for us.

For all their similarities, the main difference between Bullough and Nishida’s views on emotional/felt content in aesthetic experience is that Bullough separates the experience from the feelings of the agent, while Nishida thinks they are one and the same. Nishida may be using ‘feeling’ in a more general sense than Bullough. But how are we to interpret Bullough’s description of emotional/felt content as “intellectual and emotional peculiarities and the idiosyncrasies of our experience,” which we are to bring to bear on a potential aesthetic experience (Bullough 1912, 92)? Nishida states that there is not a single moment that feeling is absent from one’s experience (Nishida/Dilworth 1973, 15). Put simply, all activity is filled with feeling (23). Nishida is including all modes of feeling, because for Nishida feeling amounts to awareness, the foundation of consciousness. Bullough’s description of emotional/felt content may be narrower. However, if one were to speculate as to what if anything in consciousness would fall outside of Bullough’s description, what would there be? It appears that Bullough’s
description of emotional/felt content is just as broad as Nishida’s. The difference is in how this content is related to present experience: as the foundation of the experience itself for Nishida, and as a flexible medium through which we filter our experiences for Bullough.

Nishida makes a powerful and seemingly accurate assertion, that all activity is filled with feeling. Does Bullough’s characterization of emotional/felt content disagree with Nishida’s? No, it doesn’t. Characterizing emotional/felt content as a medium through which one filters experience is only superficially different from the content being the base of experience itself. Both characterizations amount to feeling and experience being inseparable from the agent’s perspective.

Emotional/felt content is inseparable from experience. Thus, this content is necessary for aesthetic experience, and is foundational for any definition of an aesthetic attitude. However, as we have seen in this and the preceding sections, emotional/felt content must be free of direct personal interest. This amounts to allowing one’s emotions to operate freely, while maintaining a disinterested point of view.

3.2 Definition, Conclusions, and Further Questions:

a. Aesthetic Attitude Defined.

The purpose of any aesthetic theory is to account for aesthetic experiences and aesthetic judgments which are based on those experiences. Throughout this paper we have been examining theories of those who believe it is the attitude of the observer, and not the properties of the object, that is primary when distinguishing non-aesthetic
experiences from aesthetic ones. Given the examinations and discussions earlier in this chapter and in the previous two chapters, we are now prepared to give a complete definition of an aesthetic attitude, which has four characteristics:

1. One’s attention is undivided, i.e. not distracted from the experience by personal interest or outside interference.
2. One is not motivated by personal interest, i.e. attending to the experience for its own sake, not for a directly personal ulterior purpose.
3. One’s relevant developmental concepts and past experiences allow for 1 and 2.
4. One’s feelings are allowed to operate freely to the degree necessary for 1, 2, and 3.

All four conditions must be met to obtain an aesthetic attitude. Using this definition it is possible to account for all aesthetic experiences, and aesthetic judgments.

b. Aesthetic Experience.

There are three distinct types of aesthetic participant the operation of which any complete aesthetic theory must account for: the observer, the creator, and the critic. The critic is essentially the same as the observer. The difference being that the critic makes an informed kind of aesthetic judgment based upon his or her aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic judgments will be discussed shortly. Here we must apply our aesthetic attitude theory to the aesthetic experience of the observer and the creator.

The aesthetic experience of the observer has been discussed directly and indirectly throughout this paper. The primary aesthetic participant due to the nature of
aesthetic attitude theory is the observer. If an aesthetic attitude is maintained, the
observer will have an aesthetic experience. Further, any object can become aesthetically
significant for the observer, provided it is experienced from an aesthetic attitude.

The aesthetic experience of the creator, or the creative aesthetic experience, is
more complex than observation. An experience is aesthetic when the agent maintains an
aesthetic attitude toward the object of that experience. This means that, as stated above,
any object can be the object of an aesthetic experience provided the agent maintains an
aesthetic attitude toward it. Aesthetic objects are defined in precisely these terms, as the
objects of aesthetic experience. Thus, the method of creation of the object, including the
attitude or motivation of the creator, is immaterial with regard to whether the object can
be viewed aesthetically. However, there is a difference between an object that happens to
be viewed aesthetically and an object that is created specifically as an aesthetic object.
There are objects, such as artworks and other craftworks, which are created for no
directly practical purpose other than for their aesthetic enjoyment. The attitude of the
creator ultimately does not prevent an agent from merely viewing an object aesthetically.
But, specifically creating an object to be viewed aesthetically would require the creator to
also view the object aesthetically, and so assume an aesthetic attitude at least temporarily
during the creation process.

The aesthetic sensibility of the observer is also affected by having information
about the object of an aesthetic experience. The mere aesthetic experience of an object is
distinct from a more informed aesthetic experience. This informed aesthetic experience is
more profound the wider range of information one has about the object, potentially
including the creator’s supposed motivations. So, whether or not the creator of an object
apparently maintained an aesthetic attitude during its creation has some bearing on the aesthetic experience of the observer. The full impact of such considerations is made obvious when considering aesthetic judgments.

**c. Aesthetic Judgments.**

Judgments of aesthetic value must be based upon aesthetic experiences. If a judgment is found to be based on a non-aesthetic experience, then it is a non-aesthetic judgment. The danger here is that by saying any object can be viewed aesthetically we must then consider each aesthetic object as equal in terms of aesthetic value. This is a mistake. As stated above, there is a difference between a mere aesthetic experience and a more informed aesthetic experience. The difference is in the aesthetic sensibilities of the observers. A mere aesthetic experience can occur with any object provided the observer maintains an aesthetic attitude. A more informed aesthetic experience comes from a more developed aesthetic sensibility than is required for a mere aesthetic experience. As we have seen in the previous chapters, one’s aesthetic sensibility develops over time through training and experience, which internalizes concepts and information that shape subsequent experiences. The implication is that a more developed aesthetic sensibility will allow a wider variety and more profound quality of aesthetic experiences. This has direct bearing on judgments of aesthetic value.

A tacit aesthetic judgment is being made simply by the occurrence of an aesthetic experience. The act of experiencing an object aesthetically implies that the observer judges the object to have at least a minimum level of aesthetic value. However, just as with aesthetic experience, there is a similar difference between mere aesthetic judgments and the informed variety. Mere aesthetic judgments (judgments of a minimum level of
aesthetic value) are made based on mere aesthetic experiences and usually have no bearing on the aesthetic experiences or judgments of others. Informed aesthetic judgments (judgments of a higher or more complex level of aesthetic value) are made based on informed aesthetic experiences but may also influence the aesthetic experiences and judgments of others. Those possessed of a more refined aesthetic sensibility are able to experience a wider variety and more profound quality of aesthetic experience. So, any aesthetic judgments based upon their more informed aesthetic experiences will also be more informed. The supposed informed quality of these judgments may influence the aesthetic sensibility of other observers, enhancing their aesthetic experiences.

Enhancing the aesthetic experience of others through informed aesthetic judgments is the precise definition of the function of our final aesthetic participant, the critic. The critic, ideally, is to be possessed of a refined aesthetic sensibility developed through extensive experience and training. This refined sensibility allows them more informed aesthetic experiences that are the basis for informed aesthetic judgments. It is true that in a sense “everyone’s a critic.” A refined aesthetic sensibility is not required for criticism per se. However, the critic of aesthetic value is not making judgments for themselves alone. Their judgments also have a normative quality. They direct other observers, through the quality of their criticism, toward more informed aesthetic experiences. It is this normative quality which makes a more refined aesthetic sensibility of paramount importance.

The critic of aesthetic value must be motivated aesthetically. It cannot be their aim to direct observers to which ever experiences serve their interest. This would call into question not only their aesthetic judgments, but also their aesthetic experiences and
sensibility. Ultimately, the effectiveness of aesthetic criticism is determined by the color of other observer’s beliefs about that critic’s aesthetic sensibility, experiences, and judgments. That the critic is experienced, well trained, and aesthetically motivated.

d. Conclusions.

Through the discussion of Bullough and Nishida, we have identified four key characteristics of an aesthetic attitude theory: Attention, Motivation, Aesthetic Sensibility, and Emotional/Felt Content. All four must obtain in the ways specified above to obtain an aesthetic attitude. Maintaining an aesthetic attitude is necessary for aesthetic experience, which can be of any object provided the attitude is maintained. Aesthetic judgments must be based upon aesthetic experiences. These judgments can have a greater or lesser effectiveness based on the supposed aesthetic sensibility of the provider. Thus, an aesthetic attitude, as defined here in, consistently accounts for all types and levels of aesthetic experience, aesthetic judgments, and aesthetic participants.

e. Questions for further research.

1. How can we definitively know if an aesthetic judgment is based upon an aesthetic experience?

2. Does the goal of self improvement through aesthetic experience amount to practical self interest?

3. Is there a difference between moral value and aesthetic value?

4. Is there a difference between aesthetic emotion/feeling and “real” emotion/feeling?
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