

Arnold Berleant, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34/3 (July 1994). Published in a Chinese translation. Summarized in Japanese in *Bigaku*, No. 178 (Vol. 45/2), 1994, p.70. Published in a Russian translation in *Polygnosis*, No. 2 (1999), 49-59.

BEYOND DISINTERESTEDNESS

In the spirit of a critical reconsideration of the foundations of aesthetics, I should like to place in question the most fundamental premise of traditional theory, the notion of aesthetic disinterestedness.¹ I find in certain recent modes of reflection an openness and a provisionality that are a welcome alternative to the restrictiveness of that tradition. While one term for this alternative course is 'postmodern,' I do not want to burden it with all the critical baggage that has accumulated around that troublesome concept, nor do I accept those exaggerated pronouncements made in its name that have led Stefan Morawski and others to regard postmodernism as a hopeless and destructive impasse.² These make it easy to discredit so boldly iconoclastic an intellectual development as it. I, for one, welcome the flexibility and pluralism that are the most salutary features of some of the recent discussions of interpretation and criticism, without allying myself with the particular brand of nihilism that often accompanies them.

At the same time, this discussion does not develop an alternative position; that is a larger undertaking than is possible here. My purpose here is more modest yet essential in the reconstruction of aesthetics: It is to see what remains of value in the traditional approach once its misleading assumptions and claims have been set aside. Genuine insights are to be found here that may be obscured, on the one hand, by programs for the emancipation of aesthetics and, on the other, by the heavy weight of history that endeavors to subsume the diversity of the new

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under the order of the familiar. Is it possible to distill those insights out of traditional theory in a form that renders them still useful in new contexts?

The eighteenth century bequeathed a theoretical frame to modern aesthetics that has profoundly influenced the understanding and appreciation of art for over two hundred years.³ Its key concepts, supplemented with a few additions from the romantic era, continue to supply the vocabulary for accounts of the arts of both scholar and layperson. Nothing seems more natural than to think of aesthetic appreciation as a distinctive kind of attention, contemplative and disinterested, that is directed toward a work of art apart from any other consideration, particularly of use, that would compromise our satisfaction in its intrinsic value. It was Kant who gave this theory its definitive formulation: "Taste in the beautiful is alone a disinterested and free satisfaction; for no interest, either of sense or of reason, here forces our assent....Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful."⁴

In some respects this is an unexceptional theory of beauty, expressing our customary sense of aesthetic beauty and resting harmoniously alongside our common beliefs about science and morality. These three regions--science, morality, and art, in fact, constitute the principal domains of Kantian philosophy, which incorporates aesthetics into a division of the realm that has served the cognitive purposes of philosophy well. And at the center of aesthetics lies the notion of disinterestedness, where it has resided since that discipline acquired its modern identity in the eighteenth century.

Yet when we measure this traditional view against the demand on any theory that it give a satisfactory account of the data, we find it lacking. Not only is the attitude it enjoins difficult to

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apply to many experiences of art, so that the nineteenth century chafed under its strictures and the twentieth has endeavored to elude them altogether; aesthetic disinterestedness has been a mixed blessing even for those traditional arts for which the theory was originally designed. Theoretical developments since the Enlightenment have, in fact, pressed the theory of disinterestedness quite out of shape. The Romantic attraction to the emotional and expressive dimensions of aesthetic experience, and the sharing of such experience through artistic communication, have definitively incorporated the personal contribution into the artistic and receptive processes. And in the present century, overt appreciative participation in the artistic process has increased to become a major feature. Moreover, late twentieth century intellectual movements like hermeneutics and deconstruction have undermined the cognitive structure in which disinterestedness has its place, dismissing the very idea of objective, universal judgment as mythical and impossible.

In the light of these developments, it is tempting to discard the idea of disinterestedness as both false and anachronistic, perhaps historically important but now a distinct impediment to aesthetic understanding. Rejecting disinterestedness outright is not unreasonable, given the tenacity with which that theory retains its hold on scholarship. Artists have long since thrown it over, aesthetic appreciation often finds it irrelevant, and theorists have increasingly attacked it.⁵

But it is too easy to dismiss our forebears as deluded, a solution as simplistic as it is common in both art and politics. I should like rather to pursue the issue here more circumspectly. For traditional theory was trying to do something important: to identify what is distinctive about art and distinguishes it from other things. An uncritical, wholesale dismissal of traditional aesthetics may be unnecessarily violent, and in the enthusiasm of liberation we stand in danger of discarding what is meaningful about the aesthetic, entirely. The question that is

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really before us is, then, what marks aesthetic appreciation and how can we identify it? If

disinterestedness can no longer be taken as its distinguishing feature, what can?

Disinterestedness lies at the heart of a cluster of ideas that developed in the writings of English and French theorists during the last half of the eighteenth century whose purpose was to identify first moral and then aesthetic experience. What was common to both, these writers determined, was the absence of interest, that is, of egoistic concern. Shaftesbury, who, along with Hutcheson and Alison, was one of the principal contributors to this view, contrasted "the disinterested love of God," a love pursued for its own sake, with the more common motive of serving God "for interest merely." The disinterested love of God is, then, wholly intrinsic.⁶ Similarly, as the notion of the aesthetic evolved among the British writers of this period, culminating in Addison, disinterestedness gradually emerged as its animating idea.⁷ This development became explicit in Kant, who installed this idea as the key term in aesthetic theory.⁸

Initially, it seems odd to forego any concern with practice, ends, and consequences in ethics, and most discussions, pace Kant, retain an awkward and uneasy balance between the inherent importance of intention and the consequences of action. Yet for art an exclusive concern with intrinsic value would appear eminently appropriate, since there are few other areas of human experience where we consider an object entirely for its own sake and appreciate it wholly for its inherent qualities. This was, in fact, Shaftesbury's move, for whom, moreover, it is only in the object apprehended--God or a work of art--that we can distinguish the virtuous person from the art lover. Indeed, one might characterize Shaftesbury's account of moral experience as preeminently aesthetic.

My purpose here, however, is not to reexamine this history. That has been done

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elsewhere.⁹ It is rather to explore the idea of disinterestedness in order to discover whether it holds any insights worth retaining at a time in the evolution of aesthetic theory when its traditional meaning seems both inappropriate and misleading.¹⁰ Disinterestedness, moreover, does not come unaccompanied: It has its coterie. Ideas about universality, the art object, contemplation, distance, isolation, and value cluster about disinterestedness and are hard to keep separate. In reassessing this notion, then, we must consider its relation to these correlative concepts. This is no mere exercise in conceptual analysis, however. It is an attempt to get at the substantive claims of disinterestedness in order to determine whether there is anything in the idea worth retaining that can provide a stable center for aesthetics at a time in intellectual history in which the modernism of the recent past has been displaced by pluralism and indeterminacy. My answer is that there is, but it is a residue so attenuated that its value is better realized when the idea is recast and reinvigorated in a form that leaves the concept of disinterestedness and its tradition behind. What, then, do disinterestedness and its related terms intend and offer under present conditions?

Contemplative is the most common descriptive of the appreciative stance toward art. In 1725 there was nothing unusual in Hutcheson's readily associating beauty with the pleasures of contemplation.¹¹ Over half a century later, when Kant wrote about the judgment of taste as contemplative and not, like pleasure, involving the impulse or stimulation of desire or, like good, involving the existence of the object, he sought to dissociate the beautiful from everything material and offer it as an entirely free satisfaction.

Although Kant did not consider the judgment of taste a cognitive judgment, since it is not based on or directed toward concepts, contemplation, nonetheless, originates in classical thought

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in cognitive and moral contexts.¹² Pythagoras, for one, found in contemplation the completion of rational human nature, while Plato considered pure contemplation the ideal of human understanding. Aristotle designated active reason as contemplation (theoria) and found in pure contemplation philosophical knowledge, intellectual enjoyment, and the completion of moral development. And in the contemplation of the beautiful, Plotinus, like Plato, finds help in moving from the sensuously to the spiritually beautiful.¹³ So began a long tradition of finding the fulfillment of human development in the disengaged, contemplative intellect.

This contemplative, intellectualist tradition in experience easily suggests itself as a commendation of whatever we wish to elevate, and was readily appropriated as the model for aesthetic appreciation. Wordsworth's famous "emotion recollected in tranquility" has usually been taken to express the contemplative ideal applied to poetry, while Hegel conjectures that "the way men are occupied with the objects of art's creation remains throughout of a contemplative character."¹⁴ These typical instances of using contemplation to characterize aesthetic appreciation are expressed in Stolnitz's well-known definition of the aesthetic attitude as "disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone."¹⁵

Yet if we start from our appreciative experience of art and not from the philosophical tradition, contemplation is rather less convincing a characterization than we may have thought. Art, as that same classical tradition understood well, typically involves practical activity in its making, and it often does so in its appreciation, also. Some instances are obvious, like moving around a sculpture, adopting various positions and distances in viewing a painting, approaching and entering a building. There is, indeed, a kind of activation that all art requires, from following

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the contrapuntal maneuvers in a fugue and organizing the narrative in a novel, to imaginatively realizing the images in a poem and participating subliminally in the movements of dance. The recent arts, however, have often made this explicit, not just in the form of walk-in sculptures and environments but in the growing use of interactive devices which enable the appreciator or audience to contribute to the work's development and, in interactive theater, video, painting, and sculpture, actually to assist in constructing the work.

The removal and separateness, the passive attention we associate with contemplation have little place here. One can be quietly, reflectively attentive toward an art object, to be sure, but that attentiveness does not display the impersonality or objectivity usually associated with the cognitive model of philosophical reflection. That cognitive model, in fact, has little to do with aesthetic experience.¹⁶ Traditional theory, for which it is a suppressed premise, is not the result of the practice and appreciation of art but the consequence of an intellectualist tradition that reserves philosophy's position as foundational. It assumes that you can talk about art without having to go to what artists or appreciators actually do.

There are, of course, advantages to a theory that conforms so obediently to tradition. Until recently western philosophy has regularly worshipped at the temple of Apollo and viewed with distaste the practical, the technical, not to mention the Dionysian. Aesthetics from the top down fits nicely with established doctrines, social as well as philosophical. Recent attacks on the arts and on governmental support of the arts conveniently use a contemplative tradition of art and appreciation to revile, on moral grounds, work that breaks the barrier of polite discretion to do what good art has always done: penetrate and awaken our awareness, and in ways that may not be comforting. Aesthetics thus plays into the hands of the politics of expedience. It makes art

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safe by removing it from any disruptive social role, and protects the status quo against art that encourages social change by changing our perceptions.

Is there, however, anything worth retaining in the notion of contemplation? If we excise all that is extraneous to aesthetic practice, what is left is a call to directed attention and to open receptivity. These are important, certainly, but they are obscured by the stronger connotations of contemplation. Aesthetic appreciation does indeed require directed attention to whatever is present in the situation. That need not be an art object in the usual sense but may be the perception of environmental sense qualities or associated images and memories. Contemplation, too, urges us to an open-minded acceptance in appreciation, a willingness to accept without prejudice sounds, colors, materials, images, and forms that may be strangely dissonant with our customary experience of the arts. Directed attention and open receptivity are important conditions of aesthetic appreciation, but we can better attain them without the distractions of contemplation.

Another idea regularly associated with disinterestedness is the notion of distance. Traditionally distance has been used in identifying the removal of practical interest that has characterized aesthetic appreciation since the eighteenth century. Not physical distance primarily, it is rather psychological distance, to use Bullough's famous term, that is used to denote that sense of detachment from practical affairs, from causes and consequences, considered necessary to identify and justify autonomous art objects. The concern here seems to be with avoiding the disruptive intrusion of practical concerns. For Edmund Burke, these, like terror when in danger or violent pain, render aesthetic delight impossible.¹⁷ Bullough argued that distance must be not only of a sufficient degree to avoid involving the appreciating subject's

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ethical convictions, institutions, and organic affections, but at the other extreme, not so great as to make the art object seem artificial, improbable, empty, or absurd.¹⁸

The arts have traditionally employed devices that seem designed to assist the spectator in lifting the occasion out of any practical context and placing it in a special, autonomous space of its own. The pedestal and the stage raise sculpture and theater above the plane of ordinary life, the frame and the proscenium arch separate art and performances from their surroundings, special halls for the visual arts and for music provide what the cathedral does for religious worship, a sanctified space removed from the concerns of daily life.

In aesthetics, the isolation of the art object is the correlative of appreciative distance. Science, like knowledge and practice in general, deals with the relations of things; art, on the contrary, must take them in isolation. Thus, in a characteristic statement, Münsterberg maintains that "to isolate the object for the mind, means to make it beautiful, for it fills the mind without an idea of anything else;...and this complete repose, where the objective impression becomes for us an ultimate end in itself, is the only possible content of the true experience of beauty."¹⁹

But is this sense of detachment necessary for aesthetic appreciation? Burke, Bullough, and others cite situations in which one's personal safety is so much in jeopardy that self-preservation usurps total attention. Clearly, the possibility of aesthetic experience is minimized when the layers and aura of awareness are preempted by an overriding urgency. Yet intrinsic awareness does not require excluding practical interests but rather retaining qualitative apprehension. Burke's discussion, in fact, occurs in connection with the sublime, where, indeed, part of the awesomeness of the situation inheres precisely in its threat. There is an aesthetic appeal in walking in a thunderstorm, standing by the shore on which storm-driven waves are

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crashing, and gazing at a meteor shower in the night sky.

Nor need the aesthetic exclude purpose. Can the surgeon be aesthetically involved when performing surgery? When the goal dominates attention and is external to the situation at hand, the aesthetic factor clearly disappears. But in most practical situations this need not be the case, for our present perception affects these occasions qualitatively, giving them tone and uniqueness.

The artist's purpose can stand as a model here, for that purpose is embodied in the art object. The goal of the creative artist is to create experience, a goal not extraneous but embedded in the very experience, itself. There is no need for a separation from other objects, other activities, other situations. The choice is not between extrinsic and inherent considerations. Often the aesthetic lies in their fusion.

Even more clearly than with contemplation, the recent arts seem deliberately to renounce distance. Theater is one of the more striking cases of such abandonment. Devices for involving the audience have proliferated on the modern stage. Theater has stepped down from the traditional raised stage to carry out its action in and sometimes with the collaboration of the audience. At times the audience has a hand in constructing the drama by selecting from among alternative endings. Grotowski's paratheatrics, for example, attempts to dissolve the separation between the actor and the spectator by transforming theater into an actual event. Even Brecht could not abandon the compelling character of the dramatic situation by invoking his "alienation effect." It does not, as he intended, enable us to grasp the historical cause of a situation but reinvigorates theatrical participation and enlarges the meaning levels of which we are aware. Other arts have been as ready as theater to forsake the traditional conventions of distance. It is as difficult to maintain aesthetic distance when entering a building as when walking through a

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Calder stabile or climbing upon one of di Suvero's ride 'em sculptures. Environmental music surrounds the audience with musicians or speakers, undermining even the illusion of distance and emphasizing the contextual quality of musical experience.

Does anything of value remain in the notion of distance? Little, I think, beyond an injunction to attend to the intrinsic qualities of objects and occasions. This kind of perceptual attention is exceedingly important in aesthetic appreciation. It does not, however, require separating and isolating the art object or excluding our purposes and goals, as long as they are embedded in present perception.

Central among the intellectualizing influences on traditional theory is the need to attain universality. Part of the eighteenth century's geometrical model of science, universality was difficult to secure in circumstances like the aesthetic, where the observer's contribution is so much a constitutive factor. For Kant, the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment implies that its satisfaction extend to everyone. We cannot secure this universality concerning the beautiful with concepts, he held, since beauty is not a characteristic of the object but concerns the object only as it is represented to the subject. Hence the only universality that is possible is subjective. Yet for Kant the judgment of taste is able to achieve a subjective universality, valid for everyone, by being based on the suitability of the relation of imagination and understanding for cognition in general.²⁰

Since Kant, universality, which seemed equally necessary and attainable in science, morality, and aesthetics, has slipped out of their grasp. Aesthetic subjectivity, ethical relativism, and now scientific probability and indeterminacy have made universal judgments difficult and problematic. But in an intellectual shift of major dimensions, universality has no longer come to

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be considered possible. Indeed, it no longer seems necessary. We now recognize universality to have been misappropriated from science for aesthetics and a mistaken goal all along, and we can forego this requirement with an easy conscience.²¹

In aesthetics, the cognitive claims of judgment are no longer central but derive instead from experience. We must begin with the appreciation of art and nature, where interpretive and critical judgments originate. Not only need our account of experience not be guided by cognitive demands; aesthetic judgment must itself be led by experience and practice. This priority of experience has led to a greater openness to different ethnic traditions, to innovative artistic forms, and to alternative types of artistic activity unprejudiced by invidious distinctions of high and low art, decorative and fine art, or popular and serious art. The generality of any artistic form or aesthetic judgment has now become the consequence of its context and can be valid and imperative to that degree without the imprimatur of universality.

Universality, distance, and contemplation surround disinterestedness. While they supply important elements for an aesthetic of experience, that contribution is misappropriated by philosophic, cognitive traditions that are foreign to the aesthetic domain. Can we find in the notion of disinterestedness a similar residue of insight that can be recast into a different mold? Setting aside its efforts at exclusivity, at barring interest, purpose, and egoistic concern, at focusing on only intrinsic qualities and value, is there anything of importance that remains for aesthetic appreciation?

Disinterestedness claims both too much and too little. It focuses on intrinsic value, on the immediate, and on the perceptual. Important though these be, they need to be enlarged to accommodate the range of conditions in which aesthetic appreciation occurs. We have already

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seen how intrinsic value often coexists with instrumental uses. A building is no less gratifying aesthetically when it functions well; this, indeed, can enhance its aesthetic force. The drama in the design of a courtroom, the public performance embodied in a council chamber are bound up with their architectural achievement no less than the song with the singer, the voice with the poet, the movement with the dancer. There are, I maintain, elements of function and consequence in every artistic occasion, and these bind it to the surrounding life of a culture. While appreciative experience imposes an immediacy of focus, a directness of presentation that dominates the situation, we live surrounded by auras of meaning, association, and memory that are the backdrop of every occasion. The mediate joins the immediate, the implied the directly presented, in art as everywhere else. What distinguishes aesthetic perception is rather the greater intensity of focus on what is immediately present.

Part of what is problematic about disinterestedness is its dualistic structuring of the aesthetic situation. On the one hand it designates a state of mind, a psychological set that subjectifies aesthetic reception. In addition to psychologizing appreciation, disinterestedness regards the object of aesthetic perception as separate and independent. Yet both perceiver and object are important but incomplete. Neither is a discrete element in the aesthetic field but both combine in mutually creative and dependent ways: No aesthetic perceiver without a perceptual object; no perceptual object without a perceiver who activates it in experience. And that experience is more than a subjective, mental one. It draws not just on the entire range of sensory receptors but on the involvement of the body in a unified, total experience.²²

There are still other unfortunate doctrines implicated in the dualism of disinterestedness. The narrowness of focus in appreciation suggests a search for aesthetic qualities in the object,

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which brings with it a set of unresolved difficulties in identifying and locating such qualities.

Moreover, the essentialism that an inquiry into aesthetic qualities implies is another sign of the ontological isolation of the aesthetic we need to overcome. Disinterestedness, finally, was for Kant the condition for attaining subjective universality, a goal we now understand to be unrealizable and false. After dismissing distance, universality, and disinterestedness, Nietzsche's condemnation of the aesthetic irrelevance of philosophy is definitive, for "We have got from these philosophers of beauty definitions which...are marred by a complete lack of esthetic sensibility."²³

In the face of these difficulties, is there anything of value that remains in the idea of disinterestedness? Is there anything worth retaining in the efforts of this theory to identify the aesthetic? Let me approach the question indirectly by asking it first of the related notions.

Contemplation, once its cognitive context is dropped, conveys the importance in appreciation of directed awareness and open receptivity. If a reflective quality is present, it appears as meaning not cognized but experienced directly, and as the resonance of association and memory.²⁴ From distance we emphasize the qualities of objects and situations, emphasizing intrinsic perception but often alongside purposes and goals. For this, moreover, we do not require the separate identity of the art object, since the object need not be separate and independent of the beholder, and there may not even be a discriminable object.²⁵ Instead of the concern of cognitive judgment for universality, we can begin to identify forms and conditions of shared experience. Art is, I am convinced, fundamentally social, even when engaged in most privately. Appreciation, at its heart, joins us in a collaborative act with the artist, in a shared intimacy of experience. Some arts, like dance and theater, create a social situation involving a

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collective audience. Choral music may become the occasion for an extraordinary experience of community. And even on the level of critical or normative judgment, we can easily relinquish universality in favor of common meanings and evaluations within various communities.²⁶

What, finally, is left of disinterestedness? Not a psychological attitude or the exclusion of utility or purpose, but immediate and intense focus, direct presentation, and a valuing of those qualities inherent in the aesthetic field. Instead of a unique or special attitude, what remains is perception, but perception that is quantitatively more intense and qualitatively more varied and complex than in ordinary experience.

At base, disinterestedness, like its related notions of contemplation, distance, and universality, rests on a division of experience. It separates the aesthetic perceiver from the object of appreciation, and then seeks ways to rejoin them in tenuous relationships that abandon the remarkable primacy of the aesthetic by translating it into the foreign modalities of cognition and philosophy. What is left of these notions once the extraneous has been excised is best realized in a context that embodies the continuities in appreciative experience. In place of disinterestedness theory, then, we must recast ideas of aesthetic appreciation into a positive, less prejudicial account. It is a setting that can realize in shared experience important qualities often neglected: perceptual receptivity, directness of presentation and immediacy of awareness, concentration on intrinsic qualities of perception and meaning, collaboration with artist and performer that is so much a part of the appreciative act, and the resonance of association and memory through which the aesthetic occasion expands outward to other regions of life.

This collapse of objectivity, this failure of universality, are apostasies only for the false god of modernism. In its place we have an aesthetics of appreciation that recognizes the

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legitimate pluralism in the diverse contexts and responses to art, that accepts residual differences, and that is content with ultimate inconclusiveness. This may seem a modest conclusion, but it is rather like Keats's negative capability, "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason," becoming like the great poet for whom "the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."²⁷ This is, after all, an aesthetic conclusion, not unlike Lyotard's, who finds modernism in the impossibility of containing the sublime, which exceeds all limits and appears in the art which presents "the fact that the unrepresentable exists." And it is the postmodern that "puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself."²⁸

There is a healthy humility in this, a lesson to be found in art both for aesthetics and for philosophy as a whole. For among the many nuances of the negative lies a range of alternatives, not all of them destructive. In the endorsement of a pluralism of artistic modalities and standards, in the primacy of perception over cognition, in the rejection of epistemological monotheism lie the rediscovery of an historically constituted and ontologically irreducible multiplicity of differences.²⁹ We are left, then, centering on the perceptual, with an intense and directed awareness joined to a generous and open receptivity that focusses on the immediate without excluding the consequential. In place of universality we must be content with a contextually-based generality. And we must include other things, as well, such as the involvement of the body as part of an attentive attitude and an essential reciprocity among all the constituent factors in the aesthetic field. Mnemonic and cognitive factors may also be forceful aspects of developed appreciation. Here is a creative condition shared by aesthetics and the arts alike, a vital equilibrium of truths and of beauties.

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What remains after this radical reconsideration, then, is not yet an alternative theory but a direction in which to move and the beginnings of what must be a quite different proposal. More needs to be said than can be developed here.³⁰ But this severe reappraisal of aesthetic dogma is an important stage in the process of reconstructing aesthetics. To relinquish disinterestedness and its allied concepts is not to abandon the aesthetic but to rediscover its greater scope and larger power. What we gain is access to the vastly more powerful cultural force that art has always been, despite the constraints of traditional theory. Now we need to recognize that force, to encourage it, and to understand it anew.

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1. An earlier version of this paper appeared as "Prolegomenon to a Postmodern Aesthetics," in Primum Philosophari, a Festschrift for Stefan Morawski, ed. Jolanta Brach-Czaina (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1993).
 2. Stefan Morawski, "On the Subject of and in Post-Modernism," British Journal of Aesthetics, 32/1 (January 1992), 50-58.
 3. I have made a detailed examination of this history and a critique of its theoretical assumptions in "The Historicity of Aesthetics I," The British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol.26, No.2 (Spring 1986), 101-111; and "The Historicity of Aesthetics II," The British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol.26, No.3 (Summer 1986), 195-203. This essay has a different, complementary purpose, to assess what is valuable in the concept of disinterestedness and what is not, and to suggest a reformulation that will retain the contributions of the traditional theory without its limitations.
 4. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment (1790), Sect. 5. See also Sects. 43 and 45.
 5. Debate on whether there is a distinctive aesthetic attitude has been extensive. Earlier rejections include I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (1925) (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World), Ch. 2; George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," American Philosophical Quarterly, I, 1, 56-66. I have long been inclined in that direction, myself. See A. Berleant, Art and Engagement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), esp. Chs. 1 and 2; and "The Historicity of Aesthetics" I and II.
 6. Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics, ed. Robertson (London, 1900), II, 55, 56. The definitive discussion of this history is Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XX, 2 (Winter 1961), 131-143. The history of the idea of disinterestedness continues to be debated. See my Art and Engagement, Ch. 1, esp. n.3, pp. 215-16.

Arnold Berleant, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34/3 (July 1994). Published in a Chinese translation. Summarized in Japanese in *Bigaku*, No. 178 (Vol. 45/2), 1994, p.70. Published in a Russian translation in *Polygnosis*, No. 2 (1999), 49-59.

7. This is Stolnitz's claim.
8. Townsend argues for this view. See Dabney Townsend, *Aesthetic Objects and Works of Art* (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1989), p. 50.
9. See A. Berleant, "The Historicity of Aesthetics," I and II. The important literature on this issue includes Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origin of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness';" Remy Saisselin, "A Second Note on Eighteenth Century 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* XXI/2 (1962), 209; "George Dickie, "Stolnitz Attitude: Taste and Perception," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43/2 (1984), 105-203; Jerome Stolnitz, "The Aesthetic Attitude in the Rise of Modern Aesthetics--Again," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43/2 (1984), 205-208; Dabney Townsend, *Aesthetic Objects and Works of Art*; "From Shaftesbury to Kant," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48, 2; and "Archibald Alison: Aesthetic Experience and Emotion," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28/2 (1988), 132-144.
10. I have made that case in a number of places, including "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXIX, 2 (Winter 1970), 155-168. Reprinted in *The Philosophy of the Visual Arts*, ed. Philip Alperson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), and in part in *Esthetics Contemporary*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1978). See also "The Historicity of Aesthetics," I and II, and *Art and Engagement*.
11. See, for example, Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 1725, Sect. VIII.
12. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, First Book, sect. 5.
13. See Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 73, 75, 78. Cf. the Gr.

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theoria > a looking at, contemplation. Contemplation continues in Augustine, the scholastics, and the mystics, who found in it freedom from desire. See Wilhelm Windelband, A History of Philosophy, Vol. I (1900), trans. James H. Tufts (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 250, 286, 333.

14. Wordsworth's entire sentence, however, suggests a somewhat more full-bodied though refined emotion: "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind." William Wordsworth, Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Right, trans. by F. P. B. Osmaston, in Philosophies of Art and Beauty, ed. A. Hofstadter and R. Kuhns, eds. (New York: Random House, 1964), p.420. See also p. 418.

15. Jerome Stolnitz, Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1960), p. 35.

16. Or for practical knowing. Dewey identifies this preeminence of contemplation in the philosophical tradition, contrasting it with the knowing of the artisan and the scientist. See John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, enlarged edition (Boston: Beacon, 1957), pp. 109-112.

17. Stolnitz, "On the Origins," p. 136.

18. Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Esthetic Principle," British Journal of Psychology, V, 1913, and frequently reprinted.

19. Hugo Münsterberg, The Principles of Art Education (1905), in M. Rader, A Modern Book of Esthetics, 3rd ed. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 437-8.

20. Kant, Critique of Judgment, Second Moment, Sects. 6-9.

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21. "Science plays its own game; it is incapable of legitimating the other language games." J.F. Lyotard, La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979); Engl. trans. by G. Bennington and B. Massumi, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.40.

22. See Art and Engagement, pp.45-50.

23. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), Third Essay, VI.

24. Hutcheson endorses Shaftesbury's distinction between the enjoyment of beauty, which is aesthetic, and the awareness of that enjoyment, which is not. See Stolnitz, "On the Origins," p.134.

25. See A. Berleant, "Art without Object," in Creation and Interpretation, ed. Stern, Rodman, and Cobitz (New York: Haven, 1985), pp.63-72.

26. Aesthetics may be one of the means of fulfilling the universal need to overcome separateness. See Ben-Ami Scharfstein, Of Birds, Beasts, and Other Artists: An Essay on the Universality of Art (New York: New York University Press, 1988), Conclusion.

27. John Keats, Letter of December 21, 1817, in Criticism: the Major Texts (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952), ed. Walter Jackson Bate, p.349.

28. J.-F. Lyotard, "What Is Postmodernism?," in The Postmodern Condition, pp.78, 81.

29. The reference here, of course, is to Derrida's term, 'différance.' See Jacques Derrida, "Differance," in

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Speech and Phenomena (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p.141.

30. Art and Engagement develops and applies such an alternative theory. See also my earlier book, The Aesthetic Field (Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas, 1970) and the more recent, The Aesthetics of Environment (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

In a recent article in this Journal ("Aesthetics and Engagement," 33/3, 22-28), Allen Carlson challenges my proposal for an aesthetics of engagement, claiming that I fail to establish such an alternative to traditional aesthetics and that, in fact, I utilize the very theory I disclaim. To respond to Carlson's far-reaching criticisms here would deflect me from the purpose of the present essay, which is constructive rather than defensive. Suffice it to say, however, that I find the criticisms both assumptive and unresponsive to the kind of argument I have offered. My direct response to Carlson's critique appears in "The Persistence of Dogma in Aesthetics," forthcoming in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism.