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In this essay, I will argue that aesthetic realism fundamentally fails to explain aesthetic experience, and the alternative explanations from Levinson and Simoniti, whilst more plausible explanations, still fail to fully encompass the aesthetic differences across an individual through time and between individuals across cultures. Then, I will give an interpretation of aesthetic anti-realism which takes the concept of aesthetic properties as reflections of an individuals understanding of their internal response mechanisms which have predictive utility in seeking further positive aesthetic experiences, and in seeking social cohesion through the normative nature of aesthetic judgements. I will argue this explanation overcome the criticism from Jerrold Levinson that aesthetic anti-realism fails realism fails to explain the normative nature of aesthetic judgements. I will finally conclude that we should not be aesthetic realists, but instead should appreciate aesthetic properties as representing real thoughts and feelings in the individual experiencing them.

As I will discusses the merits of aesthetic realism vs anti-realism, it is probably best to lay out the groundwork for the assertions each theory makes about aesthetic properties. To do this, I will rely upon Vid Simoniti's distinction which provides concise and fair descriptions.

Simoniti describes aesthetic anti-realism (which he names non-realism, but has been referred to over time using other terms) as a theory asserting that the aesthetic properties assigned to an object are wholly reducible to the feelings and ideas induced in the individual perceiving the non-aesthetic properties of the object. Thus aesthetic properties' existence is external to the object and is completely dependent on the existence of humanity [1].

Simoniti then describes aesthetic realism as fundamentally asserting that the aesthetic properties assigned to an object exist internally to the object in some way, meaning they are not wholly reducible to the emotional and cognitive responses in an individual, and exist independently of humanity [2].

An early aesthetic anti-realist argument for aesthetic anti-realism comes from Derek Matravers, which both Jerrold Levinson and Vid Simoniti later responded to with their forms of aesthetic realism. Matravers argued aesthetic anti-realism is more parsimonious with our ontology, as adding aesthetic properties to our ontology is

[1]*Aesthetic Properties as Powers*, V. Simoniti, 2017, pp. 1434-5
[2]*Aesthetic Properties as Powers*, V. Simoniti, 2017, pp. 1436

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explanatory redundant if aesthetic experience can be fully explained through the interplay of non-aesthetic properties and our cognition [3].

However, issues regarding the degree to which aesthetic anti-realism does in fact encompass the entirety of the aesthetic experience have been noted which inspired the aesthetic realists to find better explanations. In regards to the truth of aesthetic prescriptions, Matravers accepts that with the asymmetric relationship between non-aesthetic and aesthetic properties, the ascriptions we make assert that non-aesthetic properties act as *reasons for the ascription* of the aesthetic properties, and cannot therefore be used as *explanations* for those ascriptions [4]. Levinson argues this failure of explanations can be overcome through aesthetic realism, as the explanation for an ascription is the aesthetic property existing independently.

In his paper *"What are Aesthetic Properties?"*, Levinson puts forward a version of aesthetic realism to overcome the issue of the lack of explanation of normativity arising from anti-realism. Levinson position begins with a view of properties in general as *ways of being*. Therefore, a property through this lens exists as a declaration that an object has the potential to exist in a particular way of being. Levison extends this to aesthetic properties with the sub-class of *ways of being* called *ways of appearing* (aka. manifest properties). These are declarations that it is possible for an object to appear a certain way to those with similar perceptual and cognitive capacities, to those individuals in a specific set of conditions [5]. Levinson argues that these manifest properties are higher-level properties, which exist as a result of the existence of other lower-level properties, but still exist independently, as this relationship is asymmetric, as the existence of the lower-level properties is necessary for the higher-level property, but not sufficient, which explains why some objects of aesthetic inquiry may hold the all the same properties as another object, without having the higher-level property [6]. This mirrors the anti-aesthetic position that there is an asymmetric relationship between aesthetic properties and non-aesthetic properties, but where the anti-realist position holds that the relationship is asymmetric from the object and the individual, *ways of appearing* have asymmetric relationships from the object and itself, meaning the explanation for aesthetic

[3]"Art, Expression, and Emotion" (D. Matravers, Routledge Companion 2000)
[4]"Art, Expression, and Emotion" (D. Matravers, Routledge Companion 2000)
[5]*"What are Aesthetic Properties",* (J. Levinson, Essays on Aesthetics, 2007), pp. 5-6
[6]*"What are Aesthetic Properties",* (J. Levinson, Essays on Aesthetics, 2007), pp. 4

judgements comes from the perception of the aesthetic property which has formed independently of the cognition of it.
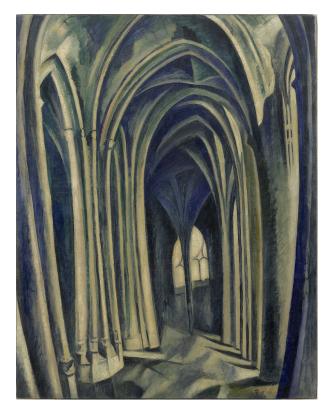

Figure 1 Robert Delaunay, *Saint Séverin No. 3* (In the Public Domain)

Another issue regarding the explanatory weight of aesthetic anti-realism comes from Simoniti, who argues there is a mismatch between the anti-realist perspective of aesthetic properties, and common aesthetic experiences. To make this criticism, he gives a hypothetical example of the *Attentive Artist*. The story describes the painting process of the *Saint Séverin* by Robert Delaunay (Figure 1): after walking into a church for the first time, he feels overwhelming excitement for the playfulness in the combination of light and shadow in the church. He then begins working on the painting to capture this. As he paints the picture over the coming days and weeks in the church, this feeling of excitement fades through the repeated exposure of studying the scene, yet he still tries to capture the playfulness of the light and shadow [7].

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[7] *Aesthetic Properties as Powers*, V. Simoniti, 2017, pp. 1439

As Simoniti later notes, the traditional view of aesthetic anti-realism would argue that the property of playfulness Delaunay would assign to the church exists wholly in the emotional response to the other non-aesthetic features of light, shadow, and shape. This appears to miss something about Delaunay's experience. Simoniti points out that aesthetic anti-realism would have to conclude that once the feeling fades, the property of playfulness must no longer exist, yet Delaunay still paints the picture with the understanding that the light and shadow *is still playful,* despite his lack of feeling the feelings associated any-more [8].

Simoniti attempts to present a realist position to explain this phenomena, presenting aesthetic properties as representations of the "powers" an object has to cause the certain feelings associated with a property. Where aesthetic anti-realism argues that the aesthetic properties are reducible to the feelings in the individual, aesthetic power realism argues that aesthetic properties exist as the feature or collection of features in an object which have the power to produce those feelings in an individual in certain conditions [9]. In the case of the *Attentive Artist,* aesthetic power realism would assert that the playfulness exists in the scene, as it has the power to cause the emotions despite not always doing so.

A weakness in the *ways of appearing* explanation which Levinson acknowledges is it's lack of explanatory utility for emotionally-laden aesthetic properties such as "beautiful", and "moving", which appears difficult to make empirical explanations of how the lower-level properties lead to the aesthetic property without introducing any influence of human cognition [10]. Next, I will look at Simoniti's form of aesthetic realism which shifts from the objects potential to appear in certain ways, to the power of an object to cause ideas and feelings in an individual which appears to solve some issues with Levinson's account, as well as the criticism Simoniti gave on aesthetic anti-realism as previously mentioned above.

Another criticism I would put forward to both accounts of aesthetic properties from Simoniti and Levinson would be the simultaneous existence of contradicting properties. Due to differences in individuals and between cultures, it is plausible for an object to have the potential to appear in a certain way to one set of individuals,

[8]*Aesthetic Properties as Powers*, V. Simoniti, 2017, pp. 1440-1
[9]*Aesthetic Properties as Powers*, V. Simoniti, 2017, pp. 1441-1443
[10]*"What are Aesthetic Properties",* (J. Levinson, Essays on Aesthetics, 2007), pp. 11

and in a contradicting way to another set of individuals, and have the power to cause the emotions related to contradicting aesthetic properties to different sets of people. This would make the normative value of aesthetic properties null, as it is equally true and valid that the object has one aesthetic property to one individual, and it's opposite to anther individual, with no truly correct answer. This means that both aesthetic realism and anti-realism would have the same level of explanatory power, whilst anti-realism not requiring the need to add the extra layer of properties onto our ontology

I would like to present an alternative anti-realist analysis of this scenario which appears to make up for the explanatory gaps aesthetic anti-realism has been criticised for by Simoniti and Levinson. The traditional anti-realist analysis sees Delaunay's belief that the scene is playful as wholly reflective of the emotions induced by the non-aesthetic properties of the scene. However, I believe there is more explanatory value in viewing aesthetic properties as reducible not just to the emotions themselves, but also to the *ideas about the cognitive processes* which cause those emotions.

I believe this solves the issue of normativity raised by Levinson. We can explain normativity is assigned to aesthetic judgements as a desire to seek out cognitively similar individuals. It is not that normativity comes from there being a fundamental truth in the object itself, it is actually that there is a desire to seek cognitively similar people.

Moreover, we can apply this to the *Attentive Artist* case to solve Simoniti's issue of properties persistence throughout time. Delaunay, having experienced the emotions caused by the scene, has built ideas regarding the way certain collections of non-aesthetic properties interacts with his cognition, and so in regarding the scene as playful despite the feelings having faded, the property has predictive value in understanding himself for finding similar aesthetic experiences in the future.

To conclude, I feel as though taking aesthetic properties as truly existing does not match with the diverse experiences between cultures and internally to an individual over time. To take a position that there is a split between our actual aesthetic experiences and cognition of them when not directly experiencing them by proposing that aesthetic responses point not to just the feelings themselves, but as pointers to

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an understanding about ourselves and the shared responses of others of similar experience explains the aesthetic experience in an instant, as well as throughout time, without suggesting that things are fundamentally a certain way despite no-one truly experiencing that aesthetic property over time.

Bibliography

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