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The Varieties of Aesthetic Disinterestedness

Norman Kreitman

Abstract

Disinterestedness, a comparatively recent concept in aesthetics, is commonly held to be one of the characteristics of an appropriate response to art, but can be understood in a number of senses. Three varieties are distinguished: a strong form which confines attention exclusively to the internal relations of the work of art; a moderate variety which links internal and external features of the work but solely within the cognitive domain; and a weak form which permits the appreciator to draw on a wide range of external referents but proscribes purely idiosyncratic responses. An illustration is given of the confusion which can arise from failure to respect these differences. Only the weak form of disinterestedness appears to be viable, and it is discussed in more detail.

Key Words

disinterestedness, formalism, Kant, culture

1. Introduction

Though somewhat fallen from favor in recent times, the notion of disinterestedness has done heavy duty in philosophical aesthetics over the past two centuries and has come to play a major role both in descriptions of what happens when we respond to a work of art and prescriptions of what we should do if we are to behave properly. The first aim of this paper is clarification of the concept rather than polemics, aiming to distinguish and test for coherence and plausibility its three main versions, each of which, or some approximation to them, has been employed at least implicitly by various authors. An example is then offered of the confusion which can arise from failure to distinguish the various senses. The second aim is to consider more closely one variety of disinterestedness and to offer some suggestions about its role in aesthetic appreciation.

The historical development of the concept of disinterestedness is illuminating.^[1] The idea, which had long been part of ethical theory, became established in aesthetics only in the second half of the eighteenth century in association with the emergence of the *beaux arts*. That grouping, which came to replace the older and much broader notion of the liberal arts, initially comprised only the visual arts and poetry, though music was soon included. It separated the fine arts from all pursuits which had any admixture of utilitarian purpose, thus firmly removing the crafts and all hybrid activities such as gardening which had both aesthetic and practical objectives ^[2]. In essence the category was derived by a subtractive process, which specified what art was not. A positive definition of what unified the fine arts was much more difficult to achieve and does not exist uncontroversially even today.

At the institutional level, the case for the autonomy of the fine arts was rapidly accepted throughout Western Europe, in no small measure because the main advocates of the movement were powerful within government-backed organizations. The theoretical problems, on the other hand, continued to

exercise philosophers, who saw their central task as the explication of beauty, from which the nature of art could be derived. The subsequent change in philosophical preoccupations towards the characterization of the subjective response of an educated individual when contemplating nature or artistic productions brought into focus questions of how this contemplation was to be understood. Some form of disinterestedness was held to be an essential feature. But the concept of disinterestedness itself underwent considerable development. [3] Initially it was taken to mean no more than that an aesthetic judgment, like an ethical judgment, should be independent of any material or social gains or losses, or any other kind of advantage, for the person making the judgment, nor, unlike moral judgments, should possible benefits for the community be taken into consideration. Subsequently the notion was narrowed to exclude the observer's intellectual and any other concerns.; The object was to be appreciated for its own sake and not because it aroused the observer's emotions, sense of history or any kind of curiosity. The critic, the art historian and the philosopher were all reacting inappropriately if their professional concerns intruded upon their initial aesthetic response.

Thus the process of attenuation applied to various art-like activities in order to derive a pure group of fine arts was reflected in the cleansing, as it were, of the individual, who when engaging with art was to abjure any considerations touching on beliefs and desires or daily life. (Schopenhauer, for example, greatly admired Dutch interior paintings, but stipulated that they should be of flowers rather than food, complaining that realistic depiction of herrings and the like made him feel hungry and thereby disrupted the purity of his response.[4]) The only features of the artwork which remained as the proper aspects for contemplation were said to be its formal properties.

But before proceeding to discuss disinterestedness as implicated in formalism, we might note another issue which arose in parallel with the rise of the fine arts, namely the question of their value or values. The *beaux arts* movements endeavored to enshrine the autonomy of art. But given the mid-eighteenth century preoccupation with moral refinement, the education of gentlemen and the pursuit of practical improvements, it is not surprising that the proposed categorization, with its aura of other-worldliness, was seen in some quarters as giving undue importance to frivolities. Answers to the question of why the arts were to be valued were varied. Writers such as Burney and Walpole modestly justified their studies of music and painting as satisfying curiosity and providing "amusement"; others of a more earnest bent proposed that the fine arts were to be distinguished and valorized by the noble and distinctive kind of pleasure they afforded.[5]

2. Disinterestedness and Formalism

We might begin by considering disinterestedness in the context of formalism. Our concern is not with the details of that theory but only with the kind of disinterestedness which it utilizes, or at least implies, as a component of the argument. The modern

form of formalism derives in various ways from Kant, but the role he assigns to disinterestedness is complex and his position is better discussed separately in a later section.

The twentieth-century version of formalism can be described in contemporary terminology as positing exclusive attention to the internal relations of the work, and correspondingly such disinterestedness means a state of mind in which the observer is appropriately immune to the work's external relations. It is conveniently exemplified by Bell, who today has few followers largely because of the circularity of his definitions of 'significant form' and 'aesthetic merit,' and because his doubtful form-content distinction for the visual arts is even less applicable to other art forms such as literature, even though he claimed to be advancing a general theory of the arts [6]. But leaving these points aside, what remains of interest is the relation between strict formalism and the sense of disinterestedness which it entails. Bell, it will be recalled, insisted that only the internal relations of a work are of aesthetic merit; everything else was irrelevant and could be supplied equally well by other, non-art means. All the spectator's emotions and beliefs were to be discounted, a requirement for disinterestedness in its strongest possible form.

Whether or not Bell intended his exclusions of external relations to embrace cognitive along with other kinds of knowledge is unclear, as he seems never to have considered the point.[7] The historical question is not, however, particularly important. What matters is that any such attempt at disqualification is doomed to fail. The spectator standing before, say, an abstract painting, will recognize the lines, shapes and any colors for just what they are; that is to say, will bring to bear his past experience and informal knowledge of circles, lines and so on. We can even say that such knowledge is constitutive of the perception itself, and that we can never revert to epistemological infancy.

Apart from this rather obvious role of prior experience there is also a consideration regarding the appreciator's future. A form displayed in an abstract paintings is not an arbitrary figure such as might accompany a geometrical proof where the unique features of the illustration are precisely not what is at issue. If the work is of any interest, it will offer the viewer spatial dispositions which to some degree surprise him with the realization that the relationship of such elements is not as he has always supposed they must be; for example, that it is possible for a circle intersected by several lines to come to simulate a series of triangles.[8] It thus becomes part of the viewer's experience that there is at least one member of the class of, for example, circles, that has unfamiliar and noteworthy features. The viewer has learned something; previous assumptions have been modified, and at least for a while fresh insight will be carried into subsequent encounters. Thus, interaction with the work depends on the viewer's past and amends the future, in contrast with the state of hermetic isolation indicated by strong disinterestedness. Further, what has been argued for the visual arts appears in principle equally applicable to the other artforms.

In summary, the strong sense of disinterestedness which may

be attached to a narrow view of internal relations, such as comprehensively to exclude both prior and subsequent experience, is untenable.

3. Moderate Disinterestedness

There is a second, less restrictive meaning of disinterestedness which can be termed the moderate form. It makes its appearance in Kantian theory, which will be discussed in Section 4, below. This version, too, arises primarily in relation to the visual arts, though by no means exclusively. It differs from the first sense in that while it focuses attention on the purely formal elements of an artwork, it accepts that even a non-representational work cannot be described as having no reference at all to categories with which we are familiar from everyday life. But it claims that we can reasonably assume, if never prove, that formal properties are similarly perceived by everyone with normal senses under standard conditions and that since this cognitive-perceptual experience is universally the same, it has no necessary connection with anything that is unique to individual observers who will vary widely one from another. In particular, it needs have no linkage with other components of experience, such as the emotions. What the work displays are spatial and similar relations, such as temporal structures, as in narrative, and these merit our undivided attention. Through our encounter with the work, we may modify our general knowledge of such relations but of nothing more, and we err if we obscure our perception by cloudy and irrelevant subjectivity. The work itself has no bearing on our wider concerns, and in this sense our perception is, and should be, disinterested.

Such a thesis skims over a number of debatable assumptions concerning what the work in question is really about. It also reflects an old-fashioned view of a cognitive faculty operating in a restricted and isolated range of mental functions. But it is particularly suspect on two main counts. First, can we confidently assert that pure forms have no affective concomitants, and that a perfect circle, for example, carries no overtones? Many mystics, especially those in the eastern tradition, have thought otherwise, while for those who hold no such beliefs, alternative interpretations, such as Freudian ones, could be proposed. The association of forms with emotions may be culturally determined, but it remains the case that all human beings are acculturated. The same holds for associations to colors, which are even more likely than simple shapes to be linked with affect, as evidenced by the long tradition in European art theory concerning the emotional qualities of the different hues.^[9]

The second difficulty is that spatial relations have a major role in the images and metaphors we use to structure practically all our experiences.^[10] We speak of a "high" moral tone, the "depths" of despair, of getting "through" an examination and so on. Spatial orientation, far from being hermetically sealed off from the rest of our mental life, appears to lie at the core of our thinking about nearly everything. How far the modification to our standard space-time orientation as proposed by any particular artwork does in fact fertilize other areas of experience, perhaps including the core sense of the self, remains an open question. However, it certainly appears

that modernist art, with its emphasis on fractionation and multiple, simultaneous perspectives has informed twentieth-century sensibility across the whole cultural spectrum. That such a change has influenced much that we term personal experience is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. This being so, the notion of spatial cognition as compartmentalized must raise considerable doubt. It follows that moderate disinterestedness, since it is predicated on the same concept of an autonomous function, must be similarly viewed with suspicion. The formal qualities of a work are of cardinal importance, but our engagement with art involves much wider interests than the moderate thesis proposes.

4. Disinterestedness as Exclusion of Personal Associations

A third possible meaning of disinterestedness, and the one which is most widely used, is also the weakest, in that allows that in responding to art it is appropriate to react both cognitively and emotionally to almost any referents it may have to the larger world. The only constraint is that reaction to the work as an aesthetic object should not depend on anything which distinguishes the unique disposition, life history or other individual features of one appreciator from another. All appreciators will have much in common, which can be called, however vaguely, "human nature," but idiosyncratic associations, such as that we have visited the scene depicted in a landscape picture or that a piece of music induces nostalgia, are to be set aside.

This formulation requires some clarification. It is not implied that the exclusion of the purely personal will always enhance the total impact of an artwork. Sometimes it is evident that private associations and specialized knowledge are simply irrelevant to the aesthetic response. A soldier will recognize that a battle scene in an opera is a poor representation of reality, but s/he may accept that such a stereotypic rendering is perfectly appropriate within its context. In such examples, disinterest as the exclusion of personal associations -- is advantageous. But, to take a well-worn example from Bullough, suppose a person prone to jealousy watches a performance of Othello.^[11] It is unlikely that such a person would even try to adopt the role of the average person and set aside his or her own history. Bullough described the probable reaction by the jealousy-prone person as "under-distanced" and a distortion of the attitude appropriate for aesthetic response. But on the contrary, if the person were to discount his or her experience, then the dramatic situation would be less powerful and rewarding and his or her appreciation of Shakespeare's insights reduced. Disinterestedness does not, then, describe what invariably happens, nor can it be advocated as always enhancing the intensity of aesthetic responsiveness. On the other hand and as suggested above, a lack of disinterestedness would almost certainly distort critical assessment of any one work in comparison to another which carried different personal associations. The important distinction between intensity of response to a work (horror films and tearjerkers are cases in point) and judgment about its aesthetic merit is often overlooked, but needs to be respected.

However, the idea of even weak disinterestedness has raised considerable opposition, directed either at the concept itself or its closely allied notions of the aesthetic attitude, aesthetic contemplation and the like. [12] The nub of these criticisms is that the concept is redundant. Appreciation of art, it is said, requires complete and undisturbed attention, as do many other activities, from fly-fishing to doing nuclear physics. Anything which disrupts attention from the work itself must weaken the aesthetic response. Such impairments can be caused by a whole range of distractions: having indigestion, being preoccupied with tax affairs, or even particular situations such as that one's daughter is acting in the play one is watching. But there is no case for singling out personal concerns as any different from other kinds of irrelevancies. Similarly, there is no need to postulate any special kind of attitude, attention or contemplation as unique to the aesthetic response. Perception is perception and attention is attention; these may be full or partial, but there are no special kinds of perception or attention. Similarly, one could say that full attention already means disinterestedness and there is no point in bringing in further conceptual baggage.

All this may be accepted, but the defender of the role of weak disinterestedness can claim that it misses the point. What is important is not the nature of attention or perception as such, but what the appreciator makes of that which is attended to. That is to say, the importance lies in how s/he interacts with the work and interprets what is perceived; of how, in short, the work is to be recognized as carrying a meaning which is not constrained by the appreciator's biography. Objections have also been raised on the grounds that disinterestedness implies an unwelcome restraint on the range and intensity of the appreciator's response to an artwork, a degree of emotional aloofness, but these strictures could only apply to the strong and moderate forms, not the weak variety. These points will be elaborated later; for the moment it seems that weak disinterestedness can be defended against its main critics.

5. Disinterestedness and Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

There are, then, grounds for considering that only the weak form of disinterestedness is viable. Nevertheless, others may disagree and continue to use the concept in its strong or moderate sense or, worse, fail to distinguish between any of its various meanings. A contention of this essay is that such vagueness leads to serious confusion. An example of that sorry state is conveniently provided by Kant, whose continuing influence, in any case, demands attention.

Kant's concern in his *Critique of Judgment* is to elucidate the "judgment of taste," his term for what is involved when we call something beautiful. He is motivated from the outset with establishing normative claims for such judgments, and argues that with respect to the perception of beauty there are grounds not for soliciting but for demanding agreement from others. If everyone is to concur, then their judgments must relate to what is universally perceived, undistorted by individual differences, and this condition can only be achieved by pure contemplation of a limited range of properties of the object, namely its formal qualities.

Kant describes two varieties of beauty. Free beauty is found when delight arises solely from disinterested, reflective contemplation. Mere sensory pleasures of sight or sound have no essential part, for by themselves they belong to only to the agreeable or charming. Likewise, no determinate concept (one capable of being clearly formulated) concerning the object is to be admitted. Even the knowledge of whether the representation relates to a real object is to be put aside, since a real object would stand in some relationship to the observer and hence evoke an attitude. All that is to be considered is the form. Simple stimuli, such as a single musical note or a color, raise certain problems, but in complex examples the formal qualities which make for beauty are those which have the appearance of a design (or "finality"). The representation must have the appearance of being organized with respect to some purpose or end, though that end-point remains unspecified and unspecifiable. It is implied, if not explicitly stated, that the most perfect examples are to be found in Nature.

A key feature of this account is disinterestedness, and we may ask exactly how this, or its opposite, interest, is to be understood.. Interest is said to be indexed by satisfaction with the real existence of the aesthetic object (or its "representation") as contrasted with delight arising solely from consideration of its "formal purposiveness." An immediate problem is that we do, of course, take considerable interest in fictions of many kinds, so interest can also apply to unreal objects. An alternative interpretation of the text is possible, however, according to which interest is to be understood as little more than paying attention^[13]. Whatever the details, the point is that for Kant interest implies some kind of desire, want or prior attitude on the part of the observer, and these Kant seeks to eliminate from judgments of taste.

To make his case for claiming that judgments about free beauty are in fact disinterested in the sense just outlined, Kant draws on two arguments. One is to assert that the kind of detached contemplation he describes is what, in fact, occurs in practice. This is perilously close to begging the question. The second, developed at greater length, is cast in negative form. All interests, it is claimed, are located within a small group of concerns comprising the sensual, the moral, or assessment of the goodness of an object either instrumentally or as perfect of its kind. When these interests are satisfied, some variety of pleasure may result, but those pleasures differ in various ways from aesthetic delight. The latter cannot therefore be based upon interest. This elimination argument, as it is often called, is very weak, since the list of interests has not been shown to be exhaustive; there could be many other kinds which have not been considered.^[14]

He then offers a more positive characterization of experience of the beautiful. "Practical" pleasures entail some movement towards the intentional object; thus the pleasure of eating requires obtaining good food. Contemplative pleasure, on the other hand, is a passive delight, with no desire to act, and indeed with complete indifference as to the reality of the object as already noted. Interest is totally lacking. But this line of reasoning runs into the problem that we do, in fact, desire experience of the beautiful, both before and after the aesthetic encounter. To meet this, Kant introduces the strained notion of

"inner causality," which at least one commentator has described as "clouded" if not incoherent. [15] It is simpler and much more convincing to say that the judgment of taste does involve an interest, albeit one which is very limited.

With dependent beauty, which includes all art, the defining property of which is its embodiment of the beautiful, and everything which can be understood as fulfilling some definable purpose, the position is different. While consideration of form remains very important, interest in a broader sense is not only permitted but is unavoidable, since the observer must now entertain some idea concerning the object. The specificity of the concepts to be admitted is not made clear, but presumably may range from the minimal - "this is a painting" - to the highly complex - "this a depiction of the Battle of Coruna." Yet whatever degree of precision is allowed, Kant's position on dependent beauty becomes self-contradictory. As just noted, a judgment of beauty must be concept-free, but dependent beauty necessitates concepts. Similarly, the proper appreciation of formal qualities requires virtually complete disinterestedness, but no such detachment is possible once concepts are involved. In the senses used in our earlier discussion, there is a conflict between the moderate and the weak meanings of disinterestedness. [16]

This confusion has often been discussed and a number of solutions proposed, [17] but our concern here is limited to noting that the kind of disinterestedness posited by free beauty is in opposition to that of dependent beauty. It is tempting to suggest that if the different kinds of disinterestedness had been more clearly recognized in advance, the free-dependent distinction would never have been put forward. On the other hand, if these varieties are appreciated, then Kantians can claim that acceptance of the dual meanings of the term can go some way to save the argument and that both kinds of disinterestedness can be operative in contemplating an artwork. For example, in her discussion of the female nude in painting, Brand proposes that one form of contemplation is "interested" and includes regard for the sexual attractiveness of the figure, while the other approximates to, though never quite reaches, a disinterested or dispassionate concern with the formal properties of the painting itself. [18] Some such proposals, though they pose considerable difficulties, are evidently required if confusion is to be avoided.

6. Cultural Disinterestedness and Aesthetic Appreciation

We have seen that of the various forms of disinterestedness the weak variety is the only one which appears to withstand adverse scrutiny. In a more positive vein, some considerations can be advanced which add support to the concept. One is what might be termed "cultural disinterestedness." The impersonal stance we have considered is one in which we seek to approximate the outlook of what social psychologists have termed the "generalized other," that is to say, the typical member of our group. Yet that group has elastic boundaries, capable of extensive enlargement. Standing before a mediaeval religious painting, we recognize *inter alia* that it is replete with symbolism which we understand only imperfectly and which has lost its original emotional impact and that it

was intended for use in a social context that has vanished. Indeed, we are being offered a glimpse of another world. This is similar to literary productions from earlier times. In response to such works, we adopt what we take to be an appropriate frame of reference. The complexity of this task should not be underestimated. Even the most erudite Shakespearean scholar has to struggle to achieve the mindset of the Elizabethans, while with classical Greek drama we cannot be certain even of the meanings of many words typically used in those plays.

However, it is surely remarkable that we often do attempt to give up all the dense associations of our personal lives and of our immediate culture in the service of our role as appreciators. If the work and our familiar world do not fit, we try to consider ourselves members of a different society, which is to say that the appreciator tries to imagine him- or herself as a different kind of person. Artifacts of exotic origin are, of course, less commonly encountered than those of our own culture, but our responses to them illustrates how we expand our frames of reference when reacting to any interesting work by a temporary divorce from our standard point of view. Such plasticity is only possible if we are willing, at least in certain relevant respects, to abandon the everyday self, and it is just the capacity to do this which is weak disinterestedness.

There is an analogy here with empathic understanding of another person, when we attempt to grasp how and why that person feels as they do. Empathic outreach commonly occurs within a dynamic interaction, so that we continually correct our inferences about the other, but a degree of disinterestedness is required at every stage. For the emotions other persons express and the projects they entertain will not necessarily be those we would have were we in the same situation, since no two people can have precisely the same world-view. Of course there are limits to our empathic abilities, which we reach when our most basic assumptions conflict with those of the other, but we can and do try to assume the other's viewpoint as far as we can. And as with cultural disinterestedness, we can make some progress. We may then be rewarded not only by the strengthening of a social bond but also by learning that there are perspectives on the world different from our own and which may have something to offer. Again, flexible detachment is of the essence. [\[19\]](#)

For clarity, it may be added that something very similar also seems to be required for other kinds of endeavor, such as scientific research. The question of whether disinterestedness functions in quite the same way in these different contexts can be left open, but that it is a feature of several activities does not reduce its importance for aesthetic appreciation.

Secondly, there is a relevant aspect of the phenomenology of involvement with art, namely the sense of liberation from immediate personal concerns that we experience when we enter the world of the artwork, or encounter natural beauty. This feeling of freedom appears to be homologous with a state of disinterestedness. That it is rarely considered by aestheticians may be because of a suspicion that comes perilously close to an other-worldly aestheticism typical of the Decadents of the late 19th century. That fear is unjustified if

we recognize that disinterestedness operates only during the actual duration of the aesthetic encounter, that it is, so to speak, a device to enhance flexibility of interpretation and to widen our sensibility, and that we may if we choose bring the fruits of the engagement back into the orbit of our daily lives. There is certainly no suggestion that the world of art is superior to actuality, as the aesthetes proclaimed.[\[20\]](#)

7. Conclusion

Finally, some comment might be useful regarding how disinterestedness relates to two of its associated concepts. Disinterestedness is often linked to the notion of aesthetic distance, as originally formulated by Bullough. There is, however, no easy parallel between the two. First, Bullough's dimension is chiefly used by him to distinguish different kinds of art, while disinterestedness, as argued here, refers to the act of interpretation by the appreciator. Then again, a work which he would describe as over-distanced is one which is excessively theoretical or abstract and which will thus fail to make much impact. Conversely, one which is underdistanced offers a clichéd presentation of the mundane and banal and will again fail to impress. The former could be said to be impersonal to an extreme degree, but it is not clear that the latter can be described as "too personalized." And thirdly, as Hanfling has pointed out, Bullough's dimension comprises some five different kinds of distance, most of which have no bearing on disinterestedness.[\[21\]](#)

The connection between disinterestedness and aesthetic pleasure is by no means a simple one and has often given rise to difficulties. Hutcheson, for example, distinguished two kinds of pleasure arising from perceptions. One derives from the external senses, such as the pleasure of eating, and the second from the "internal sense", as with perceptions of beauty, harmony and decency. One difference between them was that only the former was associated with a prior "uneasiness" due to appetite, while the latter is free of such needs and is in that sense disinterested. Yet in the same passage, he speaks of "the desire of beauty," which implies a mental state preceding the perception, a wish to seek the beautiful,[\[22\]](#) and neither Hutcheson nor anyone else has ever wanted to deny that one could be passionate about art itself, or that being disinterested was the same as being dispositionally *uninterested*. We have then a preceding desire for "beauty," which to a variable extent is fulfilled by the pleasurable encounter with art. (Kant's approach to this issue has already been mentioned.) Thus, if disinterest is to be defended it must accommodate certain desires, such as the wish for aesthetic gratification. But there is no reason why it should not. Weak disinterest postulates no more than the exclusion of uniquely personal references from the assessment of an artwork. Subject to this proviso all manner of wishes and fears have ready admittance.

As a more general reflection, it has repeatedly been suggested here that an artwork displays elements of the world set out in an arrangement which challenges our standard expectations and that the role of disinterestedness is to facilitate our grasp of what is being offered. Further, engagement with art is generally regarded as intrinsically rewarding, which is to say

as having value. If these points are correct, it follows that a primary value of art is that it affords opportunities to engage in the task of reinterpretation and reintegration, to consider that the world is not necessarily as we have always supposed. We can then replace the long-standing question of "what is the value of art" with "what is the function of art," to inquire what it is that art does for us. The question leads on to consideration of what we lack in our everyday experience that drives us to seek the gratifications of art, a matter that raises to some basic issues regarding the human situation. A functional approach to aesthetics along these lines would have many advantages, but that is a theme for another occasion.

Endnotes

[1] P. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, 4 (1951) 496-527 and 13 (1952) 17-46. See also, L. Lipkind, *The Ordering of the Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

[2] Kristeller's account makes clear that the artforms included within the group of fine arts varied between countries and even individual authors, with uncertainty in the earlier years regarding, for example, dance and theatre. By the end of the century, however, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry were established in western Europe as the five core components.

[3] J. Stolnitz, "On the Origin of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness," *Journal of the American Association for Aesthetics* 20, 3 (1961-2) 131-147.

[4] A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966) p.208.

[5] Cited by Lipkind L., *op cit.*, note 1, p. 10.

[6] A succinct statement of Bell's views is given in his *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914) p. 13-37, reprinted in G. Dickie, R. Sclafani and R. Roblin, *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 2nd edition (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989).

[7] In point of historical fact, Bell does grant the role of prior knowledge in relation to the understanding of how three-dimensional space is represented on the flat plane of the painting, a concession which appears to vitiate his case, and we must also appreciate that in his era it was not generally understood how all perception is actively structured.

[8] The assumption that a meritorious painting will display a novel or at least unusual disposition of forms and colors may require defence. Against it, one could argue that a cliché could be of interest in a gallery by virtue of its implicit comment on the current state of the art or serve as an oblique comment on the nature of galleries. However, these considerations are metacomments about painting and institutions, and are better set aside in the present discussion.

[9] J. Gage, *Colour and Meaning* (London: Thames and Houghton, 1999).

[10] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[11] E. Bullough, 'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912) pp. 87-98 and 108-117.

[12] G. Dickie, "All Aesthetic Attitude Theories Fail: The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, 1 (1964), pp. 56-66. For a succinct discussion of disinterestedness in relation to the attitude, see also "The Aesthetic Attitude," by D. Cooper, in *A Companion to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); A. Berleant, in "Beyond Disinterestedness," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, 2 (1994) pp. 242-254; A. Berleant and R. Hepburn, "[An Exchange on Disinterestedness](#)," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 1, (2003).

[13] For an extended (and unusually favorable) account of Kant's theory concerning

disinterestedness, see H.E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), ch 4. See also, D. Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), p.50.

[14] D. Crawford, see Note 14, K. Ameriks, "Kant and the Objectivity of Taste," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23, 1 (1963), pp. 13-17.

[15] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*. trans. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), para 51. An alternative view is to say that interest arises whenever a real object is contemplated, but once a representation of the object is present to the appreciator the subsequent judgment as to whether it is beautiful depends solely on whether it causes delight. Interest has no role at this second stage. N. Zangwill, "Unkantian Notions of Disinterest," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 32, 2 (1992), pp. 149-152. See also, J. Kalenkamff, "The Objectivity of Taste," *Nous* 24, 1 (1990), pp. 108- 109.

[16] Note that Kant's variety of formalism differs somewhat from those advanced in the early twentieth-century. He highlighted the relevance of "purposiveness " as displayed by the formal elements, and he also believed that the perception of beauty can have consequences for everyday life, as conducing towards morality, a view, incidentally, revived by some Cubists and Abstract Expressionists. Nevertheless, his use of the term in relation to judgments of free beauty comes very close to moderate disinterestedness as previously discussed (and rejected) in Section 2. In relation to dependent beauty, however, Kant appears to rely on the weak version of disinterestedness.

[17] D. Dutton, "Kant and the Conditions of Artistic Beauty," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, 3 (1994), pp. 226-241, where he also comments "I have found no interpretation of Kant for which some textual element cannot be adduced."

[18] P. Brand, in *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*,. Carolyn Korsmeyer ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

[19] The response to exotic art as an illustration of the imaginative expansion and re-integration required for the appreciation of all art is also discussed by Dewey. He does not refer to disinterestedness as such, but evidently envisages

something very similar. He also notes the parallels between reacting to art and empathic conversation. J. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minto, Balach and Co., 1934), pp. 333-335.

[20] Additionally, aesthetic disinterestedness is also fully compatible with an early version of cognitive psychology, namely Personal Construct theory. This considers in detail and with considerable experimental backing how we orientate ourselves in the world by constructing and reconstructing taxonomies according to our perceptions of the salient features of the various objects, persons and events that we encounter, "salience" being dependent on our purposes at the time. What is novel about this approach is not only that different kinds of constructs (sortals), their flexibility and their inter-relationships are considered in fine detail, but also that mathematical and graphic techniques exist for actually displaying how a person orders a given collection of elements into a structured array; that is to say, which can identify the constructs he is employing and illustrate how they are connected. If such a person then undergoes some psychological change, as might occur with successful psychotherapy, a different construct hierarchy can be shown to have replaced the earlier one; the preceding "interests" have been surrendered to the new. It would be an overstatement to say that similar changes have been experimentally demonstrated for encounters with works of art, but the theory does offer a helpful framework for understanding how an artwork may produce its effect. The interested reader may consult my *The Roots of Metaphor* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), ch. 2 and ch. 3, and D. Bannister and F. Fransella, *Inquiring Man* (London: Routledge, 1971) for an introduction to the literature.

[21] O.Hanfling, "Five Kinds of Distance," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, 1 (2000), pp. 89-102.

[22] F. Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and the Affections*, (1728) (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1972), pp. 101-102.

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