Research Article

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The Place of Action in the Landscape of Aesthetic Experience

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Abstract: Advocates of ordinary aesthetics argue that aesthetic experiences found in everyday life can have an impact on our ethical being. This raises the question of how, specifically, action arises from aesthetic experience. Although this matter affects both Aesthetics and Ethics, the current literature provides few details on potential mechanisms. Using neurophysiological evidence, this article proposes specific action profiles and associated mechanisms for aesthetic experiences. To achieve this, it is argued that aesthetic experience originates within the mind and that ordinary aesthetic experiences are logically permissible. Subsequently, a proposed landscape of aesthetic experience is derived. Mechanisms for pathways from experience to action are provided for each category of aesthetic experience. In sum, this provides a tangible bridge between Aesthetics and Ethics, enabling a better understanding of how one's ethical being is influenced by certain experiences.

Keywords: ordinary aesthetics, aesthetic experience, ethics, action profiles, neurophysiology

1 Introduction

The field of ordinary (or everyday) aesthetics – concerning aesthetic experiences found in non-artistic sources throughout everyday life – would benefit from identifying how these experiences translate to action. This is born of the conceptual neighbouring of Aesthetics and Ethics, and their cross-impacts as "the two traditional branches of value theory."[1] It is also a consequence from proposals in the literature[2] that ordinary aesthetics influences our moral behaviours. Neurophysiological evidence suggests[3] that aesthetic experiences are more than just reactive cognition, that instead they enable the development of meaning and choice of action in an adaptive sense. Furthermore, it has been found[4] that there is dissociable neural activity according to different aesthetic aspects during an experience, which enables the relation of pathways to action from specific aesthetic activities. What is required next is a contextualised understanding of when and how aesthetic experiences impact our thought processes and subsequent choices of action, in both a physiological and a conceptual manner. With a key bridge between aesthetics and ethics thus built, we would then have a better understanding of how aesthetic experiences contribute to our ethical being.

To achieve this, we must have a well-defined landscape of aesthetic experience and explore the aspects of action within that. This requires construction of some dependencies, which I'll develop across several sections

1 Levinson, "Aesthetics and Ethics," 1.

2 For example, Irvin, "Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic," 29; Saito, "Body Aesthetics and Moral Virtues," 225; Maes, "Existential Aesthetics," 265; Brady, "Aesthetic Value, Ethics and Climate Change," 551.

3 Xenakis and Arnellos, "Aesthetics Facilitates Sense-Making," 245.

4 Hartung et al., "Aesthetic Appraisals of Literary Style," 1401.

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of this article. I will start, in Section 2, by exploring aesthetic experience with respect to experience in general, specifically considering the neurophysiological aspects to help define the origin of aesthetic experience, which I will argue starts from within the mind of the individual, rather than initiating from external stimuli. This leads to a discussion of the boundary between normal and aesthetic experiences in Section 3, to help set the scene for the creation of an experiential landscape. I find that there is no irrefutable boundary of aesthetic experience, when seen in the context of experience as defined in Section 2.

With these prerequisites in place, Section 4 builds the landscape of aesthetic experience using the conclusions drawn and by incorporating existing and original ideas. I propose that there are several different categories of aesthetic experience. Finally, the examination of the mechanisms of action at specific points across the landscape is made in Section 5. Using neurophysiological and psychological understanding, I describe the journey from momentary experience to action. It is clear that there is an abundance of available pathways to action related to the different categories of aesthetic experience, from which I conclude that distinct action profiles are required. I proceed to define the action profiles and, where possible, the mechanisms of influence on action. The article concludes with a summary and brief discussion of the implications of this work.

2 Experience Starts from Within

Experience, in its broadest sense, is what is happening to us at every moment of our existence. It is the combination of internal states of mind and external sensory inputs in a given moment. I will define this more thoroughly shortly. First, this must be contrasted with specifically *aesthetic* experiences, which are notoriously difficult to define.[5] Divergent ideas have flown readily, arguing that the nature of aesthetic experience is variously about objects and their properties, pleasure, art, value, judgement, beauty, perception, attention, meaning, cognitive response and more. Several philosophers have intuited that the primary underlying feature of aesthetic experience is a cognitive state that is somehow different to the cognitive states that occur in our ordinary lives.[6] This is notable because modern neuroscientific investigation has produced supporting evidence for the idea; following Marković,[7] aesthetic experience is, in its most general description, acute feelings arising from a state of mind that is different to the states of mind that we possess in our everyday lives. This description admits a variety of ways of being, which might, at first glance, appear to devalue its usefulness as a definition. I explore this in detail later (Section 5.5) but the groundwork must be laid before we can properly discuss it.

The counterpoint is that Martin Skov and Marcos Nadal have argued,[8] also using neuroscientific evidence, that aesthetic experiences are not, in fact, associated with special states of mind. In this present article, I offer a perspective that might provide a way forward: I will argue that the ultimate distinction of aesthetic experiences (from normal experiences) lies in their pathways to action. That is, if an experience may be called aesthetic, then what are the affective consequences compared with non-aesthetic experiences? I will start from the perspective of experience-in-general, which allows for consideration of the special case of aesthetic experience, particularly via aesthetic experience's special case of ordinary aesthetic experiences. The above description of aesthetic experience – acute feelings arising from a special state of mind – will be used as a touchpoint, rather than as a firm definition.

To understand how experience relates to action, we must first understand the relationship between perception and experience. It is common and intuitive to assume that an (aesthetic) experience is initially

5 For discussions of this difficultly, see Tomlin, "Contemplating the Undefinable," 1; Muelder Eaton and Moore, "Aesthetic Experience: Its Revival," 9; Dempster, "Aesthetic Experience and Psychological Definitions of Art," 153.

6 See, for example, Neville, "Kant's Characterization of Aesthetic Experience," 197–201; Ferree, "The Descriptive Use of 'Aesthetic Experience'," 32; Nanay, "The Aesthetic Experience of Artworks," 77.

7 Marković, "Components of Aesthetic Experience," 1.

8 Skov and Nadal, "The Nature of Perception and Emotion," 470. Note that they haven't referenced Marković's work.

triggered by the receipt of (certain aesthetically affective) external stimuli in a perceptual event. A basic illustration of this is seeing a "beautiful" painting and reacting to it. Some interpretations of aesthetic experience assume this causal sequencing without discussion of it. For example, Noël Carroll's content approach centres on the aesthetic properties of an object, which includes formal properties as well as the reciprocal relationship (via mental states) the appreciator has with the work;[9] that is, it is assumed that the first step in the aesthetic experience is engagement with the properties of the object. Meanwhile, other interpretations explicitly require that causal sequencing. For example, Jerrold Levinson's characterisation of aesthetic experience starts with "the right sort of attention … focused on an object's perceivable forms and properties," followed by a consequential perceptual state and subsequently a response to "the perception itself or the content of that perception."[10] Although there is an implied coincidence between perceptual object[11] and engagement, the first aspect of aesthetic experience in Levinson's sequence is the object, while the cognitive responses (the "perceptual engagement" and the "hedonic, affective, or evaluative response[s]")[12] to it are secondary. These examples are akin to an input–output model of perception to action, whereby the input of an external sensory stimulus spontaneously triggers an experience within the mind of the observer, which then generates subsequent actions. The current empirical understanding of experience, however, demands that we take a different perspective.

Marcel Kinsbourne provides[13] neurophysiological evidence which demonstrates that this model of how the human brain works is incorrect. The model ignores the great nuances that have been discovered about how the brain actually works, and in particular, it ignores the learning aspects of human brains. It may, at best, be a simplified model of the experiences of infant, pre-verbal humans. Given the criticality of this point to my argument, it is worth delving into this in more detail: summarising Kinsbourne's explanation, a more accurate description of the relationship between perception and action is as follows.

Areas of the brain responsible for representing sensory stimuli have direct links to other areas of the brain. Perturbation of the receptor surfaces in one area triggers "an orderly sequence of state changes in connected brain areas,"[14] and these connections are reciprocal. There is a feedback-and-learning mechanism taking place, so it is not that one perceptual stimulus always triggers one deterministic action. Instead, there is a "recursive reciprocity of perception and action"[15]: in cognitively mature humans, the mental states that trigger action have already been modified through experience, such that the states themselves influence the intended outcome. Expectations, evaluations, and intentions ("internal initiatives" as Kinsbourne describes them[16]) operate in a counter-influential way to the brain activations derived from external stimuli. That is, they act reciprocally on each other. In a more biologically precise manner than my opening statement, Kinsbourne thus defines experience as "the resultant of these superimposed state changes."[17]

Returning to the suggestion that aesthetic experiences are primarily driven by perceptual events, another article[18] by Kinsbourne explains that the only scenarios where external stimuli are the primary influence on experience (and hence satisfy the input-output model) are those where the predictive capabilities of the brain are constrained, such as during unanticipated painful events or in the general existence of immature (infant) or damaged brains.

Based on these insights, I propose that we cannot support a simplistic input–output model of perception to action for aesthetic experiences for the majority of common perception scenarios in humans. This does not mean that the content and properties of perceptual objects are not important in aesthetic experience; I will

9 Carroll, "Defending the Content Approach," 171–5.
10 Levinson, "Toward an Adequate Conception of Aesthetic Experience," 38–9.
11 Here, I don't necessarily mean a physical object; I mean the *object*, as in the focus, of a perceptual event.
12 Ibid., 39.
13 Kinsbourne, "Consciousness in Action," 545.
14 Ibid., 548.
15 Ibid., 551.
16 Ibid., 548.
17 Ibid.
18 Kinsbourne, "New Models for Old," 15.

show later that meta-aspects of aesthetic experience are a crucial part of defining it. Rather, it is that conceptions of aesthetic experience (such as those proposed by Carroll and Levinson) must recognise that the relationship between mental states and external stimuli is iterative, self-reinforcing, and strongly embedded in the personal history of a given mind, in such a way that we must position aesthetic experience as starting within the mind. While this makes it practically impossible to analytically separate the influence of external and internal states, it does mean that we cannot simply say that one sees a beautiful painting and then has an aesthetic experience. Instead, it is more like one's mind must first be primed to have an aesthetic experience and then on seeing a beautiful painting an aesthetic experience might be had.

To reinforce this point, we can again look at neuroscientific research. Alex Proekt *et al.*[19] show that both conscious and unconscious expectations can influence our internal mental states and subsequently our observed behaviour. As in Kinsbourne's discussion, it is evident that our internal initiatives (intentions and expectations) have a dynamic relationship between the mind and the environment. This eliminates the possibility that it is solely the properties of a piece of art that can stimulate an aesthetic experience.

Positioning aesthetic experience as starting in the mind solves a well-known problem[20] in Aesthetics, whereby one can view a piece of art one day and have an aesthetic experience, view the same piece the next day and not feel anything, and view it again a month later and successfully have an aesthetic experience. Similarly, one could attend a concert performance of a favourite piece of music, but not be overwhelmed with emotion because there are other matters filling one's thoughts. If it were the case that an aesthetic experience is simply stimulated by the external properties of a piece of art, then the above variation couldn't occur. Conducting a controlled experiment on this topic is difficult, but we could expect that the external setting (of a piece of art) is likely to be more consistent than one's internal state of mind, and hence the variability of experience is more readily explained by the state of mind than the environment.

Another consequence of this positioning of aesthetic experience as starting within the mind is that it removes from aesthetic experience the immediate dependence on perceptual objects in the external world. I say the *immediate* dependence, because they may well be important eventually in the experience, but external stimuli from the properties of an object are not the determining factor of whether an aesthetic experience occurs – the state of mind is. Consider a perceptual object O which has arbitrary properties, and a mind M which can have either an enabling state for aesthetic experiences, M_E, or a not enabling state for aesthetic experiences, M_N, at a given point in time. Exposing M_N to O cannot result in an aesthetic experience. Exposing M_E to O may result in an aesthetic experience. As there is no immediate dependence on objects, then the following scenarios are permissible: the combination of an enabling state of mind and (1) an ostensibly stimulating piece of art; and (2) a seemingly unstimulating piece of art (e.g. an everyday object); and (3) no specific external object. Scenario 1 is the commonly understood aesthetic experience. Scenario 2 is the world of ordinary aesthetics. Scenario 3 is a new distinction, where the mind enters a state resulting in an aesthetic experience without any triggers from external stimuli. This will be discussed further, later. With these scenarios opened up, we can start to see the landscape of aesthetic experience forming.

3 The Boundary of the Ordinary

In the preceding discussion I kept referring to "pieces of art" mainly for simplicity of argument at that stage, but also to maintain consistency with how the common view of an aesthetic experience often considers "great" or museum-worthy works of art as potential generators of aesthetic experience. Although it is well established[21] in Aesthetics that these sources are not necessarily the only places to find aesthetic experience, more recently the discussion has diversified to more thoroughly incorporate everyday objects and

19 Proekt et al., "Dynamical Basis of Intentions," 9447.

20 For example, see discussion in Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 30.

21 For an overview, see Cooper, *Aesthetics*, 1.

experiences.[22] My conclusion of the permissibility of the world of ordinary aesthetics in the preceding section is thus not new in concept, but I've shown how it emerges logically (rather than intuitively) from a better understanding of the neurophysiology of experience.

The issue with this, however, is that we must (by definition), and do, distinguish "ordinary" from "extra-ordinary" sources of aesthetic experience. That is, in our current time and across our global cultures, in terms of aesthetic appreciation, we tend to separate ordinary objects from artistic objects (and ordinary experiences from aesthetic experiences) – for instance, a dining plate from a Renaissance masterpiece. Although the justification for that distinction is fraught with debate, I will proceed to explore ordinariness from the perspective of aesthetic experience.

My objective is to describe the landscape of aesthetic experience as it relates to our daily lives and ethical being, which means that the sources of aesthetic experience must be understood. The issue above must be resolved by determining if it is necessary to separate ordinary from artistic sources with respect to aesthetic experience. It's worth observing here that the definition of aesthetic experience I gave at the beginning of the previous section – *acute feelings arising from a state of mind that is different to the states of mind that we possess in our everyday lives* – does not preclude aesthetic experience coming from ordinary activities because the constraint in the definition is on the state of mind, not the *source* of experience.

If the sources of aesthetic experience occupied only a minute fraction of our time, e.g. when we view great works of art, then describing a "landscape" of aesthetic experience is inappropriate. Indeed, it seems to be an artificial arrangement that so little of our lives would be given to the wonderful, enriching experience of enjoying works of art, when in actuality, it can be argued that we are surrounded by enriching experiences much of the day. This is an intuitive expectation that there is no reason to separate the ordinary from the artistic – but is this expectation defensible on a biological and conceptual basis?

In the definition of experience given by Kinsbourne, there should be no distinction between the experiencing of an artistic object and the experiencing of an ordinary object. At that most general level, in terms of the conflation of internal mental states and external stimulation, it can be argued that there is no reason to separate aesthetic and ordinary experiences: any distinction is imposed externally to the process of experience. However, details matter, of course. As revealed by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI),[23] the viewing of artistic objects stimulates many regions of the brain: those associated with visual perception; object and scene recognition (the latter of which is correlated with the experience of pleasure); semantic, higher-level processing related to object context and use; emotion and reward processing (in particular a region associated with the anticipation of rewards); and regions associated with self-reflection and emotion. The involvement of a "subjective experience of emotion"[24] appears to be an essential component of brain activity when viewing artistic objects. Furthermore, fMRI investigations[25] into artistic experiences and descriptions of beauty found that there is a single region of the brain associated with the assessment of beauty and ugliness. The researchers concluded that the strength of activation of this region demonstrates that the assessment of beautiful and ugly lies on a single spectrum cognitively,[26] and it is entirely subjective to the individual's opinion of beauty. This same region is involved in cognitive activities associated with value judgement.

What can be understood from all this is that the viewing of artistic objects provides a rich cognitive experience rooted in emotion, which aligns with many people's reported sentiments and feelings about experiencing art and supports the subjectivity of aesthetic preferences. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, in light of this, an fMRI study by Malach *et al.*[27] found that viewing pictures of everyday objects (tools, toys, clothing, animals, and plants) is indistinguishable from viewing pictures of artistic objects (abstract sculptures by Henry Moore) in terms of the activation of a region of the brain related to object recognition. This region is separate

22 Irvin, "Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic," 29; Sartwell, "Aesthetics of the Everyday", 761.

23 Vartanian and Skov, "Neural Correlates of Viewing Paintings," 52

24 Cupchik et al., "Viewing Artworks," 89.

25 Ishizu and Zeki, "Toward a Brain-Based Theory of Beauty," 1; Kawabata and Zeki, "Neural Correlates of Beauty," 1699.

26 But note Vessel et al.'s ("The Brain on Art," 9) contrasting observation that "only the most aesthetically-moving artworks" produce widespread neural activation, rather than activation being linear.

27 Malach et al., "Object-Related Activity," 8135.

from the areas of the brain that perform semantic processing. This shows that at a basic level, the human brain doesn't immediately distinguish between the experiencing of ordinary and "artistic" objects – there's no inherent class distinction. Simply put, some objects elicit a richer response – a richer experience – than others. This means that any perceptual object may be the focus of an aesthetic experience – and I extrapolate this such that any experience may be considered as aesthetic – if there is an enabling state of mind. I suggest that the enabling conditions include (at least) the related topics of the environmental context,[28] extent of mental distractions,[29] and quality of attention.[30] So, based on current evidence, there doesn't appear to be a biological basis for there being a firm boundary between the ordinary and the aesthetic.

Regarding conceptual arguments, John Dewey made the case[31] for incorporating everyday artforms into the domain of aesthetic experience. Dewey effectively imposed criteria which, when met, would qualify an activity as an aesthetic experience. While progressive, this still imposes a boundary on aesthetic experience. Sherri Irvin has critiqued Dewey's argument[32] and shows how those boundaries exclude ordinary experiences, which, Irvin says, can be no less special than those of Dewey's qualifying artforms. By presenting contravening examples, Irvin argues that while ordinary experiences may not meet Dewey's criteria, this does not prevent them from having an aesthetic character and enhancing our lives as aesthetic experiences.

With no mandates from either a neurophysiological perspective or a conceptual one in terms of sources, there is no need to exclude "ordinary" sources from aesthetic experience. Note that this does not mean that we won't still use the terminology of ordinary and extraordinary (or artistic); rather, it is that there are no constraints on the reality of experiential sources. I will proceed to describe the landscape of aesthetic experience as it relates to our daily lives and ethical being, with the understanding that aesthetic experience may potentially arise from any source.

4 The Landscape of Aesthetic Experience

I shall now introduce some methodological notes to support the development of a landscape of aesthetic experience. When drawing such a landscape, I propose a requirement that it must be reflective of the vibrancy and breadth of human life. If it is not, then our accounts of experience must be incomplete. For the iteration I will present here, I will use two constraints to fulfil the requirement: (1) that ordinary experiences are not underappreciated, and (2) that artistic experiences are not undervalued in favour of ordinary experiences. The first constraint is designed to enable the essential incorporation of ordinary aesthetic experiences, which, as explored above, cannot be overlooked or devalued from the contribution they make to our lives. The second constraint is introduced to avoid unnecessary bias and assert that, while artistic experiences can be steeped in sociohistorical conditioning – which risks reducing their authenticity – the affective power of artistic experiences should not be ignored. Additionally, a landscape of aesthetic experience should be based, as much as possible, on naturalistic arguments, by which I mean being rooted in empirical neuroscientific and psychological evidence where it exists.

Aesthetic experiences are a subset of the domain of all experiences. As discussed in Section 2, however, any experience may potentially be aesthetic. So, in lifetime time periods, the landscape of aesthetic experience is effectively the landscape of all experiences. Based on the discussions in Sections 2 and 3, we can say that there are aesthetic experiences drawn from ordinary, everyday experiences and those drawn from artistic experiences, and of course, those experiences which do not exhibit aesthetic characteristics. It seems appropriate to further divide these categories to accommodate variations in aesthetic appreciation and how they affect us. This differentiation approach is supported by an fMRI study by Belfi *et al.*, which found that different

28 Reybrouck and Brattico, "Neuroplasticity Beyond Sounds," 71.
29 Weigand and Jacobsen, "Beauty and the Busy Mind," 1.
30 Chatterjee and Vartanian, "Neuroscience of Aesthetics," 183.
31 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1.
32 Irvin, "Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic," 29.

emotional responses can come from different kinds of engagement in aesthetic experiences: they explain that the interactions of different mental states and brain systems during aesthetic experience can "bring about complex emotional responses and 'pleasure through understanding' (Biederman and Vessel, 2006)[33] at multiple levels of analysis, from the purely formal to the highly conceptual and personal, along with subsequent activation of reward systems."[34] As such, we will consider some models of appreciation to develop the landscape.

Sherri Irvin proposes[35] a framework of aesthetic experience which is naturalistic and highly aligned with my methodological requirements. Irvin identifies three categories of aesthetic experience, which I interpret here as (1) general aesthetic experience, (2) aesthetic experience of the artistic with an object-focussed, basic appreciation by the individual ("aesthetic appreciation" as Irvin calls it), and (3) aesthetic experience of the artistic with an object-focussed, deep appreciation by the individual ("deep appreciation"). Category 1 is an aesthetic experience that can arise from both ordinary and artistic sources, which does not require an accurate, critically appreciative understanding of the object – the focus of attention[36] – being experienced. Categories 2 and 3 are aesthetic experiences which specifically arise from artistic sources, where there is an accurate understanding of the object being experienced as well as a critical appreciation of it. The degree of critical appreciation distinguishes the two categories, where the deep appreciation of category 3 involves technical, contextual, and historical appreciation, and potentially elaborate self-reflection – an introspective awareness of the impact of the experience. Irvin's framework is appealing as it applies an empirically justified structure to several of the seemingly competing descriptions of aesthetic experience, demonstrating that they may well be different facets of the same problem. I suggest that these insightful categorisations are part of the aesthetic landscape, adding essential substance to the structures already sketched.

At this point, the landscape of aesthetic experience can be described (with reference labels in parentheses) as the aesthetic landscape which draws on all experiences as its source, some of which are (L1) aesthetic experiences arising from ordinary sources, and the rest are aesthetic experiences arising from artistic sources, with three distinct characters: (L2.1) those with no critically appreciative aspects, (L2.2) those arising from basic appreciation and (L2.3) those arising from deep appreciation. It is also necessary to have a separate category (L0) for non-aesthetic experiences, as a reference point.

Now, Irvin's discussion of critically appreciative aesthetic experiences isn't explicitly constrained to artistic sources. They are the focus, due to the framing of the argument, but Irvin says, "… aesthetic appreciation is focused on its object: it is appreciation of that object, and as such the object must be largely correctly apprehended."[37] The object isn't necessarily an artistic source, but may also be an ordinary source. In the landscape of aesthetic experience described so far, I have broadly grouped aesthetic experiences into those associated with ordinary sources (L1) and those associated with artistic sources (L2.x). The artistic sources incorporate critically appreciative categories, whereas the ordinary sources, at this point, do not. However, there exist arguments both for critically appreciative and for non-critically appreciative approaches to the aesthetic experience of natural environments.

Allen Carlson reviews[38] the critically appreciative and non-critically appreciative perspectives on the aesthetic experience of nature, as follows. The critical approach (referred to as "scientific cognitivism") holds that aesthetic appreciation of nature should not be informed by anything other than an understanding of nature. For instance, the critical formalist understanding of art should not be applied to the experience of nature. Instead, "nature must be appreciated as nature and not as art."[39] The correct apprehension of the object of appreciation – the object being nature – is found using knowledge of natural history, such as geology

33 Biederman and Vessel, "Perceptual Pleasure and the Brain," 249.
34 Belfi et al., "Dynamics of Aesthetic Experience," 584.
35 Irvin, "Is Aesthetic Experience Possible?," 37.
36 Be it on a painting, a piece of music, a performance, a person, bodily sensations such as the feeling of the breeze on the skin and so on.
37 Irvin, "Is Aesthetic Experience Possible?," 45.
38 Carlson, "Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics," 301.
39 Ibid., 304.

and biology. The non-critical approach (referred to as "non-cognitive") incorporates several arguments that do not require cognitive considerations, as for scientific cognitivism. These include responsive states of the observer, such as arousal, wonder, and reverence. The most prominent of these arguments is an aesthetics of engagement (proposed by Arnold Berleant), which requires the observer to have participatory engagement *within* the object of appreciation and hence "calls for abandoning traditional dichotomies, such as between the object of appreciation and the appreciator."[40] It demands total immersion and a multi-sensory experience.

Carlson argues that the critically appreciative and non-critically appreciative perspectives don't necessarily oppose one another.[41] Thus, as experiences of nature represent a significant subset of ordinary aesthetic experiences, these perspectives inform further development of the landscape of aesthetic experience for ordinary sources. Instead of there being simply (L1) aesthetic experiences arising from ordinary sources, we can now state the following: the landscape of aesthetic experience can be described as the aesthetic landscape which draws on all experiences as its source, some of which are aesthetic experiences arising from ordinary sources with two distinct characters: (L1.1) those with no critically appreciative aspects and (L1.2) those involving critical appreciation. The rest are aesthetic experiences arising from artistic sources, with three distinct characters: (L2.1) those with no critically appreciative aspects, (L2.2) those arising from basic appreciation, and (L2.3) those arising from deep appreciation. It is still necessary to have a separate category (L0) for non-aesthetic experiences, as a reference point.

It is worth adding another dimension to this landscape, that of the intensity of the aesthetic experience. There is not simply one intensity state of aesthetic experience, but rather the intensity occurs on a scale, with some experiences being more intense than others. It isn't just a subjective declaration by the appreciator either: neuroscientific and psychological findings support[42] the existence of degrees of intensity of aesthetic experience, showing that the strength of neural activation correlates with the reported intensity of the experience. While there are many descriptions of aesthetic experience, it is likely that the majority of instances that one actually has are not very intense, despite their importance in our lives – for instance, the many ordinary aesthetic experiences encountered in daily life (such as those described by Irvin[43]), and perhaps, the majority of experiences had at art galleries. Some aesthetic experiences, however, *are* particularly intense, although I suspect that they are in the minority in terms of frequency of occurrence. Many of the literary descriptions[44] of aesthetic experiences give the impression of them being particularly intense, and there is an academic expectation of the feasibility of intense aesthetic experiences.[45] Crucially, it has been found via fMRI study[46] that the most intense aesthetic experiences activate the brain in a different way than less intense experiences; they involve several parts of the default mode network, which is associated with self-reflection. It is likely that these most intense aesthetic experiences are highly affective – this will be explored in more detail later.

Another reason for the incorporation of intense aesthetic experiences – and one which is consistent with the findings around activation of the default mode network and self-reflection – is scenario 3 proposed in Section 2, that of an aesthetic experience which occurs with no external stimulation but with an enabling state of mind. This occurs during meditative experiences (such as meditation itself and mindfulness practices), which are in themselves intense experiences in that one attempts to exclude external distractions and to focus on introspection. This can have powerful effects on one's state of mind, both in the short and in the long term[47]

40 Ibid., 303.

41 Ibid., 306.

42 Blood and Zatorre, "Intensely Pleasurable Responses to Music," 11821 and see related discussion in Brattico and Varankaitė, "Aesthetic Empowerment through Music," 289; Yang et al., "The Neural Determinants of Beauty," 91; Weigand and Jacobsen, "Looking at Life Through Rose-Colored Glasses," 517, although there is a lot of variance around the regressions described in this work.

43 Irvin, "Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic," 30.

44 Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 12 onwards provides several excellent examples.

45 Shusterman, "From Analysis to Eros," 90–3.

46 Vessel et al., "The Brain on Art," 9.

47 See discussion and references in Irvin, "Is Aesthetic Experience Possible?," 48–9.

and, on attention, consequently creating more intense experiences of the world.[48] Although this is a niche category, it is one which must be accounted for.

Given the early stage of development of the landscape model, I will avoid adding true dimensionality to account for gradated intensity of experiences and instead propose a binary arrangement, where *intense aesthetic experiences* are a distinct type of aesthetic experience representing only the most intense experiences. This means that the landscape is as described above, but where any individual aesthetic experience may be an intense one; the landscape will be intermittently marked with intense aesthetic experiences. The consequences of intense aesthetic experiences will be discussed in more detail in the next section, as they strongly affect action.

5 Action Profiles within the Landscape

In every conscious moment that we experience existence, there is action, in some manner. Any of those moments might be an aesthetic experience, so how does that influence action? This article is concerned with the nature of action related to aesthetic experiences in the context of our ethical being. In this case, action means the collection of mental and physical activity that occurs during an aesthetic experience, some of which may have consequential impacts on our moral behaviour in the future. Specifically, this includes mental states, thought processes, inner speech, externalised speech, and physical movements that are a direct response to the aesthetic experience for the duration of its occurrence. Additionally, there is a particular interest in the modification of, or introduction of new, thought processes which, after the experience is over, might evolve over time in a way that influences our decision-making and hence can change our moral behaviours. These individual mechanisms can be seen as pathways from experience to action. Each category of experience within the landscape of aesthetic experience will involve various pathways to action and so they can be grouped together into action profiles which represent each category of experience.

5.1 In the Moment

The starting point is Kinsbourne's description of experience, conveyed in Section 2. In each moment, internal mental activity – mental states, expectations, evaluations, intentions, inner speech – combines with external stimuli (via representational states[49]) to create thoughts and actions, which in turn affect thought and action in a future moment. Kinsbourne writes[50]: "The[se] concepts, either directly or via inner speech, activate response mechanisms, which constrain the rendering of the thought into a sequential mode, and furthermore are in differing states of motor preparation." That is, experiences shape thought and prepare the body for future physical activity. So, in each moment, thought and action are generated from unconscious and conscious input in a selective, self-reflective manner. This is a continual process of generation.

A critical aspect of this process is how the mind anticipates what will occur in the future, via *expectations* and *anticipations*. Expectation is the mechanism for predicting future events when related external stimuli are present. Anticipation is an evolutionarily-adaptive mechanism for predicting future events when there is no immediate external stimulation present related to those events.[51] Anticipations come with a motor-enabling capacity to prepare for future events.[52] Both expectations and anticipations directly influence the experience

48 Bigaj, *Three Essays on Aesthetic Experience*, xvii and chapter three starting at 114.
49 Nanay, *Between Perception and Action*, 1.
50 Kinsbourne, "Consciousness in Action," 548.
51 Silvano, "The Processes of Expectation and Anticipation," 471.
52 Kinsbourne, "Consciousness in Action," 552.

of the current moment (as Kinsbourne puts it "the experience may be critically modified by the anticipation") and hence influence outcomes in terms of thought and action. Thus it can be seen that, in each moment, our minds are laden with thought, control of physical activity, and preparations for future thought and action.

5.2 From Cognitive Variance to Behaviour

An individual action can take place in an instantaneous moment, but often occurs over an extended collection of instantaneous moments that our sensation of "now" traverses. To help understand how action evolves through experiences over time, I will use part of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of the consciousness of time as analysed by Holly Andersen:[53] the concept of "now" has three constituent parts, (1) the primal now, which has an intentionality focussed on the currently occurring experience or another instantaneous Husserlian tripartite moment, (2) a leading aspect into the immediate future, which accommodates expectations of the next imminent experience, and (3) a receding aspect into the immediate past, which represents retention. Our existence can then be seen as a never-ending chain of instantaneous moments, constantly leading forwards. The mental propulsion, so to speak, is provided by the expectations and anticipations which are continually generated.

As inner or outer activity – thought, inner speech, unconscious evaluations, externalised speech or physical activity – progress over a series of primal nows, there is the input and feedback processing of external stimuli, as well as the creation of expectations and anticipations at the leading edge of the now. These can change the inner or outer activity in the next moment, causing the action to evolve. For conscious thought and inner speech, this enables the "train of thought." So, for the duration of a given experience (aesthetic or not), there are actions that are direct responses to the experience itself, and there is the possibility of those responses influencing behaviour over longer time periods than that of the experience. This macroscopic behavioural view concerns goals and is commonly understood as how emotions affect change.

5.3 Emotion, Goal-Based Behaviour, and the Changing of Minds

Emotions are, effectively, the mental states that occur during an experience, while feelings are the conscious, subjective experience of emotion to evolutionarily adaptive effect.[54] They influence behaviour through goals, via hedonic (pleasure-based) reward systems within the brain.[55] Goal-based behaviours are the primary driver of motivation in humans.[56] This is where the setting of goals and the striving for the attainment of them drives decision-making and action. There are parallel streams of both unconscious and conscious goal-based activity, both sharing the same mental structures, with the unconscious motivational mechanisms having primacy.[57] Goal-based motivational behaviours occupy extended periods of time, and each person has multiple active goals operating simultaneously over different timescales.

Both unconscious and conscious goals can be created and modified by experiences, either from direct internal processing and responses during the experience, or from trains of thought and inner speech that develop as a result of the experience. It may require repeated exposure to learning experiences for value-based behavioural changes to take place. The development, then, of externalised moral behaviours stems from

53 Andersen, "Representation of Time," 477; original source: Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*.
54 Kringelbach, "Emotion, Feelings and Hedonics," 37.
55 Berridge and Kringelbach, "Affective Neuroscience of Pleasure," 457.
56 Bargh et al., "Motivation," 268.
57 Ibid., 270.

this transition from momentary experience to decision-making to short- and long-term actions, in a continual process of feedback and response.

5.4 The Structure of Influence

The above discussion is about generalised experiences and how they influence action via these internal processes. This should encapsulate the influence of normal, everyday experiences as well as aesthetic experiences unless there is something about aesthetic experiences that changes the above mechanisms. I will explore that shortly, but first, some meta aspects of an experience need to be brought into view. These require a conscious awareness of the activity and reflection on the impacts of it.[58] They frame the activity in a more familiar manner:

- *The content of the experience and what we learn from it*: we consciously interpret what we understand from the content of the experience, assimilating it by acknowledging, supporting, rejecting, adopting, adapting, and so on. This can subsequently inform our future thinking and decision-making. (Note that the unconscious equivalent – modification of anticipations – has already been discussed.)
- *The pleasure and well-being benefits of the experience*: although the effect of reward systems was discussed as an internal process earlier, the conscious aspect is relevant when we are self-aware and reflect on these specific benefits (the feelings of pleasure and well-being) of the experience, leading to the setting of conscious goals. The mechanism of action comes from the activation of the hedonic and default networks in the brain,[59] in combination with conscious thought processes and goal setting.
- *The mere occurrence of the experience*: if the experience is sufficiently different to normal experiences and feelings, then there may be an effect from the change of activity. Consciously, it's a reminder that other ways of existing and the associated emotions (perhaps joy, surprise, thrill, and disappointment) may rouse us into action, to seek (or avoid) paths which might help us to satisfy our goals.
- *Conscious reflection on the experience*: there may be conscious goal-based influences from taking time after an experience (and potentially during an experience) to reflect on the impacts of the experience – the feelings, emotions, pleasure, satisfaction, etc. – and any lingering effects. I specify this separately from "the pleasure and well-being benefits of the experience" aspect, because although it may also involve consideration of the pleasurable elements, I suggest that it is a broader-based reflection.

This list is probably not exhaustive, and it is worth repeating that these meta aspects are for experiences in general. Any given experience, aesthetic or not, may have any of the meta characteristics which, along with the internal processes, contribute to the pathway to action.

5.5 Aesthetic Versus Non-Aesthetic Experiences

As previously mentioned, distinguishing non-aesthetic (normal) experiences from aesthetic experiences is difficult, with no single, clear definition from either a conceptual perspective or a neurophysiological one. The description given in Section 2 points towards aesthetic experiences being associated with different mental states and hence different emotional responses than those associated with normal experiences. It doesn't necessarily need to be a different type of emotion than is commonly encountered: it could simply be the

58 Here, I refer to being able to think about the sensations arising from an experience (e.g. the feelings and the pleasure), rather than being able to inspect how those sensations come about in terms of mental processes. Cf. Irvin, "Is Aesthetic Experience Possible?," 37.

59 Berridge and Kringelbach, "Neuroscience of Pleasure and Well-Being," 1.

intensity of the emotion and/or the extent to which feelings related to it are rendered. I side with the simpler approach and propose that aesthetic experiences have a more intense emotional basis than non-aesthetic experiences.

Related to this, I also propose that aesthetic experiences involve increased or different attentional focus on an activity,[60] than non-aesthetic experiences. This enables the heightened emotional basis proposed above. Describing the specific nature of the attentional focus is beyond the scope of this article; however, Bence Nanay has made[61] a thorough argument for attention being a key aspect of aesthetic experience and provides an analysis of the various types of perceptive attention, with proposals as to the specific nature of attentional focus involved with aesthetic experiences.

These proposals allow us to draw an important conclusion for this article. The vagueness of the definition of aesthetic experience means that there may be unexpected cross-over between normal and aesthetic experiences. While many scenarios will be satisfactorily characterised by the definition, distinguishing them from normal experiences – such as listening to a live concert, observing one's sleeping child or pausing to appreciate a warm breeze on one's face – there may be experiences where there is uncertainty. For instance, playing a game of basketball will generate elevated emotions and requires increased concentration and perceptual focus. It could be argued that playing basketball is in fact an aesthetic experience, or it could be just another basketball game for a seasoned player. Another example is where a person with a generally calm nature suffers a rare fit of anger about a particular incident: there would be intense emotions and intense focus. Is this an aesthetic experience? It could be observed that there is no pleasure involved (on the traditional assumption that an aesthetic experience is pleasurable); however, pleasure is not necessarily a requirement of an aesthetic experience.[62] We could throw a host of other narrowing factors at the definition to try to make a given example fit our intuition of what is and is not an aesthetic experience, but I'm not trying to demand a more specific definition of aesthetic experience here. Instead, I intend to draw attention to the pathway to action of the experience. As it seems we can't clearly differentiate some ostensibly aesthetic experiences from normal experiences, then we can reasonably expect the pathways to action of those aesthetic experiences to be similar to those of non-aesthetic experiences. This isn't to deny that a particular experience feels special (like it might in a game of basketball); rather, it is to say that the place of action in it might not be very different to action arising from normal activities.

There will be divergence from the normal action profile for an experience where there is no uncertainty in its aesthetic quality. The pathway to action of a given aesthetic experience will depend on the particulars of the experience. This implicitly includes the state of mind of the person experiencing it (see Section 2), and as has now been outlined in the meta properties of influence, the pathway to action can also depend on the extent of conscious engagement by the individual.

My proposed intense aesthetic experiences should have no uncertainty. I propose that they have particular characteristics, including a unique mechanism of influence on action, that are distinct from non-aesthetic experiences and distinct from "non-intense" (i.e. low-intensity) aesthetic experiences (henceforth, when comparing intense and non-intense aesthetic experiences, I will use "non-intense" to refer to low-intensity aesthetic experiences – see discussion in Section 4). They are a type of experiential event that can interrupt ongoing behaviour, where the continual train of thought, as well as the unconscious generation of anticipations, is interrupted. This is crucial to the effect on action, as the interruption causes a revision of anticipations.[63] This in turn causes us to perceive and interpret the world differently; it disrupts established thought patterns and allows us to consider alternatives. This type of event is akin to a surprise. However, this isn't just the commonly understood sense of surprise, such as when, on my birthday, all my friends jump out from behind my sofa (it's a philosophical sofa). It includes microscopic and evolutionary surprises such as when our

60 I refer to an *activity* rather than specifically a source of external stimulation because of the possibility of source-less aesthetic experiences, identified in Section 2.

61 Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*, 12.

62 Marković, "Components of Aesthetic Experience," 4.

63 Kinsbourne, "Consciousness in Action," 551.

anticipations, accumulated over many years, are confounded regarding statistically normal causality and sequences of events. Intense aesthetic experiences are not surprises, although they do share neurophysiological qualities.

I propose that there are other characteristics of aesthetic experiences which, although they don't directly contribute to pathways to action (because they are derivative of the already described mechanisms), are worth mentioning to establish a better understanding of the experiences. The first is that both non-intense and intense aesthetic experiences are absorbing, that is they are effective at distracting us from the rest of the environment and from our inner monologues. This is due to attention being focussed on the activity in combination with the acute feelings and emotions that arise during the experience.[64] They both are also physically arresting for the same reasons. We pause or slow our movements[65] and allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the moment. The distinction between non-intense and intense is that intense aesthetic experiences have a high level of manifestation of these properties, whereby inner speech is suspended and one is nearly or completely still. Furthermore, intense aesthetic experiences must always occur with an interruption of anticipations. It would be impossible to consciously know when that specifically is happening, but given the above-suggested characteristics, an intense aesthetic experience feels comprehensively overwhelming.

The employment of these action-influencing and qualitative definitions within the landscape of aesthetic experience can now proceed, in conjunction with the described internal and meta mechanisms of influence on action. It's worth recalling that aesthetic experience starts within the mind and that it is agnostic of source; hence, there is no reason to expect that any one class of aesthetic experience (L1.1 to L2.3) should give a more powerful experience than any other, or should enable intense aesthetic experiences more often than any other. The extent to which one's attention is overwhelmed – how distracting the experience is – depends on the particulars of the experience and the person experiencing it and hence gives rise to the pathway to action. This ultimately means that each aesthetic experience, for each person, will most likely have a unique set of pathways to action. To enable tractable philosophical analysis of these processes and their implications, there need to be action profiles. These will provide practical groupings of the mechanisms of influence on action, so that we have a way of dissecting and discussing such topics as how our ethical being is influenced by certain experiences.

5.6 Action Profiles

I have described the landscape of aesthetic experience as drawing on all experiences as its source, some of which are aesthetic experiences arising from ordinary sources with two distinct characters: (L1.1) those with no critically appreciative aspects and (L1.2) those involving critical appreciation. The rest are aesthetic experiences arising from artistic sources, with three distinct characters: (L2.1) those with no critically appreciative aspects, (L2.2) those arising from basic appreciation, and (L2.3) those arising from deep appreciation. Within that, any of the aesthetic experiences may be intense. There is also the reference category, (L0) non-aesthetic experiences.

The overall transition from an experience (of any type) to action is as follows: there is momentary experience which starts with a state of mind and a focus of attention, usually combined with external stimuli, which generates (A) immediate response actions with conscious and unconscious cognitive activity, anticipation generation, thought processes, inner speech, externalised speech, and physical engagement all combined

64 Note Sarasso et al.'s ("Stopping for Knowledge") commentary on Menninghaus et al.'s ("The Distancing-Embracing Model") work: "*According to the model, the beauty-driven transient suspension of prototypical motor responses, resulting from perceivers' absence of personal goals and environmental threats (i.e., psychological distance), makes room for a higher intensity of the felt sensations and emotions elicited by beautiful objects (i.e., embracement). This 'aesthetic presence' enables observers to direct attention to the perceptual activity for its own sake, with the subjectively felt intensity of present sensation being a reward in its own right.*"
65 Sarasso et al., "Stopping for Knowledge," 723.

with emotions arising from the mental states, which stimulate feelings in the moment. In conjunction with meta mechanisms, that response set (A) along with (B) post-event conscious thought processes and (C) self-reflection may lead to decision-making and consequently short- and long-term conscious and unconscious goal-based action.

This is the generalised action profile of all possible experiences, which contains all possible pathways to action. The action profile of normal (non-aesthetic) experiences is one subset of this, and the various action profiles of aesthetic experiences are other subsets, some of which will have partial overlap with the action profile of normal experiences. In combination, these do not completely comprise the generalised action profile, because for an individual person, at a given point in time, there will always be more experiences to be had, which will change the latent normal or aesthetic experience action profiles. Thus, these profiles will evolve over time (but the generalised action profile will not evolve, by definition). For example, the types of thought processes that occur later in life are not the same as the ones available earlier in life, and hence, the normal and aesthetic experience action profiles will change over the course of a lifetime, albeit still within the domain of the generalised action profile. I now propose the action profiles within the landscape of aesthetic experience.

The L0 action profile of non-aesthetic experiences is representative of the actions arising from the commonly occurring experiences that an individual person has, at a given point in time. The action outcomes may come from any of the A, B, and C pathways in the generalised action profile where there is not a distinct, acute feeling occurring with aesthetic experiences.

For L1.1, the action profile is for an aesthetic experience involving an ordinary source with no critically appreciative aspects and where there are intensified in-moment feelings that are distinct from normal experiences. The intensity depends on the enabling state of mind of the individual and the degree of attentional focus on the source (and perhaps even the potency of the source in some sense[66]). It is unclear how the acute feelings alone may give rise to pathways to action that are different from the normal action profile (see the discussion in Section 5.5). It's possible that they enable stronger meta-responses (C pathways), rather than there being a specific internal mechanism (A pathways). It seems prudent to suggest that *some* pathways to action for aesthetic experiences from ordinary sources with no critically appreciative aspects (L1.1) are similar to those for normal experiences. The rest, I propose, are due to specific meta-aspects of an experience, and I will speculate on some potential mechanisms below. Overall, the action profile for L1.1. should probably be seen as partially overlapping with L0 and partially possessing distinct pathways as follows.

Some writers have suggested how aesthetic experiences from ordinary sources affect our ethical being. Interpreting those provides some compatible ideas for the mechanisms of influence. Sherri Irvin suggests, "Because attending to our aesthetic preferences gives our lives a more satisfying texture, we are more likely to persist in any project that is undertaken with this dimension of experience in mind."[67] That is, allowing ourselves to enjoy aesthetic experiences from ordinary sources allows us to pursue moral paths of potentially greater moral value than our usual choices, presumably because we will have developed an improved sense of overall well-being. This could come purely from the internal processes for pleasure and unconscious goal-setting. However, I also interpret a conscious element to this perspective ("with this dimension of experience in mind") and as such it could use the meta-response of "*The pleasure and well-being benefits of the experience.*" This pathway involves reflection after the experience and enables conscious goal setting.

Yuriko Saito suggests that "the aesthetic dimension of the way in which we carry out an action can determine its moral character."[68] Saito explains that the participants of a social interaction are responsible for the aesthetic experience they deliver, mutually to each of the other participants, through their bodily movements and (primarily non-verbal) communication. It is a way of conveying respect and care for each other and so a good aesthetic experience had by the participants can be considered a good moral endeavour. I interpret the assessment of having had a good aesthetic experience in that context as something which is

66 For example, a prolonged touch of a textured fabric might produce a stronger aesthetic sensation than a brief brush of it on the hand.

67 Irvin, "Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic," 43.

68 Saito, "Body Aesthetics and Moral Virtues," 227.

consciously pleasing or displeasing. That is, it's a form of hedonic valence, i.e. pleasure. Thus, this example would also use the meta aspect of "*The pleasure and well-being benefits of the experience.*"

One aspect of Hans Maes' argument[69] is that the content of aesthetic experiences can influence how individuals live their lives, helping to understand their existential circumstances – to help ease burdens and to help celebrate good times. This would use the meta aspect of "*The content of the experience and what we learn from it.*" Finally, it is conceivable to me that an aesthetic experience can be sufficiently absorbing of one's attention that certain pathways to action become available. I speculate on two possible (not mutually exclusive) mechanisms. First, that the distraction from the bustle of the world and, to some extent, from our own relentless inner thoughts, is simply pleasurable. This could enable internal processes for unconscious pleasure and subsequently unconscious goal setting. A second possible mechanism is that the focussing of attention could enable unconscious thought processes to come to conclusions which otherwise might not be reached because the brain is normally distracted with daily life. This allows for decisions to be made and action to be taken which otherwise might not occur. At least one issue with this option is that it seems unlikely that the brain would solve lingering problems within the short duration of an aesthetic experience. An alternative explanation might be that the practising of attentional focus during aesthetic experiences allows for attention to be focussed at other times when great benefits may be found.[70]

So, it can be seen how the action profile for an aesthetic experience involving an ordinary source can have some specific pathways to action, which, while not unavailable in the action profile of normal experiences, are more likely to occur for an aesthetic experience because of the nature of the particular experience. I'll return now to the action profiles of the rest of the landscape.

For L1.2, the action profile is for an aesthetic experience involving an ordinary source where there is critical appreciation. The pathways to action will be similar to that for an aesthetic experience involving an ordinary source with no critically appreciative aspects (L1.1), but we can expect additional meta-responses (C pathways) due to the involvement of knowledge and experience that enable a critical understanding of the source. As for L1.1, we can look to the literature for suggestions of the specific mechanisms. Regarding aesthetic experiences of natural environments (specifically in the context of climate change), Emily Brady argues that critical appreciation can influence aesthetic experiences via "a new emotional tone emerg[ing], or the emotions surrounding the experience [can] become more complex."[71] This means that there would be an increased concentration of similar pathways to action that would be found in L1.1. In another scenario (Brady's "pervasive case"), Brady suggests[72] that critical appreciation will prompt conscious reflection on the experience, raising questions that the individual must deal with. This would add pathways to action in the meta aspects of "*The content of the experience and what we learn from it*" and "*Conscious reflection on the experience.*" There may also be an increase in the "*The pleasure and well-being benefits of the experience*" meta-response as a consequence of the process of learning from the content (a meta- response over an extended time period).

For L2.1, the action profile is for an aesthetic experience involving an artistic source where there are no critically appreciative aspects. Fundamentally, pathways to action should be similar to that for an aesthetic experience involving an *ordinary* source with no critically appreciative aspects (L1.1), due to the non-discriminatory nature of experience with respect to sources. The rich cognitive experience provided by artistic sources may generate particularly acute feelings, but similarly to L1.1 it isn't clear how the pathways to action would be much different to those for normal experiences. I refer the reader again to the speculative mechanisms discussed for L1.1. The meta-responses, however, may be the most distinguishing feature, but for a different reason than for L1.1: the sociohistorical associations with artistic sources mean that there might be strong conscious engagements. For example, the expectations around viewing an artwork can influence how we consciously (and presumably also unconsciously) experience the work.[73] I expect this results in more

69 Maes, "Existential Aesthetics," 265.

70 Irvin, "Is Aesthetic Experience Possible?," 48.

71 Brady, "Aesthetic Value, Ethics and Climate Change," 565.

72 Ibid., 566.

73 See, for example, Szubielska et al., "Influence of Physical Context and Knowledge of Artworks;" Silvia and Berg, "Finding Movies Interesting;" Walton, "Categories of Art;" and also see Laetz, "Kendall Walton's Categories of Art."

pathways to action from the meta-responses (C pathways) than for normal experiences (and possibly even for aesthetic ordinary-source experiences with no critically appreciative aspects). Note that Irvin's definition for this category requires no critical understanding of the source, and so there may not be much activity in the meta aspect of "*The content of the experience and what we learn from it,*" and perhaps neither from the B pathways.

For L2.2, the action profile is for an aesthetic experience involving an artistic source where there is basic critical appreciation. This is similar to the action profile for L2.1, but because it is a scenario where the person experiencing the source correctly apprehends it, there should be an increased concentration of pathways to action in the meta aspect of "*The content of the experience and what we learn from it.*" There may also be an increase in the "*The pleasure and well-being benefits of the experience*" meta-response as a consequence of the process of learning from the content.

For L2.3, the action profile is for an aesthetic experience involving an artistic source where there is a deep critical appreciation by the individual. This builds on the action profile for L2.2, with further pathways to action from the "*The content of the experience and what we learn from it*" meta response. The main difference from L2.2 is that L2.3 has pathways to action coming from the "*Conscious reflection on the experience*" meta-response, because, as Irvin argued, the act of self-reflection on the impact of the experience is an essential feature of this type of activity.

Intense aesthetic experiences can occur within any of the landscape categories. The action profile is the same as the one for the category in which the experience occurs, but with two modifications. First, the overall sensation and feelings generated should be especially acute. The impacts are likely to involve the meta aspects of experience (see the speculative mechanisms discussed for L1.1). The involvement of introspective neural systems (see Section 4) suggests that the meta aspect of "*Conscious reflection on the experience*" will be involved. I also expect that the "*The pleasure and well-being benefits of the experience,*" and "*The mere occurrence of the experience*" aspects will also be involved. Secondly and crucially, this type of experience causes a revision of anticipations. This is an unconscious process which disrupts established thought patterns and changes how we perceive the world and hence influences subsequent decision-making. It is a specific, internal, unconscious pathway to action (within A pathways). Overall, intense aesthetic experiences are overwhelming and should enable action via a wide range of pathways.

With the elements of the landscape of aesthetic experience now profiled in terms of pathways to action, it's worth commenting on the apparent hierarchical inheritance of pathways. I expect that this is more of a terminological artefact than a genuine inflation of pathways to action: if L2.3 is based on L2.2, which is based on L2.1 and so on, that doesn't mean that the action profile of L2.3 is the sum of its antecedents. Rather, it is that they sample different regions within the parent profile, as well as add their own characteristics. There will naturally be common ground across all of these action profiles – it is to the nuances of each scenario that attention must paid.

6 Conclusions

The prevailing idea that aesthetic experiences are brief, but special and potent, parts of our lives, initially has an air of dissonance when it is argued that they can emerge from ordinary activities. How can something be both special and ordinary? Of course, this is a linguistic diversion, but the sentiment remains. Existing arguments that ordinary aesthetic experiences influence our ethical being present at a high level; there has been little detail provided on the nature and occurrence of that impact. That is, how, specifically, does action arise from aesthetic experience?

In this article, I have argued that there are several categories of aesthetic experience and that, in complement with non-aesthetic (normal) experiences, they comprise a conceptual landscape of experience. This includes both artistic and ordinary sources of aesthetic experience. That there should be more than one type of aesthetic experience is noteworthy – discussions of Aesthetics often refer to the singular aesthetic experience. As a catch-all, this is acceptable, but consideration of the consequences of aesthetic experience

requires insight into the domain. Each category of aesthetic experience represents a multitude of actual activities within its definition, and this comes to the fore when analysing the impact of the activity.

The ability to analyse these activities and their impacts requires several critical insights, which I have derived in this article by considering empirical neurophysiological and psychological understanding. The insights include: that aesthetic experiences can only occur when there is already an enabling state of mind in place; that aesthetic experiences may occur in scenarios where there is an absence of external stimuli; that there is no neurophysiological or conceptual reason to exclude ordinary activities from the sources of aesthetic experience; and that pathways to action for an experience consist of internal processes along with meta-responses to the experience. I have explicitly described some mechanisms that lead from experience to action. These, along with the critical insights, allow the conclusion that each category of aesthetic experience should have an associated action profile, which accommodates the variety of pathways to action, grouping them by their common mechanisms of influence on action. This makes it possible to find the specific pathways to action which are likely to occur in a particular category of aesthetic experience. And thus, there is now a framework to help us understand how action arises from aesthetic experience.

Having knowledge of these mechanisms should allow existing problems at the boundary of Aesthetics and Ethics to be revisited with a fresh perspective. It should also raise, and help to answer, new questions. What benefits are there to self-observing that one has had an aesthetic experience? Are there any negative aspects of aesthetic experience? From an ethical perspective, are the meta aspects of an aesthetic experience more affective than the internal processes? How are we influenced by aesthetic experience as we age? Could the overall benefit of aesthetic experience be that it just makes our lives more pleasant? Do the apparent benefits of aesthetic experience simply reduce to distraction from our existential anxieties?

One of the most intriguing outcomes of this investigation is support for intense aesthetic experiences. I speculate that many authors, when writing gushing descriptions of the wonder of aesthetic experiences, are reacting to the intense form of aesthetic experience, rather than the non-intense form. The framework developed in this article supports the ability to distinguish the two. I have proposed that the key feature of an intense aesthetic experience is the revision of anticipations, which comes from the experience's interruption of conscious and unconscious thought processes. This allows us to see the world afresh, disrupting embedded thought patterns.

I will finish with an observation by Georges Bataille. He believed that the power of surrealist art lies in its ability to elevate us from the derived complications of real-world action into poetic liberty – in a sense, bringing freedom from the normal ways of thinking. He suggested that rationally rooted thought processes "subordinate the existence of each instant to some ulterior goal"[74] and that experiencing surrealist art could bring freedom from conditioned rational thinking. This becomes more understandable in light of the ideas introduced here: it seems to be consistent with the sense of surprise that surrealism brings and how it can challenge our normal notions of the world.

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74 Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, 65.

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