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Is Attunement a Solution to the Antinomy of Taste?

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ABSTRACT. Many discussions within aesthetics are built on the notion of taste as that which allow us to experience things aesthetically. As such, aesthetic taste traditionally refers to a kind of sensitivity that an individual has with regards to objects, and therefore points to both the subject and the object of appreciation. This two-dimensionality of taste becomes an ambivalence when trying to identify the key stage from which aesthetic experiences overall emerge: the aesthetic, and therefore the exercise of taste, is rooted in an act of either affective response or perceptual discernment. Irene Martínez and Elisabeth Schellekens try to reconcile these stages by turning to the notion of attunement as a process of emotional adjustment to the aesthetic character of objects. I dig into their proposal and compare it with an alternate view of attunement, namely Rita Felski's, with a twofold purpose: (i) to explore whether the intended synthesis is successfully carried out, and (ii) to delve into the explanatory power of attunement applied to aesthetics.

1. Attunement as a Solution to the Ambivalence of Taste

In 'Aesthetic Taste. Perceptual Discernment or Emotional Sensibility?' (2022), Irene Martínez and Elisabeth Schellekens aim to clarify what they find to be an intrinsic dichotomy to the notion of taste as traditionally understood in Aesthetics. Generally speaking, taste can be defined as "the

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ability to secure access to that which we deem aesthetically valuable” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 58). By stating this view, they seem to focus on taste as a skill, a sensibility, or an ability to notice things in the world, and therefore withdraw from the discussion at hand an alternative but nonetheless common understanding of taste as something built out of those aesthetic experiences that one finds most pleasurable, thereby constituting our individual preferences and attachments. Hereafter, I too will be using the notion of taste in the former sense, as it has been traditionally conceived in aesthetic discussions.

In their paper, Martínez and Schellekens identify five different ways in which we exercise this ability of taste for engaging aesthetically with what surrounds us:

- i. the discernment of aesthetic qualities – aesthetic perception
- ii. the affective response to aesthetic value – aesthetic pleasure or displeasure
- iii. the emission of judgements regarding aesthetic value – aesthetic judgement
- iv. the use of aesthetic terms and predicates – aesthetic attributions
- v. the recognition and enjoyment of aesthetic merit – aesthetic evaluation

As such, these so-called aesthetic acts may partake in “a coherent experiential whole which includes most, if not all, aspects of the aesthetic” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 60). Therefore, we must also consider taste as the capacity required for successfully performing the different tasks that constitute an aesthetic experience, which in turn seems to be impossible to account for without studying taste as the enabler of all forms of aesthetic engagement. An underlying approach regarding this characterisation is a holistic view according to which “aesthetic experience is not made up of entirely separate and independent aesthetic events. Rather, it involves chain reactions between phenomenologically connected events that together constitute one coherent aesthetic experience” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 61). A simple formulation of this holistic approach seems quite compatible with our initial intuitions regarding aesthetic experience as a whole, but Martínez and Schellekens point out two issues that may arise from it: on the one hand, the thinning out of the explanation of the different aesthetic acts and therefore of aesthetic taste; on the other hand, the assumption that taste can single-handedly trigger the performance of all aesthetic

activities, thus leading to a variety of misconceptions regarding the way aesthetic experience is generated.

Above all, even from a holistic point of view, what strikes Martínez and Schellekens as inevitable is the intuition that any sort of experience must have a starting point, that is, an act from which the various events that take part in the overall activity follow. With regards to aesthetic experience, this intuition leaves us with the need to identify one of the many ways of exercising taste – thus to engage aesthetically – as the act which initiates the experience, and there seem to be two main contenders among the five aesthetic acts previously mentioned: aesthetic experience is initiated either by the discernment of an object’s aesthetic qualities (i.e. aesthetic perception) or by an affective response to them (i.e. aesthetic pleasure/displeasure).² Consequently, one of these two tasks in which aesthetic taste is exercised also constitutes its principal role – aesthetic experience cannot be characterised independently from taste and vice versa, so whichever act we point out as the initiator of the experience will also become the defining aspect of taste as the capacity to engage aesthetically with the world.

It is this overview of aesthetic engagement that ultimately leads to identifying an ambivalence in the notion of aesthetic taste as we know it. On the one hand, adopting a “perception-based” account implies conceiving of taste as the ability to discern qualities in the object, therefore giving grounds for accepting an objectivist approach to aesthetics.³ On the other hand, adopting an “affect-based” account involves accepting taste as, first and foremost, the ability to respond emotionally, thus somehow supporting a subjectivist approach. Martínez and Schellekens aim mainly towards a characterisation of aesthetic taste that successfully portrays its exercise as a relational process in which both perceptual discernment and emotional response influence one another, thereby synthesising the objective and subjective dimensions of taste.

To do so, they turn to the notion of attunement as “an adjustment of one’s emotional sensibility to the aesthetic character of the object of appreciation” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 70), and such adjustment is what constitutes becoming attuned to something. Applied to the aesthetic case, the process of attunement seems to be able to account for the complexity of taste

² See Ibid. (p. 61).

³ See Ibid. (p. 63).

and the way we exercise it when appreciating an object. On the one hand, by referring to an adjustment to the aesthetic character of objects, Martínez and Schellekens point to the importance of recognising how an object presents itself for us to react or to have some inclination towards it, and thus to engage in an appreciative experience. It's not possible to talk about concrete aesthetic experiences without talking about the object that is being appreciated and how its features condition the kind of experience an agent has of it. On the other hand, by focusing on an agent's emotional sensibility as the way they adjust to the aesthetic character of an object, Martínez and Schellekens concede that becoming attuned involves an affective predisposition to discern the aesthetic character of an object and appreciate it correctly – we adjust our “emotional understanding” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 70) to the object's aesthetic character for both “getting it right” and having a richer, more valuable aesthetic experience.

In this way, Martínez and Schellekens' application of attunement to the aesthetic case aims to account for the different aesthetic acts, mainly for the two contenders regarded as the starting point of aesthetic experience, namely aesthetic perception and response, but also regarding aesthetic evaluation:

- A. Attunement is understood as an adjustment to the “aesthetic character” that comes from “the agent's emotional understanding, where such understanding is grounded in perception” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 70).

This characterisation comes to imply for Martínez and Schellekens an identification between aesthetic character and the “aesthetically relevant qualities” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 62) of the objects of appreciation. Let's take Hanya Yanagihara's novel *A Little Life* as an example. Reading *A Little Life* as melodramatic would imply that an agent adjusts their emotional understanding – expectations, reactions and so on – to the aesthetic character of the book, namely its relevant discernible features such as the plot, the story, the characters, and so on. But if one were to read *A Little Life* as part of Hanya Yanagihara's overall work, they would still adjust their expectations and/or reactions to the relevant discernible features of the novel, which in this case would be those such as the writing style of Yanagihara. In this manner, Martínez and Schellekens

provide a plausible characterisation of the affective or subjective dimension of taste without disregarding the objective dimension, and they emphasise how attunement “renders a richer perceptual grasp of the object’s aesthetic qualities possible and therefore also opens up the possibility of a more rewarding experience overall” (Martínez&Schellekens, 2022, p. 67). Nonetheless, the question of whether one can discern the “aesthetic character” of an object of appreciation prior to the exercise of any kind of emotional understanding remains open.

B. Becoming attuned to an object invokes an affective predisposition for correct aesthetic appreciation.

The kind of emotional sensibility that comes into play in the process of attunement is “a kind of feeling with” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 68) the object, which thereby implies approaching it with a certain affective attitude in order to notice and rightfully appreciate its aesthetically relevant qualities. Nonetheless, this affective predisposition does not necessarily translate into responding with one specific emotional response that is the appropriate one for the given object. In other words, even though an agent’s affective reaction depends on how they attune to the object, the process of attunement is not successfully performed only when a given response is expressed. For example, for an agent to be properly attuned to *A Little Life* as a melodramatic piece of literary fiction, they ought not to feel sadness. On the contrary, what is required of them is to assume the characteristic features of a melodrama – the exaggerated suffering the characters go through, the not-so-happy conclusion of the story, and so on – and to be prepared to respond with the appropriate emotions given the melodramatic character of the novel, e.g. hopelessness, angst, sadness, and so on. In this sense, the process of attunement is thought of as a precondition for having concrete emotional responses, rather than involving them directly and/or prescribing them.

C. By becoming attuned, an agent is properly oriented towards the aesthetically relevant qualities of objects and therefore aims for appropriate aesthetic evaluation.

The process of attunement involves directing our attention to characteristics of the object that are relevant for aesthetic appreciation. This being so, becoming attuned supports justified property ascription in the sense that it guides our perception towards features “which may serve as reasons for an agent in explaining why she has ascribed certain properties (and not others)” (Martínez & Schellekens, 2022, p. 69). An agent could consider *A Little Life* to be beautifully raw by means of attuning to it in a certain way – i.e. engaging with the stylistic choices of the author or with how the characters are developed throughout the story – and they could point to these features as reasons to justify their aesthetic judgement, which in this case would be the ascription of the property “beautifully raw.” This cognitive rendition of attunement – i.e. the better grasping of the content and evaluative significance of aesthetic objects – is what constitutes the ultimate purpose of attunement and, subsequently, of the exercise of taste, and by virtue of this, Martínez and Schellekens appeal to both the possibility of improving our taste through training and a non-accidental experience of aesthetic value.⁴

Hereafter, I will argue that, while Martínez and Schellekens masterfully direct attention to a notion such as attunement regarding the discussion of aesthetic taste and thus contribute to enriching the way we approach aesthetic engagement overall, their treatment of the notion at issue does not fully account for the exercise of taste in all its variety as they contend. As will be developed in the following section, I find that a key feature in Martínez and Schellekens’ characterisation of the exercise of taste as a process of attunement is the so-called aesthetic character of objects of appreciation, and that even by having in mind a broader sense of what that term might refer to, it may still raise a few issues that jeopardize the purpose of accounting for all kinds of aesthetic experiences.

2. The Aesthetic Character of Objects of Appreciation

In their paper, Martínez and Schellekens initially leave open the question of whether aesthetic experience starts with perceptual discernment or with an emotional response, but they ultimately seem to regard the former as the most plausible alternative. For the sake of the following arguments,

⁴ See Ibid. (p. 60).

I stand by that intuition and therefore identify the stage of perception as the starting point of aesthetic experience, that is, as the primary aesthetic act in which taste is exercised. If this is acceptable, and if the notion of attunement successfully accounts for how we exercise taste, then aesthetic perception already implies becoming attuned and, in turn, adjusting to that which we discern in the object of appreciation.

At this point of the discussion, it seems relevant to bring back a previously announced issue, namely whether we can discern an object's aesthetic character without simultaneously exercising an emotional understanding and the perception of said object of appreciation. According to Martínez and Schellekens, when an agent becomes attuned to something, they adjust their emotional sensibility to the aesthetic character of the object – applied to attunement in perception, this means that when they perceive an object aesthetically, they do so by adjusting their affective predisposition to the aesthetic character they discern in the object. But if the agent adjusts themselves to the aesthetic character, then the latter cannot be in any way dependent on the experience – it must already “be there” [in the object] before perception so that anyone can adjust their sensibility to it. In other words, the issue can be stated follows: if an agent can adjust their affectivity to the aesthetic character of an object, which Martínez and Schellekens identify with the aesthetically relevant qualities, then said character [and those qualities] is already determined prior to the aesthetic experience, which in turn demands a certain kind of emotional understanding towards the object.

However, there may be reason to think that we determine the aesthetic relevance of perceptually discernible qualities as we go, that is, during the actual experience. This idea may be responded by stating that without an emotional adjustment, those aesthetic properties might not be properly recognised – at least certain ones like affective or expressive properties. What they may be claiming is that it is not possible to have an adequate response – responsive to the way we are required to perceive and understand the object – without a previous attitude or predisposition to look at it from a certain emotional perspective. Indeed, we need to acknowledge the aesthetic character of the object of appreciation at hand, but in a general way: to properly respond to *A Little Life*, we must at least know if it is a melodrama or a horror story, if it's contemporary or medieval, documental or fictional, and so on. In this sense, the so-called aesthetic character of *A Little Life*

would be mostly related to the way it is classified or categorised as a piece of art, and that knowledge would be enough for us to engage with the work in an appropriate manner, regardless of the outcome of the experience.

The identification of an object of appreciation as belonging to a category is still rooted in particular features presented by the object that ground the attribution of said category to it, but for the most part these features are already accepted by the relevant community as traits of each artistic category, so in this way their aesthetic relevance doesn't really change according to the different aesthetic experiences of said object. For example, the quality "melodramatic" is relevant for the aesthetic appreciation of *A Little Life* because it belongs to the literary category of melodrama, which can be known by someone who has not read the novel. In this sense, its melodramatic character is assumable and therefore stands with independence from having read the book. However, once an agent actually reads the work, its melodramatic character is found rooted in objective properties such as the troubled nature of the main characters or the unfortunate events they go through during the story.

Despite all of this, a characterisation of the aesthetic character of an object as the artistic category in which they belong may not suffice for explaining what it is that we actually do in the aesthetic appreciation of a particular instance of said category. Identifying an artwork's category and adjusting to it may seem to be the starting point of aesthetic appreciation but, even if it was, it would not be all there is to it. In fact, the notions of aesthetic character, aesthetically relevant qualities and artistic categories collide in a way that brings out several issues:

1. Sometimes an agent cannot figure out in which category an artwork belongs and they can still appreciate (at least partially) its aesthetic value (e.g. ambiguous, original, hybrid or "transmedial" artworks).
2. An agent can find certain qualities of the object to be aesthetically relevant without them being identified as features by which said object belongs to any specific category.

This is best illustrated by the characterisation of variable and contra-standard properties regarding categories of art provided by Kendall Walton in 'Categories of Art' (1970). On the one hand,

variable properties are irrelevant for the object to belong in a category but are appreciated as aesthetically relevant qualities nonetheless. On the other hand, contra-standard properties are those that would tend to disqualify an object as belonging to a category but they don't, so the object belongs to its category *despite* them. Both are instances of aesthetic qualities whose relevance is either independent of artistic categories or negatively dependent; that is, it comes from the clash between that particular quality and the category to which an object belongs in spite of the former.⁵

3. Taste is exercised when an individual gets in contact with a specific object and articulates its properties appropriately and on their own account.

As addressed before, artistic categories are grounded in objective properties, namely accepted intersubjectively as features of each category. This could seem to leave little room for deviation in aesthetic appreciation of art but it is not the case: an agent can always focus on aesthetic qualities that are not usually associated with any particular artistic category before the experience and still have a correct appreciation of the object in question as belonging in a specific category *because of* those qualities. When appreciating an object, an agent reacts to its aesthetic qualities according to the way in which they contribute to their aesthetic evaluation of it, therefore they choose –by exercising taste– which features are relevant and which ones are not. As such, an agent can become attuned to an artwork by means of knowing its category, but the way each artwork fits into one same category varies and also do the aesthetically relevant qualities that would be considered common features of said category. Becoming attuned to *A Little Life* requires reading it as literary fiction –to read it as non-fiction would lead to reading it *incorrectly*. Nonetheless, the book's qualities that strike as aesthetically relevant for a particular agent to consider *A Little Life* a valuable piece of literary fiction are not fixed nor pre-determined for them. For example, they could point to the way Yanagihara plays with the limits between the plausible and the implausible regarding

⁵ See Walton (1970, pp. 338-354).

the amount of disgraceful events presented, or to the thorough character study carried out in the book, and so on.⁶

4. Natural objects don't belong in any aesthetically relevant category from which they get their aesthetic character.

Ultimately, Martínez and Schellekens' characterisation of aesthetic character lies in a further assumption, namely that every object belongs to a category whose aesthetic relevance is determined prior to the experience. When the exercise of taste is guided by categories – i.e. in the appreciation of some artistic objects – we can easily tell, at least to a certain extent, if an agent is having the correct experience of a given object by means of their attunement to the proper category. Adjusting to the category of an object would equate to grasping its aesthetic character, and, in turn, would allow for an agent to discriminate some of its aesthetically relevant qualities. However, appealing to categories (of any kind, but especially of art) is hard when trying to account for the aesthetic experience of natural objects. These instances don't belong in any sort of category that could be tied directly to its aesthetic character, so there is no way for an agent to become attuned to them by means of adequately discerning those qualities that are aesthetically relevant in virtue of their link to a specific category. In this sense, Martínez and Schellekens initially aim to explain the exercise of taste directed towards both artworks and non-artistic objects, but they end up leaving the aesthetic appreciation of natural objects unexplained. For example, there seems to be no category in which a lunar eclipse belongs whose aesthetic relevance directly constitutes the aesthetic character perceived in the eclipse. Here, the exercise of taste is somewhat free: the aesthetic qualities appreciated are objectively indeterminate and therefore dependent on the agent's particular exercise of taste.⁷

⁶ This train of thought could lead us to discuss the possibility of an interpretative pluralism with regards to artworks. Robert Stecker, for instance, would argue that we can understand –i.e. affectively adjust to– an object of appreciation from various and equally appropriate perspectives. For more, see Stecker (1997, pp. 133-155).

⁷ Allen Carlson and Marcia Eaton defend that in case of the aesthetic appreciation of nature natural sciences provide the categories for a correct aesthetic experience. In any case, subsuming an object under its natural kind is cognitive, not emotional adjustment: categories of natural sciences are not aesthetic categories *per se*, but they still can be aesthetically relevant.

The serious consideration of the exercise of taste regarding non-artistic objects inevitably leads us to rethink aesthetic character as a concept: if it makes sense to speak in these terms at all, what is the aesthetic character of a lunar eclipse? What exactly does an agent adjust to in order to attune to a lunar eclipse and, therefore, to experience it aesthetically? It seems that there are no features in a lunar eclipse, or in any non-artistic object for that matter, that we could consider aesthetic prior to the experience of it, and if this is true, then there seems to be nothing to adjust to in these cases. Furthermore, the indeterminacy of aesthetically relevant qualities for non-artistic objects leaves the door open for considering cases of exercise of taste, or of aesthetic experience overall, that are not directed towards aesthetic evaluation – e.g. there is more than one correct way of appreciating a lunar eclipse in an aesthetic manner.

Overall, the analysis of what Martínez and Schellekens refer to as the aesthetic character of objects of appreciation reveals that, when trying to account for the exercise of taste in all kinds of aesthetic experiences, their article is written with artistic objects in mind. The process of attunement makes sense at least as a metaphorical clarification, it fits with our general way of engaging with aesthetic objects because it points to a key aspect of this kind of experience, which is the interrelational dynamic between perception and feeling. But to successfully account for the totality of aesthetic experience, it must be applicable to cases in which an agent exercises taste for appreciating non-artistic objects and therefore they are not necessarily performing an act of aesthetic evaluation. In this section, I tried to show why Martínez and Schellekens' approach to attunement does not quite manages to do so, and in the following I will put it in contrast with another application of the notion of attunement to aesthetics, namely Rita Felski's, which Martínez and Schellekens explicitly refer to (and dismiss) in their paper.

3. Attunement as Attachment

There are two crucial aspects regarding Martínez and Schellekens' treatment of attunement: (i) becoming attuned is a conscious appreciative mental process that depends on our aesthetic skills, and (ii) we don't ascribe aesthetic value based on personal associations but on the aesthetically valuable properties discerned in the object. In virtue of these two points, Martínez and Schellekens'

proposal contrasts with that of Rita Felski in her book *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020), to which they directly refer in their paper. According to them, Felski's notion of attunement (i) is based on personal attachment to artworks instead of on the aesthetic character of objects; and (ii) allows for aesthetic experiences to be ineffable, that is, for them to not be a result of conscious effort to exercise our appreciative skills. Ultimately, they dismiss Felski's approach as a subjectivist account in which personal taste is the only thing that matters.

Felski's main goal is to grasp the way in which we engage with artworks by becoming attached and claims the aesthetic as «premised on relation rather than separation, on attachment rather than autonomy» (Felski, 2020, p. 8). She also aims to reconcile the dichotomy of subjectivity versus objectivity regarding the appreciation of art: the aesthetic exists because we both react to and are affected by things in a certain way that we have come to call "aesthetic". But this first-person dependence does not take away from the fact that we act as if our aesthetic experience should be shared by the rest, we correct each other's judgements and we expect for ourselves and others to improve our appreciation skills (and we usually know what it takes to do so). The main point is that, at the bottom of our aesthetic practices, there is an intersubjective relationship that shapes our taste by means of which we find our appreciation of things to be valuable, and it is in this way that the aesthetic experience acquires its normative dimension.

When it comes to the appreciation of artworks, Felski identifies three ways in which we become attached: attunement, identification, and interpretation. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the former. Becoming attuned is to enter a responsive relation that is not characterised by content – that is, an internal emotion towards an external object – but by a "state of affectedness [...] It is not a feeling-about but a feeling-with" (Felski, 2020, p. 42). In this manner, it is a kind of resonance with the object, which ultimately means to experience an affinity: "attunement is about things resonating, aligning, coming together" (Felski, 2020, p. 42) when encountering an object of appreciation. There are several key aspects that characterise Felski's notion of attunement:

- i. It is an intentional process, in the sense that it involves a "state of readiness" (Felski, 2020, p. 52) – an affective predisposition – for connecting and guiding attention towards a distinct "other" i.e. the specific artwork that is being appreciated.

- ii. It is a conditioned process, in the sense that it is embedded in a personal and/or interpersonal history of aesthetic response, and therefore is not unconditioned.
- iii. It can operate both consciously or in the background – there can be aesthetic experiences that are ineffable, but not all of them are.
- iv. An agent can consciously hold beliefs about valuable objects that don't line up with the kind of artworks they become attached to – an agent can ascribe aesthetic value to an artwork without attuning to it, and vice versa.

As previously mentioned, there are several points of friction between the conceptions of attunement here presented. On the one hand, Martínez & Schellekens conceive the attunement process as conscious and directly dependant on our aesthetic skills, therefore giving much relevance to the impact that improving our perceptual abilities has on our discernment of aesthetically relevant properties; whereas Felski allows for attunement to operate unconsciously and acknowledges the possibility of aesthetic experiences to be ineffable. On the other hand, while Martínez & Schellekens identify attuning to an object's aesthetic character with identifying properties and merit and with ascribing aesthetic value to it, Felski states that beliefs regarding value and experiences of attunement are mutually independent. The latter is the more intricate issue because it brings forward an approach to attunement that detaches it from the appreciation of aesthetic merit, which was one of the five main aesthetic acts performed by means of exercising taste and, therefore, one of the five main ways of becoming attuned to objects of appreciation.⁸ According to Felski, if for an agent to resonate with an object in this way doesn't imply that they appreciate its aesthetic value, then neither does it imply they have a correct experience of it and subsequently has little to do with the exercise of taste towards aesthetic evaluation. In fact, she rejects the very notion of taste and thus completely unties attunement from the exercise of an ability to properly appreciate things in an aesthetic manner, i.e. of getting things right aesthetically.

I think the main advantage of Felski's treatment of the notion of attunement is that she does not specify to what exactly in the object we become attuned to when appreciating it, and in turn she rightfully stresses the role of the agent in aesthetic appreciation. On the one hand, and despite

⁸ See Cohen (2004).

the explicit focus on artworks throughout her book, this kind of indeterminacy leaves room for it to vary from case to case and thus could account for the whole diversity of aesthetic experiences possible. On the other hand, although her approach could be understood as a form of aesthetic subjectivism, Felski fully recognises the intersubjective determination of aesthetically relevant qualities and, in turn, the somewhat objective dimension of aesthetic appreciation. Nonetheless, it is true that what Felski ultimately tries to account for is the ties we forge with artworks, which appear as groundless because we cannot fully point to the underlying reasons why they come to be. She argues that the fact of an agent not being able to make explicit the reasons for their attunement to an artwork does not mean that this experience is unsupported or unmediated by more or less determinate factors which would constitute an explanation for it. To Felski, however, for attunement to be grounded only means that it is not an appreciative connection experienced by an agent at random: experiences of attunement can be explained, but they don't need to be justified, and therefore, in principle, there is nothing normative about becoming attuned to an object if it remains independent from any kind of consideration about value.

I argue that Felski's emphasis on experiences of attunement independent from aesthetic evaluation is precisely what makes its proposal lacking and therefore also insufficient for accounting for aesthetic experience as a whole. The notion of attunement can throw light on the way we engage aesthetically with artworks in the first stages of aesthetic experience, namely aesthetic perception and response [or feeling], but its role regarding overall aesthetic evaluation is adjacent. Felski states that aesthetic evaluation is carried out through interpretation, this process being the most reflective and conscious form of attachment. It follows that attunement as a process ends up serving as an explanation of the way personality and affections intervene in aesthetic appreciation, and, in this way, it successfully accounts for the social/subject-related aspects of taste. However, attunement is presented as completely unrelated to the correctness of an object's aesthetic experience.

Felski understands the process of interpretation as a "second-order reflection" (Felski, 2020, p. 128) and that is the case regarding the role of art criticism as we know it. Nonetheless, the interpretative task involved in an ordinary aesthetic experience does not usually start in delay with respect to the perceptual stage and, in turn, is not as deliberate or reflective as she lays out. It

appears that Felski separates out a definite interpretation of an artwork, which is thought-out and rationally supported, and an immediate interpretation of it that is invoked in the experience of understanding, of “getting” the artwork, the latter not constituting an interpretative – and therefore normative – process but an affective one, namely one of attunement. However, if it were the case that in many artistic cases perception implies interpretation, realizing the artwork’s sense or purpose, then attunement must be accounted for as a process in which somehow the adjustment implied by it carries some sort of meaning.

4. Final Thoughts

Each one of the approaches presented throughout this paper serves different purposes, but both of them succeed in highlighting the explanatory power of attunement concerning our aesthetic engagement with objects of appreciation, especially artworks.

Regarding Martínez & Schellekens’ proposal, I argue that it drifts towards an aesthetic objectivism. While their paper stands out as a robust attempt to enrich the theoretical characterisation of the exercise of taste while preserving its two-dimensional nature, they fail to account for all kinds of aesthetic experiences by relying attunement on the adjustment to an object’s aesthetic character. The characterisation of aesthetic character as something given before the experience leads to them focusing on aesthetic qualities directly related to categories of art, and therefore on artistic objects of appreciation. This claim carries further implications than what they may have originally intended, and so the appreciation of non-artistic objects ends up being neglected. Moreover, it remains unclear how the ambivalence of taste can be balanced in perception, and the identification of aesthetically relevant qualities is left unaccounted for. In addition to this, Martínez & Schellekens take as the paradigmatic aesthetic experience that of art criticism as traditionally conceived. This implies an understanding of the exercise of taste as directed towards aesthetic evaluation, and in turn, they dismiss other ways of exercising taste in which the experience doesn’t necessarily involve an evaluative act.

Regarding Felski’s proposal, I hold that she drifts towards an aesthetic subjectivism. She manages to stress the relational nature of aesthetic appreciation but doesn’t quite grasp the

complexity of its implications. By detaching attunement to the recognition of aesthetic value and at the same time locating this process in perceptual and responsive stages of aesthetic experience, she both limits the role of attunement in aesthetic evaluation and take response and perception as non-normative aesthetic acts. Aesthetic experiences are both perceptual and responsive, and the latter implies more than an emotional attachment to that which is perceived because it generates a normative experience, one in which the agent not only reacts to the object in a certain way but feels like the rest should do the same. Felski addresses aesthetic normativity when referring to attachment as interpretation of art, but she seems to limit this process to the traditionally conceived role of art criticism, which does not exhaust the scope of the normative character of aesthetic experience. Moreover, she conceptualises taste as the overall construction and development of aesthetic personality, therefore rejecting taste as an appreciative skill and leaving its objective dimension – related to the discernment of aesthetic features – unaddressed.

To conclude, I defend the suitability of the notion of attunement primarily for clarifying the way subjective input is necessary for generating a normative experience out of the perception of an object. I find that the authors mentioned throughout this paper successfully manage to introduce the notion of attunement in discussions of aesthetic taste by approaching what seems to be the main issue regarding these discussions i.e. the struggle to account for both the subjective and objective dimensions of aesthetic appreciation and the importance of finding a balance and a synthesis between them instead of prioritising one over the other. Despite this, I find these applications of attunement to the aesthetic taste unsuccessful in their original aim, and argue that they can be seen as both instigators and symptoms of the ambivalent nature of the exercise of taste: while trying to reconcile it, they accentuate the breach. While Martínez & Schellekens fail to account for the subjective dimension of taste, Felski fails to do so with the objective dimension; and while Martínez & Schellekens claim more than what they may have originally intended, Felski claims less than what we would expect regarding the subject matter. Hence, objective and subjective remain at odds.

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