

PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCATENATIONISM

MA in Culture and Thought after 1945

University of York

September 2012

Word Count: 19,649

A creature cannot be beautiful if it is too great, for contemplation of it cannot be a single experience, and it is not possible to derive a sense of unity and wholeness from our perception of it.

- Aristotle, *Poetics*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would, first and foremost, like to thank Professor Peter Lamarque and Dr Dimitris Platchias for their invaluable aid and support as I fumbled my way through the convoluted darknesses of philosophy, and congratulate Dimitris on the birth of his son.

I would also like to thank Dr Claire Westall, the convenor of this MA, for her excellence as both an academic and a person (not that the two are mutually exclusive), and for her support throughout this year.

And finally for all of those who have helped and debated with and supported me over this immensely rewarding year, but particularly for Kate, in the hope that she enjoys the conclusion.

INTRODUCTION:

In one particularly memorable passage in *The Singularity of Literature*, Derek Attridge proposes that a literary work is ‘an act, an event, of reading, never entirely separable from the act-event (or acts-events) of writing that brought it into being as a potentially readable text, never entirely insulated from the contingencies of the history into which it is projected and within which it is read’¹. In a 2009 essay Michael Hurley located the epistemic and aesthetic value of works of art in what he called the ‘present continuous’, rather than in the ‘perfective’².

This dissertation began with a similar intuition: that, to properly describe works of art we have to firstly be able to describe how we interact with works of art, and that interaction must be represented as taking place over time. However, where should one begin such an account? It seems to me that to be properly rigorous, we must begin in a place very far removed from the heady delights of aesthetics, and work our way slowly towards them. I am going to outline a particular problem in philosophy of mind, namely, how to give an account of both the phenomenal unity and continuity of consciousness. I will then try to show that the approach I take in order to help resolve this issue in phenomenology can also bear fruit in a discussion of aesthetic appreciation.

My first chapter is an outline of a particular problem in phenomenology. It mediates between two recent attempts to account for diachronic and synchronic (over time and at a time) phenomenal unity, and suggests an attentional modification to the preferred method.

¹ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 59.

² Michael Hurley, “How Philosophers Trivialise Art: *Bleak House*, *Oedipus Rex*, ‘Leda and the Swan’” *Philosophy and Literature* 33, (2009): 108.

My second chapter is a defence of the:

Local Moment Thesis (D): Phenomenal unity just is the unity conferred by an act of attention, the closure under conjunction of the phenomenal content of any particular local moment.

by argument that the:

Content Limit Claim (B): The phenomenal content of any particular experience is limited.

is true, and that the:

Blickfeld Claim (C): The conjunction of my phenomenal content at a time comprises a phenomenal field the scope of which is not restricted to the scope of my attention at a time.

is false. From this, I also argue that the:

Strong Synchronic Claim (A): The phenomenal field is unified at a time.

is false.

To give the reader a better sense of what this means, I turn to examples from aesthetics in my third chapter, and engage closely with Jerrold Levinson's

concatenationist theory of music. I conclude by sketching, with reference to Monroe Beardsley, what an attentional unity theory of aesthetic response might look like, finishing with:

Appreciative Unity Claim (E): In attempting to do justice to a work of art as a work of art, we strive to maximise appreciative unity.

CHAPTER 1: A Problem in Phenomenal Unity

1.1- (1) It appears to be something of a tradition to begin any sustained debate relating to the unity of consciousness with a discussion of the various sorts of ways in which consciousness can be unified. If the theorist is particularly dedicated, this may be accompanied by a brief outline of the various kinds of consciousness itself. With respect to the latter, I will content myself for the moment with ‘Nagel’s oft-worn phrase’: a mental state is conscious if there is *something it is like* for me to possess it³. Later in this dissertation I shall refer to a distinction between two particular sorts of consciousness outlined by Michael Tye, but it is not necessary to describe them here. A discussion of some of the various sorts of ways in which consciousness can be said to be unified is taxonomically useful to begin with, however, and follows.

(2) The first main kind of unity that can be present in consciousness is that in which separate properties, such as redness and movement, which are processed by the visual cortex in different areas of the brain, are experienced by us as belonging to the same object. I do not separately experience redness and movement. Rather, I experience a red, moving object. This is *object unity*. In characterising it thus, I am following Tye⁴. One could describe the same phenomenon as an experience of redness and an experience of roundness that are strongly bound together because they are present in my consciousness as directed at the same object. Bayne and Chalmers call this *objectual unity*⁵. The difference in account is due to a fundamental disagreement concerning whether experience has a mereological aspect or not. Bayne and Chalmers see a total unified experience as a sum of the several particular experiences that one is

³ Uriah Kriegel, “Consciousness as Intransitive Self-Consciousness: Two Views and an Argument.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33, No. 1 (March 2003): 105.

⁴ Michael Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*. (Saban: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003), 12.

⁵ Tim Bayne and David Chalmers, “What is the Unity of Consciousness?” *The Unity of Consciousness, Binding, Integration, Dissociation*, ed Cleeremans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

currently having⁶. Tye takes a total unified experience to be a single experience with a complex content. I will return to this distinction in much more detail later. The problem of accounting for this particular kind of unity is commonly called “the binding problem”. It comes in two distinct parts. There is the question of neurophysiological binding: how the brain brings together separately⁷ processed pieces of information to jointly affect our responses to an object. There is also the question of phenomenological binding: how we come to experience those separate pieces of information as pertaining to a single object. This results in there being something it is like for me to perceive a red, moving object. Bayne and Chalmers argue⁸ that as it could be possible to solve the one problem without solving the other the two sorts of binding are, at least conceptually, distinct.

(3) Another kind of unity is *spatial* unity. Two conscious states are spatially unified if the subject of them experiences them as representing objects as belonging to the same space. Visually, for example, my perception of the cherry tree and my perception of the wall that are outside my window both have spatial representational content; content which I am able to compare⁹. My visual experience thus represents the tree as being to the left of, and slightly behind, the wall. A strong argument can be made for all perceptual consciousness being spatially unified; Kant went so far as to suggest

⁶ Brook and Raymont (in “The Unity of Consciousness.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Walter, Beckermann, McLaughlin. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 574 footnote) caution against characterising Bayne and Chalmers, as Tye does, as straightforwardly holding a mereological position in view of a demurrer by Bayne and Chalmers where they caution that a ‘mereological parts/whole account’ should be viewed only as an ‘aid to intuition rather than as a serious ontological proposal’. Given that this ‘aid to intuition’ fully determines how they lay out their thesis, however, I am inclined to agree with Tye that to all intents and purposes their account is a mereological one.

⁷ In time, as well as in space. S Zeki notes that as well as being processed in distinct areas of the visual cortex, colour and movement take different amounts of time to process. We perceive colour before motion ‘by ~80ms’ (Zeki, S. “The Disunity of Consciousness”. *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* 7:5, (May 2003), 215).

⁸ Bayne and Chalmers, “What is the Unity of Consciousness?”, 9.

⁹ Bayne and Chalmers take these two features to be necessary for spatial unity (“What is the Unity of Consciousness?”, 4).

that perceptual consciousness is necessarily spatially unified¹⁰. Whether such unity is relevant to other kinds of conscious experience is less clear.

(4) Two conscious states are *subject* unified if and only if they are had by the same subject. Bayne and Chalmers add ‘at the same time’ to the definition¹¹, but I am not sure that this limit to synchronicity is necessary. It could be argued that a diachronic element to subject unity is part of what establishes the continuity of that subject over time. Rosenthal has given an interesting account¹² of how an illusion of the self might obtain phenomenologically due to the fact that we have ‘a sense that we are talking about one and the same individual when we use different tokens of a proper name’. If two conscious states appear to have the same ‘essential indexical’, as Rosenthal calls the ‘I’, phenomenologically it would appear that they were had by the same conscious subject; and thus that there was a unity present. Regardless of such debates about the nature of the subject, with respect to my current argument the statement that all of the conscious states of a given subject are subject unified is trivially true.

(5) Related to subject unity is the notion of *introspective* unity, ‘that two states of consciousness are unified if and only if the subject can introspect both states in a single act of introspective awareness’¹³.

(6) The final sort of unity that I will describe is an attempt to satisfy the intuition that there is a non-trivial way in which all of a subject’s experiences can be unified. As I type, I am visually conscious of the screen in front of me, and the words on the

¹⁰ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 12.

¹¹ Bayne and Chalmers, “What is the Unity of Consciousness?”, 4.

¹² David Rosenthal, “Unity of Consciousness and the Self”. Presented at a meeting of the Aristotelian Society, held in Senate House, University of London, on Monday, 23rd June, 2003 at 4:15pm.

¹³ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 13.

document. The periphery of my vision reports the movement of my hands, and out of the window, the red of the cherry tree, the grey of the stone wall next to it, and the blue of the bay. Aurally, I experience the sound of my typing, and the whistling of the wind around the house. I can feel the warmth of the sofa, taste my recent cup of tea, and propriocept the various positions of my hands, and of my feet. In addition to all of this, I am aware of the contents of my thoughts, of the background hum of my current mood, and of all of the occasional images that flash into my mind. And all of this, so the intuition goes, is somehow unified to become the sum total of my consciousness; there is something that it is like for me to have all of these experiences, and this is not simply the trivial fact that I am the subject of all of them. Tye refers to this as simply *phenomenal* unity. Bayne and Chalmers, and Dainton, show their hands more quickly. Bayne and Chalmers describe this unity as *subsumptive* unity, and propose a subsumption¹⁴ relation to account for it. Dainton calls the relationship between multiple experiences *co-consciousness*¹⁵. It should be noted that this sort of unity need not only obtain at the highest level; accounts of it generally start by describing how it would obtain between two particular experiences, or two particular modalities, and then scale up to the full phenomenal field¹⁶. Varying taxonomies aside, the intuition being described is the same; that ‘a conjunction of experiences is not an experience of conjunction’¹⁷, and that this experience of conjunction, the *unity* of consciousness, needs to be described. I will refer to this sort of unity as *phenomenal* unity.

¹⁴ Briefly, ‘two conscious states are *subsumptively unified* when they are both subsumed by a single state of consciousness’ (Bayne and Chalmers, “What is the Unity of Consciousness?”, 5).

¹⁵ Barry Dainton, *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in Conscious Experience*. (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

¹⁶ Describing one’s complete phenomenology as a sort of ‘field’ goes all the way back to 1874, when Wundt distinguished between the *Blickfeld* (‘field of consciousness’) and the *Blickpunkt* (‘focus of consciousness’). Dainton, and Bayne and Chalmers all use the field metaphor.

¹⁷ Oliver Rashbrook, “Diachronic and Synchronic Unity” published online. Feb, 2012: <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~jesu2151/published/diachronicsynchronic.pdf> [accessed September 19, 2012]. 2.

(7) Perhaps I should have said that there is an intuition that there is a non-trivial way in which all of a subject's experiences are unified *at a time*. That 'a conjunction of experiences is not an experience of conjunction' is described by Rashbrook as the 'Synchronic Slogan'¹⁸. The assumption, which has been briefly mentioned in relation to subject unity, is that in all of the ways described above consciousness is (at least) unified at a time. An experience of conjunction (i.e. unity) at a particular moment in time just is not the conjunction of the experiences one is having in that moment, but shares that moment with them:

Strong Synchronic Claim (A): The phenomenal field is unified at a time.

Diachronic unity, the unity of consciousness over time, is generally treated separately. Henceforth, unless explicitly stated, when I refer to synchronic or diachronic unity I will be referring to synchronic or diachronic phenomenal unity. Similarly, when I talk about the unity of consciousness, I will be referring to the phenomenal unity of consciousness.

1.2- (8) There have been two notable recent attempts¹⁹ to describe synchronic and diachronic unity using the same model. Both accounts begin with a discussion of synchronic unity and then transfer their conclusions to a discussion of diachronic unity. Tye and Dainton have very different conceptions of synchronic unity; so I will first, in **1.2**, discuss the differences in their views on synchronic unity before turning to their accounts of diachronic unity in **1.3**. I am sympathetic to the endeavour to

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Tye, 2003; Dainton, 2000.

jointly account for the two sorts of unity, but as will become apparent, whilst I am more sympathetic to Tye's non-mereological account of the unity of consciousness, it requires modification to fully do justice to the way in which consciousness interacts with time, and how this might give rise to unity.

(9) With respect to the synchronic case, the main distinction between Tye and Dainton is that the latter is a proponent of what Brook and Raymont²⁰ call the 'Experiential Parts' (EP) theory of consciousness, whereas Tye is an opponent of this theory; we might call him an NEP theorist. Other notable supporters of EP theory include Lockwood, Shoemaker, and Bayne and Chalmers. Bayne and Chalmers describe the unification of conscious states or experiences as due to something called 'subsumption'²¹. NEP theorists are much fewer in number than their counterparts; Searle and Tye are influential examples. EP theorists argue that each experience has an object (the cherry tree, the wall), and multiple objects thus result in multiple experiences (my experience of the cherry tree, my experience of the wall). NEP theorists hold that experiences can be individuated differently; that 'a unified act of conscious experiencing is a single experience... non-composite, no matter how many objects it has'²². We could say that EP and NEP theorists approach the subject-object relation that structures phenomenal consciousness from different ends. EP theorists hold that objects are stable and primary, and thus that the relation keys off them and is then bound together for the subject's consumption. NEP theorists take the subject to be stable and primary to the relationship, and hold that the binding must therefore occur before each specific relation, as such, is considered. For the EP theorist,

²⁰ Brook and Raymont, "The Unity of Consciousness", revised 2010, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-unity/#ExpParThe> [accessed September 19, 2012].

²¹ See footnote 12.

²² Brook and Raymont, "The Unity of Consciousness", 2010.

synchronic conscious experience is mereological. What must be accounted for is the way in which experiences are bound together to provide an experience of phenomenal unity. This binding is generally taken to be some sort of *unity relation* that connects the various experiences. In *Stream of Consciousness*, Barry Dainton takes experiences to ‘refer to consciousness in all its forms (so conscious thoughts and vague bodily feelings count as “experiences”)’²³. He calls the unity of consciousness at a time ‘synchronic co-consciousness’²⁴, and takes it to be a primitive unifying relation²⁵ between simultaneous conscious experiences which comprise the parts of the unified whole of synchronic co-consciousness.

(10) There are two initial objections to the idea that many experiences are bound together to give a single unified phenomenology. The first is the argument that experience is transparent. Briefly, Tye argues that we are unable to introspect our own experiences. If I try to focus upon my visual experience of the cherry tree, for example, it seems clear that I can focus upon the cherry tree more closely; I become aware of the individual leaves, the petals on the flowers, the occasional bee. What I do not seem able to do, however, is focus upon my visual experience itself. I experience the cherries as red and round, not my experience as red and round. Thus, Tye argues that ‘visual experiences are transparent to their subjects’ and that ‘we are not introspectively aware of our visual experiences any more than we are perceptually aware of transparent sheets of glass’²⁶. For Tye, ‘the unity relation is not given to us

²³ Barry Dainton. “Précis: Stream of Consciousness”. *PSYHCE* 10: 1, (May 2004): 1-29, 3.

²⁴ *ibid*, 4.

²⁵ Dainton considers several other attempts to account for synchronic unity before concluding that they are all inadequate, and settling for what Bayne (“Co-Consciousness. Review of Barry Dainton’s ‘Stream of Consciousness’”. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, No. 3 (2001): 3) calls a ‘no-theory theory’. Bayne suggests that such an approach is unwarranted, given that Dainton only considers subjective attempts to account for unity, but Dainton is committed to a phenomenological account only, and insists that the relation does seem to be basic, ‘at least from the standpoint of phenomenology’ (“Précis”. 12).

introspectively as a relation connecting experiences. Why, then, suppose that there is such a relation at all?²⁷ At the very least, this suggests that there is less phenomenological evidence for the simultaneous relation of multiple experiences than EP theorists might want.

(11) The second objection is what Hurley refers to as the ‘just more content’ objection²⁸. This hinges on the point that as the unity relation itself is phenomenal, it must be experienced. So if we have three conscious experiences which are synchronically unified, say *e1*, *e2*, and *e3*, then the unifying relation must itself be an experience *e4*; otherwise there would be nothing it is like for me to experience *e1*, *e2*, and *e3* as a conjunction (rather than experiencing just the conjunction of the three), and so the sense of unity that the whole debate is committed to explaining would be lacking. However, we must then account for the maximal experience as a unified experience of *e1*, *e2*, *e3*, and *e4*. With a mereological theory, the only way to do this is with another unity relation, which again, must be experienced. We could call this *e5*, and so on. This leads to an infinite regress. Tye remarks²⁹ that a similar regress also arises if we take it there to be something it is like to experience each of *e1*, *e2* and *e2*, *e3* and *e1*, *e3* together. This would prevent us from even reaching our first maximal experience³⁰. Bayne and Chalmers point out that their subsumption relation avoids this regress because, whilst being something ‘of an intuitive primitive’, much as Dainton’s co-consciousness, they state it is also ‘plausibly reflexive (a state subsumes itself)’³¹. Thus, ‘if A and B are subsumed by C, there is no need for a

²⁶ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 24.

²⁷ *ibid*, 25.

²⁸ S. Hurley, *Consciousness in Action*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁹ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 22.

³⁰ Tim Bayne calls this the ‘phenomenal bloat objection’ (in “Divided Brains and Unified Phenomenology: An Essay on Michael Tye’s ‘Consciousness and Persons’”. *Philosophical Psychology* 18:4, (2005): 9).

further state to subsume A and C, since C subsumes itself³². This is a compelling response, although I confess I have difficulty wrapping my head around what exactly it would be like for me to have an experience of the unity of several of my experiences one of which is the very experience of unity that I am having, which is what I take the reflexivity claim to entail. And if we take the transparency objection (10) to be true, then I'm not experiencing the unity of my *experiences* at all, so it cannot be that one of them is the maximal unified experience that I am currently having³³.

(12) Tye's alternative to the multiple simultaneous experiences model is what he calls the 'one experience view'³⁴. The central intuition is that 'simultaneously experienced perceptual qualities... are experienced together and thus phenomenologically unified'³⁵. The qualities, tellingly, are not qualities of experiences, but are qualities of things experienced. For Tye, at any moment in time there is only one experience. He supports this with the argument that any part of a whole must be considered only as a part insofar as it is, in actual fact, part of a whole. This requires a little elucidation. At one point Tye uses the example of a statue (elsewhere he discusses clouds and fights) to explain his meaning:

A large chunk of clay is used to make a statue at time *t*. The clay constitutes the statue without being identical with it. Suppose

³¹ Bayne and Chalmers, "What is the Unity of Consciousness?", 21.

³² *ibid.* Bayne and Chalmers use 'conscious state', 'phenomenal state' and 'conscious experience' interchangeably (see 1 for their initial move from 'conscious experience' to 'conscious state'); the disparity between their account of 'states' and Tye's account of 'experiences' is terminological only, therefore.

³³ I unfortunately lack the space to fully explore these arguments here. For a nice response from an EP theorist see Bayne, "Divided Brains and Unified Phenomenology".

³⁴ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 25-41.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 36.

counterfactually that at time t' , where t' is later than t , an artist cleverly removes much of the clay without remoulding it so as to leave behind a small clay pot. In the counterfactual situation, the clay that remains constitutes a pot at t' . But in the actual situation it does not... there is, in actual fact, no tiny pot within the statue. There is only the statue. Within the aggregate of lumps of clay composing the statue, there is a smaller aggregate of clay lumps that in a certain counterfactual situation composes a pot. In actual fact, the smaller aggregate does not compose a pot... it does not by itself actually compose or constitute any ordinary thing. Rather, that aggregate and the remaining aggregate form a larger aggregate that composes the statue.³⁶

Similarly, for Tye, the case with experience. If we consider my phenomenology described at (6), for example, Tye would argue that even though it could be the case, in a counterfactual situation, that my phenomenology just comprised the visual qualities of the red cherry tree and the grey wall, and *in that case* my experience would be an experience of a red cherry tree and a grey wall, whereas *in actual fact*, those qualities are only part of my phenomenal whole. It is incorrect to say, therefore, that those qualities contribute additionally to separate experiences which are part of my larger, overall experience. Rather, there is just my overall experience, which has a complex content.

(13) One main response to this might be what Bayne calls ‘phenomenal articulation’³⁷. He states that: ‘one can hear a dog barking while: experiencing an itch

³⁶ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 30/31.

³⁷ Bayne, “Divided Brains and Unified Phenomenology”, 5.

in one's right leg; experiencing an itch in one's left leg; or having no bodily sensations at all'³⁸. The 'intuitive explanation', as he puts it, as to why one can experience a dog barking without an itch, or experience an itch without a dog barking 'is that the experience of the dog barking is distinct from the experience of the itch'³⁹. But this objection seems to me to miss Tye's point entirely. Tye is not arguing that one cannot have an experience of a dog barking or an experience of an itch. He is arguing that if one has an experience of a dog barking whilst one's right leg is also itching, it is not right to say, with respect to that particular phenomenal experience, that one is having an experience of a dog barking and an experience of an itch. The distinct experience-hood of those particular phenomena is only *potential*, with respect to the current experience. If the content of one's consciousness just was the perceptual qualities that comprise a dog barking then, in that case, one would have an experience of a dog barking. This potential experience-hood *is* mereological; potential experiences can have other potential experiences as parts. Your actual current experience, as an instantiation of a potential experience, can also have potential experiences as parts, but you can't instantiate different potential experiences simultaneously. For Tye, I take it, this simply follows from the initial claim that there is a phenomenal unity to consciousness.

(14) On this account of the synchronic case, I am more sympathetic to Tye than I am to the EP theorists. Tye takes Rashbrook's 'Synchronic Slogan', that 'a conjunction of experiences is not an experience of conjunction'⁴⁰ to be true simply because one does not have a conjunction of experiences; just an experience of conjunction. An EP theorist, on the other hand, has to postulate a kind of relation between conjoined

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Rashbrook, "Diachronic and Synchronic Unity", 2.

experiences to provide the experience of conjunction that they take to be simultaneous with those experiences. Simply for the sake of clarity, Tye's approach is more appealing. Furthermore, I agree with his insistence on the distinction between what is actually experienced and what could potentially be experienced, with respect to a particular experiencing⁴¹. This has the potential to provide grounding for descriptions of the way in which consciousness is structured. And it is my sense that it is this structure, more than anything, which provides us with our sense of phenomenal unity.

1.3- (15) Tye becomes more difficult to agree with, however, when he extends his theory to the unity of consciousness over time, diachronic unity. In this next section I shall discuss why, and propose a content-limit modification that preserves the appeal of the one-experience view without being quite so strongly counter-intuitive as Tye.

(16) The problem of unity through time, for the EP theorist, is to give an account of how successive experiences relate in a manner that gives an experience of succession. A further complication is added with the conception that each experience is not necessarily merely an instant, but rather extends in time. Thus we have the claim that to 'characterise a subject's experience at a time we need to appeal to a temporally limited interval of time'⁴². One of the simplest reasons to give for this is that when I experience the movement of the branch of the cherry tree outside the window, at any particular moment, I am experiencing the movement of the branch. But movement is a phenomenon that is relative; we judge it by comparison over time. Thus there must be some sort of experienced present 'relative to which movement is itself experienced'⁴³. This is referred to as the *specious present*⁴⁴. Generally, this is taken to have a

⁴¹ Tye doesn't describe it quite like this, but I think that such a description does him justice.

⁴² Rashbrook, "Diachronic and Synchronic Unity", 10.

⁴³ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 87.

‘determinate temporal length’⁴⁵, and so the problem presents itself as one of describing the relation between adjacent specious presents when there is experienced continuity over time.

(17) An initial solution, that specious presents simply succeed one another in objective time, is not satisfactory. It is unable to account for the experience of continuity between successive specious presents. All that this would provide us with would be a discrete succession of experienced continuities. A common modification is to provide what Rashbrook calls a ‘bottom-up’ solution⁴⁶. On this view, successive specious presents overlap⁴⁷. For Dainton, this overlap is unified by the same co-conscious relation he uses to account for synchronic unity, and provides the requisite experience of continuity. Rashbrook’s objection to this is that whilst Dainton concludes ‘somewhat tentatively... that synchronic co-consciousness is transitive’⁴⁸, he states that ‘in the diachronic case [co-consciousness] clearly isn’t’⁴⁹. This is problematic for Dainton’s attempt to account for both diachronic and synchronic unity with the same relation, because as Rashbrook points out ‘it cannot be the same basic relationship that solves both the diachronic and the synchronic problems, because the same relationship cannot both be transitive and not transitive’⁵⁰.

(18) Tye’s objection to the model of overlapping specious presents is of the same kind as his objection to the synchronic unity problem. Taking it that the problem of diachronic unity consists in the need ‘to specify the phenomenal unity relation that

⁴⁴ Rashbrook calls extended intervals of experience ‘Time-Windows’ (9) instead.

⁴⁵ Rashbrook, “Diachronic and Synchronic Unity”, 11.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 13.

⁴⁷ e.g. Dainton, “Précis”, 21.

⁴⁸ Dainton, “Précis”, 14.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 22.

⁵⁰ Rashbrook, “Diachronic and Synchronic Unity”, 14.

connects token experiences at different times and binds them together into a single larger experience'⁵¹ is, according to him, 'no more real than the problem of the unity of experiences at a time; for there is no relation of unity *between token experiences* that is given to us in introspection'⁵². In other words, the succession that we experience is a succession of contents, not of experiences. 'Continuity, change, and succession are experienced as features of items experienced, not as features of experiences'⁵³. The problem is that this view commits Tye to the following:

The simplest hypothesis compatible with what is revealed by introspection is that, for each period of consciousness, there is only a single experience - an experience that represents everything experienced within the period of consciousness as a whole (the period, that is, between one state of consciousness and the next)⁵⁴.

This is not intuitive. The main problem is that the short period of extended time in which I can say that I am experiencing the now (which is, I think reasonable to suggest, essentially the specious present) just does not stretch back to when I woke up this morning. I can say that I experience the last couple of seconds or so; they are part of the experience I have of typing which is extended in time. If I try to introspect my waking up this morning, however, whilst I might be willing to grant the transparency thesis, and thus that I don't introspect the *experience* of waking up, I do think that it is clear that I am *remembering* waking up; not experiencing it now. There is, I must insist, a distinct difference in phenomenal character between what it *was* like for me

⁵¹ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 95.

⁵² *ibid*, 95/96, emphasis Tye.

⁵³ *ibid*, 97.

⁵⁴ *ibid*.

to wake up this morning, and what it *is* like for me to *remember* waking up this morning. Furthermore, I would argue that what it is like for me to remember waking up this morning would be unchanged if there had been a period of unconsciousness between then and now (if, say, I took a nap after lunch). So Tye's insistence that 'unity through time... comes with the closure of experience under conjunction *just as* unity at a time does'⁵⁵ cannot be right; at least not on Tye's conception of unity through time.

(19) Tye is aware of this problem. He suggests that to account for phenomenal unity over time, and to encompass his one-experience view, we distinguish between 'direct' and 'indirect' unity⁵⁶. Direct unity is that which obtains between one specious present and the next; 'it obtains if and only if the qualities experienced in one specious present are experienced as succeeding or continuing on from the qualities experienced in the immediately prior specious present'⁵⁷. Indirect phenomenal unity through time is a relation that obtains 'between experientially represented qualities... if and only if the qualities experienced in nonadjacent specious presents are linked by chains of direct phenomenal unity'⁵⁸. But, I would argue, no such unity is given to us in introspection. I cannot discern by introspection whether my experience of myself waking up this morning is or is not linked to my present by a 'chain of direct phenomenal unity'. Such a chain is a useful explanatory conceit, perhaps, but a similar description could apply to the EP conception of multiple simultaneous experiences. Tye rejects EP rightly, in my view, precisely because we cannot introspect such a relation. His theory must be held to exactly the same standards.

⁵⁵ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 101. My emphasis.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 100.

⁵⁷ *ibid*.

⁵⁸ *ibid*.

Furthermore, as Rashbrook points out, the distinction between the two kinds of unity ‘falsifies the claim that the same account of unity is being given in both the diachronic and synchronic cases, for in the synchronic case, only an appeal to *one* variety of [unity] is required’⁵⁹.

(20) It is perhaps helpful at this point to step back a little, and overview the position. I find the view that we experience the passage of time because the contents of our experience are temporal in character (or at least, are represented as such to us) compelling. Even Dainton, who for the most part attempts to fully account for diachronic unity as a relation between overlapping specious presents, suggests that to account for the directional asymmetry of the passage of time, we might ‘simply recognize that the contents... themselves possess an inherent directional dynamism’⁶⁰. So far, so good. But Tye’s conclusion, which seems to follow directly, that there is only one experience for each extended period of consciousness, is unpalatable.

(21) In his distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ unity, I want to suggest that what Tye is attempting to capture is something about the way in which consciousness is *structured*. In other words, in addition to experience and content, there is a third player at work; and this is the way in which content is structured to give an experience⁶¹. There are two main questions that can be asked at this point, and I shall give brief suggestions as to what our responses might be to them.

⁵⁹ Rashbrook, “Diachronic and Synchronic Unity”, 19. His emphasis.

⁶⁰ Dainton, “Précis”, 23.

⁶¹ Sebastian Watzl (“How Attention Structures Consciousness”, paper presented at *Perceptual Attention*, University of Antwerp, September 1, 2012) levels a similar criticism against what he calls the ‘appearance view’ generally (that ‘the phenomenal character of experience... by the way the world or an aspect of the world appears to the subject’, p2). Whilst his argument is different in form to my own, he also reaches the conclusion that the structuring agent is either attention or something attention-like.

(22) The first question is, what sort of structure is Tye attempting to capture when he distinguishes between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ unity? I think that very simply, the intuition Tye is attempting to outline when he describes ‘direct’ unity is that:

Content Limit Claim (B): The phenomenal content of any particular experience is limited.

In other words, ‘direct’ unity is that which obtains due to B, its extent defined by the content limit of the particular experience of which it is the unity. ‘Direct’ unity is presented to us, when we introspect. ‘Indirect’ unity, however, is Tye’s postulated unity to account for his insistence that there is only one experience over time; an insistence that would lead him, necessarily (and somewhat inconsistently), to argue that B is false. I think that there is strong evidence to support B⁶²; evidence that Tye must deny to maintain his one experience solution to the diachronic problem. Interestingly, I think that EP theorists would take B to be true, but in a stronger form than I have stated it. For an EP theorist, the phenomenal content of any particular experience is limited to *one*: each individuable object merits its own experience. Agreeing as I do with Tye (see 1.2), that at a time one only has one experience with complex content, I think that this strong version of B is false.

(23) The second question that should be asked at this point is, why should such a structure escape Tye’s introspective method? I think firstly because Tye tends to focus upon what is revealed about the *content* of one’s experience, when one introspects. That content is limited is not strictly part of the content itself. Secondly, by arguing

⁶² I discuss the evidence in **Chapter 2**, (33) & (34).

that one cannot introspect the qualities of one's various experiences, and therefore that we must only have one experience at any given moment in time, Tye places himself in a position where his method can make no distinction between the introspection that he uses as the primary evidence for his argument, and the experience that he concludes he is having. What it is like to have an experience of a certain content, it could be suggested, is only introspectable by attending to just that content. Tye himself admits that introspection might 'causally impact the phenomenal character of the introspected state... [so that] the attended phenomenal character is different from the unattended one'⁶³. Introspection seems to be a process that selects, or focuses upon, certain mental content to make it available for other sorts of uptake. If to introspect were to experience, then the content of experience being limited would seem necessarily to give rise to just such a selection process. It might not, therefore, be too much of a stretch to suggest that the structuring of consciousness is in some way related to the process of introspection itself, or some more primitive kind of process of which introspection is a particular instantiation.

(24) Tye would resist this assertion that introspection and experience were so closely related. He would insist, for example, that whilst the phenomenal character of a state might *change* if it were attended to; if it was not attended to, it would still *have* a phenomenal character. For Tye, there is a distinction between introspective consciousness⁶⁴ and phenomenal consciousness. He gives the example of a headache that wakes you from sleep, and asserts that 'if you have a headache then you have a pain. And, intuitively, to have a pain is to undergo a certain sort of feeling'⁶⁵. Thus, just before your headache wakes you 'there is a feeling without [introspective]

⁶³ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 10.

⁶⁴ The sort of consciousness-of that only comes with attending to something.

⁶⁵ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 7

consciousness... but if there is a feeling, then there must be a consciousness, in some sense of the term. For how could a feeling be a *feeling* and yet not be conscious at all?’⁶⁶. There is a serious misconception here. If we take me to be conscious if there is something that it is like for me to be in a certain mental state, how can there be something it is like for me to feel a pain ‘prior to waking up’⁶⁷? Tye seems to be taking it to be the case that because what you recognise as a pain when you awake is what awoke you, then it must have a continuity (and thus the accompanying feeling has a continuity) that stretches back before you woke up and attended to it. Now, it certainly follows that the set of neural stimuli which when consciously attended to I would characterise as a headache *are* continuous as I become consciously aware of them and characterised them thus, but it does not follow that before I was awake, there was anything it was like *for me* to ‘have a pain’. Those neural stimuli had no phenomenal character. Yes, ‘I’ had the pain in the sense that my body and mind had those neural stimuli which when I awoke, I characterised as the pain, but whilst I was unconscious there was no *me* for whom there was anything that the pain could be like. I do not think, therefore, that Tye can easily separate phenomenal consciousness and introspective consciousness.

(25) Given this, I will conclude this section by suggesting that a content limit exists that structures our experiences - that B is true. Further, I want to suggest that this content limit manifests itself as, and is best understood as, an *attentional* mechanism (of which introspection is a particular kind), which selects contents for conscious uptake. **Chapter 2** will mostly be concerned with arguing for this, and will conclude

⁶⁶ *ibid.* Emphasis Tye.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

by suggesting what this might mean for our accounts of diachronic and synchronic unity, and particularly the endeavour to account for both with the same model.

CHAPTER 2: A Defense of an Attentional Account

2.1- (26) Dainton begins his investigation into synchronic unity by distinguishing it from any sort of unity that might be granted by attention, or introspection. His argument for this is to cite a description similar to mine in (6), in which he lists all of the things of which he is aware whilst ‘studying a painting in an art gallery’⁶⁸. In my example in (6), similarly, one could argue that whilst I am attending to the screen in front of me, I am still clearly aware of the red of the cherry tree, and the taste of my recent cup of tea. In other words, ‘attention is selective... at any one time we are only paying attention to a relatively small part of our overall state of consciousness’⁶⁹. Tye, following naturally from his distinction between introspective and phenomenal consciousness and their related unities, see (5) and (6), also asserts that the ‘phenomenal unity of individual experiences is... not a matter of their being actual or potential objects of a single act of the subject’s attention’⁷⁰, and gives a very similar account, this time of the process of walking along a lane filled with leaves. Tye states that ‘you see many more leaves than you notice... [i]f your interest is held by one large, yellow and brown, star shaped leaf, you do not cease to see the other leaves... [t]hey simply recede into the phenomenal background’⁷¹. Both Dainton’s and Tye’s arguments here rest upon what I am going to call the Blickfeld Claim:

Blickfeld Claim (C): The conjunction of my phenomenal content at a time comprises a phenomenal field the scope of which is not restricted to the scope of my attention at a time.

⁶⁸ Dainton, “Précis”, 4.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 19.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

From which it follows, any unity conferred by attention at a time is not equivalent to synchronic phenomenal unity⁷². One could perhaps envisage situations in which one's phenomenology was reduced just to that provided by the focus of one's current attention, but that would be a sparse phenomenology, 'very different from how our consciousness usually is', as Dainton puts it⁷³.

(27) Whilst Dainton is happy to content himself with the conclusion that 'the claim that experiences are co-conscious only because they are introspectable has no phenomenological foundation'⁷⁴, Tye also claims that the thesis that we cannot introspect our own experiences (10) provides a 'deeper reason why phenomenal unity is not to be identified with introspective unity'⁷⁵. Tye calls this a 'deeper reason' because insofar as it relates to the contention between mereological accounts of consciousness, of which Dainton's is representative, and his own, it supports the non-mereological account. With respect to the distinction between introspective or attentive unity and phenomenal unity, however, it still relies implicitly upon the Blickfeld Claim. If our consciousness is not comprised of multiple experiences, as Tye argues, then we are not introspecting experiences at all, but rather the contents of our (one) experience. What then is to prevent me asserting that the unity conferred upon contents by their being attended to by me at a time is not the unity which a complex content possesses by virtue of its being experienced by me at a time? The necessary response would be that I do not attend to *all* of the content that I

⁷² By 'scope' I mean the extent of the contents of the relevant mental state. Phenomenal unity relates all of the set of features of which one is currently phenomenally aware (the contents of my total unified phenomenal state). The unity conferred by attention relates all of the set of features to which one is currently attending (the contents of what we might call my 'attentional state'). The two sets are generally not identical (from A), so the two unities are distinct.

⁷³ Dainton, "Précis", 5.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 178 (footnote to 20).

experience, at a time. This is a rewording of C. Tye and Dainton (and most theorists) take this to be true.

(28) However, if C is false, then either the scope of my phenomenal field is smaller than that of my attention, or they are one and the same. The first option is nonsensical; this would imply that there is nothing that it is like for me to attend to at least some of the objects of my attention. For the purposes of this argument I am going to take it to be the case that I am phenomenally conscious of (at least) the objects of my attention⁷⁶. The second option - that the scope of my phenomenal field at a time is identical with the scope of my attention at a time - is much more interesting. It is worth noting at this point that if C is false, and what I experience just is what I attend to, then this would entail that B is true, because as attention is a selection mechanism, there is *ex hypothesi* a content limit to attention. If B is true, and there is a content limit to our experiences, this does not entail C being false, because the content limit could be separate to that that is imposed by attention. B's being false does however entail that C is true. To argue that the contents of one's experience at a time just are the contents to which one is attending at a time, therefore, I have to first show that C is false. If the contents of one's experience at a time just are the contents to which one is attending at a time, then it seems plausible that not only is the synchronic unity of my consciousness a product of the contents of my consciousness being experienced together - as with Tye - but that they are experienced together by virtue of my act of attending to them. To show that C is false, I shall argue first from phenomenology, and second from empirical evidence.

⁷⁶ And thus, I'm also taking attention to be conscious. It might be suggested that there is such a thing as *unconscious* attention, but if so I would characterise that as a primitive attention-like mechanism that is not relevant to a debate about phenomenology (although it might be very relevant to a discussion about the origins of attention).

2.2- (29) For the phenomenology, let us first reconsider our account from (6). Accounts like this are generally the first sort of support given for why C is true. A list of the qualities of my experience is given which is clearly longer than the list would be if we described just the things to which I am currently attending. Often, for the purposes of the account, attention is fixed in some way; thus Dainton sets his stage by considering what one experiences whilst ‘studying a painting in an art gallery’⁷⁷, and I by asserting that I am ‘attending to the screen in front of me’⁷⁸. My issue with this is methodological. What exactly am I doing when I list the red of the cherry tree, the blue of the bay, the movement of my hands, the warmth of the sofa and the taste of my recent cup of tea? It seems to me that the answer is that I am successively attending to each of these qualities. And this is problematic, because I’m not sure if it is right to say that they were part of the phenomenal character of my experience *before* I attended to them. The most compelling example of this I can think of is what it is like to feel the pressure of the floor against my feet. Now when I read that sentence, I immediately consider how my feet feel. I attend to that feeling. And once I do so, the feeling becomes part of the phenomenal character of my experience. But I am unwilling to say, for the same reasons I was unwilling to concede to Tye his easy distinction between introspective consciousness and phenomenal consciousness (24), that it is obvious that the impulses my brain was receiving from my feet had phenomenal character before I attended to them. If the process of listing all of the contents of my phenomenal field at a time requires me to successively attend to various parts of that supposed phenomenal field over time, what evidence do I have that the experience of phenomenal field is not simply the product of successive

⁷⁷ Dainton, “Précis”, 4.

⁷⁸ At (26).

attention over time? If it is, the approach of listing all of the things that supposedly comprise my phenomenal character at a time is insufficient as evidence that C is true. This point also has ramifications for the truth of A, but I shall return to A specifically below.

(30) Another way to try and show that C is true is to show that a change in phenomenal character does not necessarily constitute a change in attention. Dainton has a particularly nice version concerning a bookshelf:

Imagine taking a brief look at a row of books on a bookshelf. Suppose the shelf contains about twenty books, and you allow your eyes to sweep across them all, without pausing on any particular one. You may notice and read only a couple of titles; a few moments later, if you try, you may be able to remember these titles... [b]ut it is obvious that your overall visual experience as you looked at the bookshelf was a good deal richer than what you can now remember... [y]ou are unlikely to have read the title of each book, and your perception of some may well have been blurred... but most (probably all) of the books featured in your visual experience, and so contributed to its overall phenomenal character. *If the shelf had contained one book more, or one book fewer, your experience would probably have had a different phenomenal character, even if this difference is one you would not have noticed, and one you would not remember...*⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Dainton, *Stream of Consciousness*, 29/30. Emphasis mine.

There are several things to be said here. Firstly, this example seems much more compelling as an account of the fact that we may not be able to *remember* all of the contents of a visual experience post the event. I agree. I do not think that the claim that our memory can be an inaccurate representation of our past experiences is in any way controversial. But holding this to be the case has no bearing upon the debate as to whether, *during* my experiencing, the phenomenal character of my experience extends beyond just that to which I am currently attending. With respect to this, the bookshelf example is much weaker.

(31) Secondly, consider the sentence ‘If the shelf had contained one book more, or one book fewer, your experience would probably have had a different phenomenal character, even if this difference is one you would not have noticed’⁸⁰. If I do not *notice* a difference, is there a difference in phenomenal character? I think not, because surely what it is like *for me* to have an experience is not different if I do not discern a difference. Dainton would argue that it is, because ‘most (probably all) of the books featured in your visual experience, and so contributed to its overall phenomenal character’. I think that there is a confusion here between objective reality and the experienced phenomenal character of reality. What I experience, as I sweep my eyes along a bookshelf, is a blur of objects I recognise to be book-like. But it does not follow that each of the books *as books* are present in the phenomenal character of my experience. With respect to the phenomenal character of my experience, they were book-like blurs. Those that resolved themselves more clearly (and thus had their titles read), perhaps because my eyes lingered upon them a little, were more book-like than those that did not. What is being confused is the *character* of our experience with fact

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 30.

that we *know*, because that is how we have set the thought experiment up (or, in reality, because upon reflection we know that book-blurs are generally caused by books), that the shelf comprises a line of individual books. The etiology of phenomenal character is not to be confused with the experience of phenomenal character. If, in response, Dainton were to insist that the addition of a book *must* change our phenomenology⁸¹ - that a change in objective reality necessitates a change in phenomenal character - but that we do not notice, then he would simply be begging the question. Thus, I do not think Dainton has provided enough evidence to claim that it is true that ‘the content of our experience at a given moment is not restricted to whatever it is we are paying attention to at the time in question’⁸²; and this is the Blickfeld Claim.

(32) Tye makes this point in reverse, so to speak; that a change in attention does not result in a loss of particular phenomenal character. His example is of the ‘lane filled with leaves’, which I mentioned in (26). ‘If your interest is held by one large, yellow and brown, star-shaped leaf, you do not cease to see the other leaves. They do not vanish from your visual experiences. They simply recede into the phenomenal background’⁸³. I would argue that the leaves do vanish from your visual experience *as leaves*. They are still represented there, certainly; but the experience of what we take to represent those leaves for us is no longer the same as the experience of those leaves for us when we attended directly to them. The best way I can put how I think we experience them is to say that what we see are green blurs which represent the *potential* to be, if fully attended to, ‘leaves’. I think that this relates interestingly to my point in (13), that potential experiences are mereological in character. A potential

⁸¹ Instead of ‘probably’, as he writes here.

⁸² Dainton, *Stream of Consciousness*, 30.

⁸³ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 19.

experience just is a particular set of features that have the potential to be attended to. The way in which our successive attentions are structured over time does have a mereological character. I think that it is this character, when experienced as part of what is assumed to be a synchronic unity (that of the phenomenal field), which leads EP theorists to conclude that *experience* somehow has a mereological character. The confusion arises from a mischaracterisation of what exactly is synchronic, and what exactly diachronic, in our experience.

2.3- (33) Thus it seems to me that we experience a Blickfeld by successive attention over time, but that at any particular moment, the extent of our phenomenology just is the extent of our attention. The empirical evidence that supports this most strikingly is a series of experiments on visual attention by Liqiang Huang and Harold Pashler. This culminates in their (2007)⁸⁴ hypothesis that ‘awareness reflects a surprisingly impoverished data structure called a labeled Boolean map, defined as a linkage of just one feature value per dimension (for example, the colour is green and the motion is rightward) with a spatial pattern’⁸⁵. The conclusions that can be drawn are twofold. Firstly, that ‘surprisingly impoverished’ relates all the way back to Duncan⁸⁶, who showed ‘that [for a conscious system] there is a severe capacity limit to access’⁸⁷. This strongly suggests that B is true. Secondly, the way in which this limit is compensated for is by successive attention. This is because, on Huang and Pashler’s account, only one feature value can be accessed at one instant⁸⁸:

⁸⁴ With Anne Triesman.

⁸⁵ Liqiang Huang, Anne Triesman, and Harold Pashler. “Characterising the Limits of Human Visual Awareness”, *Science*, 317 (2007): 823.

⁸⁶ J Duncan, “Demonstration of capacity limitation”, *Cognitive Psychology*, 12 (1980): 75-96 & J Duncan, “The locus of interference in the perception of simultaneous stimuli”, *Psychological Review*, 87 (1980): 272-300.

⁸⁷ Huang, “Characterising the nature of visual conscious access: The distinction between features and locations”, *Journal of Vision* 10, 10 (2010): 1.

[G]iven a display containing both a red and a green object there are three possible Boolean maps that could be constructed. One is a Boolean map that selects only the red object. Another is a Boolean map that selects only the green object. The third is a Boolean map that encompasses both objects. If this third possibility is elected, then according to Boolean map theory, the individual colours cannot be accessed. Therefore, to access the properties of individual objects (e.g., to determine that the display contains both a red and a green ball), one would need to create two distinct Boolean maps *in series*.⁸⁹

Boolean map theory has a lot of other interesting things to say about the way in which a selection process might work with respect to consciousness. I sadly do not have the space to explore them here. For my purposes, the evidence seems clear enough; a capacity limit exists in consciousness, and consciousness of contents that exceed that capacity limit comprises serial selection by a mechanism that I have called ‘attention’. It seems to follow, then, that the claim that our phenomenology extends further than that which we are currently attending to is in trouble. Therefore, I think that C is false.

(34) The evidence, as I mentioned in passing (33), also suggests directly that B is true. As C is false, this already entails the truth of B (28), but I want to give one final reason we might take this to be the case before I move on. Consider your visual experience of fifty coins, laid out on a table. If I did not tell you that there were fifty, would you know? I think that the answer, obviously, is no. You would have an

⁸⁸ Liqiang Huang, and Harold Pashler, “A Boolean Map Theory of Visual Attention” *Psychological Review* 114, 3 (July 2007): 607.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* My emphasis.

experience of a *group* of coins, laid out on a table. If you were to look away and I were to add a coin, or take one away, it might seem obvious that your experience would change; but I would suggest that it would only change if I added the coin to the edge of the group of coins because the *shape* of the group as a whole, would change. If I added that coin in the centre, you might well not notice it. If you didn't notice it, then your experience wouldn't have changed. In the same way, there is nothing it is like to look at a several billion blades of grass in any particular moment, but there *is* something it is like to look at a grassy field. Certainly, if you had the time, there would be something it is like to attend to each blade of grass as a blade of grass successively; and we could perhaps suggest that the unifying concept 'grassy field' includes as part of its phenomenal character the potential to do so, but I think it is clear that there can be nothing it is like for me to see each blade *as a* blade of grass simultaneously. Indeed, if there could be, it seems unlikely that as a species, we would ever have learned to count. Counting provides an objective framework against which we can measure successive moments of attention, and thus directly compensates for the fact that B is true. And this should not really come as a surprise. As animals, our minds are finite. Indeed, we have evolved from animals whose minds were more finite, if I may use such a phrase. Those minds have had to survive in an environment that is incredibly complex. It seems likely, therefore, that the structures by which we interact with the world, the very architecture of our minds, must be primitively selective. Further, that sustained and complex processing must proceed from a connection of serial moment-to-moment selection⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ I shall say a little about how these connections might work, for example how an objective framework such as a number system might interact with the phenomenology of successive attention in chapter three (see 3.3).

(35) Finally, let me turn to A. This is the strong synchronic claim: that the phenomenal field is unified at a time. The claim is that the unity of the phenomenal field is synchronic in nature. If C is false, and B is true, then it follows that the content limit outlined in B is the limit of our attention. If the character of our experience is structured by attention, therefore, and attention builds a sense of a phenomenal field over time, then it cannot be the case that A is true. The unity of the phenomenal field is diachronic in nature. That most philosophers take A and C to be true I take to be a product of the illusion of synchronicity created by successive attentions. This is not to argue that the Blickfeld doesn't exist. My argument is that to begin by mischaracterising it as synchronic in nature leads to the characterisation of phenomenal unity as strongly synchronic, and this is a mistake. Phenomenal unity is only weakly synchronic. The contents we attend to at a time are closed under conjunction for the duration of that moment⁹¹ of attention, but *not* for successive attentions (i.e. for the phenomenal field). If you take phenomenal unity to be strongly synchronic, then you must argue that the contents that comprise (or the experiences which comprise, if you are an EP theorist) the phenomenal field *are* closed under conjunction, and thus make an error that in various guises problematises most attempts to account for phenomenal unity.

(36) It could be objected that reducing phenomenal unity to attentional unity gives a poor account of unity over time. Firstly, because it is difficult to explain how attention at a time relates to attention over time. Secondly, because a diachronic account which uses successive attentions is surely subject to exactly the same criticisms as were leveled at the account of successive specious presents, in (17); that it cannot give an

⁹¹ More on the duration of the attentional moment follows.

account of continuity between successive specious presents. I shall give short responses to these questions now; **Chapter 3** is intended to provide more satisfying examples of how an attentional phenomenology might work.

(37) The first objection is founded upon a misconception. I do not think that there is really anything like ‘attention at a time’ without some sort of sense of time that is intrinsic to it. When we attend, our attention is transparent. In exactly the same way that experience is transparent (10), I cannot attend more closely to my attention. Thus, ‘things and qualities we experience at successive times are experienced as continuing on or as succeeding one another’⁹². So the contents of our experience simply possess a temporal quality; the experience of time is primitive. In much the same way that the ‘specious present’ is postulated, and for the same reasons, an *attentional moment must therefore be extended in objective time*. Indeed, the theoretical assumption that a unity exists at a time is, after all, approximate at best. Zeki⁹³ points out that colour is perceived *before* motion by a lapse in the order of ~80ms. Locations are perceived before colours, which are perceived before spatial locations. In addition, intra-modal binding (e.g. colour-colour) takes less time than inter-modal binding (e.g. colour-movement). According to Zeki, the perception of simultaneity arises after ~500ms, so we could perhaps take this to be the minimal length of the attentional moment. ‘Minimal’, because I do not think that the attentional moment should be considered to have ‘determinate temporal length’⁹⁴ like the specious present. The ‘length’ of the attentional moment is surely partly dependent upon the duration of the content to which one is attending; attention interacts with its environment, rather than imposing a particular temporal limit upon it.⁹⁵ If the content, as attended to, changes

⁹² Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 96.

⁹³ Zeki, “The Disunity of Consciousness”.

⁹⁴ Rashbrook, “Diachronic and Synchronic Unity”, 11.

or ceases, then our attention shifts. Our attention can also shift due to capture, for example in visual attention, ‘due to luminance-based transients (e.g., motion and looming) and some types of brightness change’⁹⁶; or due to conscious direction. Henceforth I shall call the content-dependent specious present, this extended experience of content, framed by an act of attention, the *local moment*. It is the local moment I take Tye to have been attempting to pin down with his discussion of ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ unity⁹⁷ (19). In taking the experience of time to be intrinsic to our conscious experience, I am in agreement with Kant⁹⁸.

(38) The second objection can be responded to as follows. If we are attending to the contents of our experience, then as long as we are attending to the same contents, we can be considered to be having the same experience; our phenomenology remains within the scope of a single act of attention, over time; a single local moment. At this point, on the ‘specious present’ account, we are still within the same specious present, so the succession objection does not hold - all that has taken place is continuity. Once our attention changes, however, we are attending to a *new* complex content; and so there is no need to account for an experienced continuity between the old content and the new. There is a disjunct of contents between successive local moments, and so there is a disjunct of continuity. By tying the length of the local moment to

⁹⁵ There is an interesting paper by Ian Philips, (“Attention to the Passage of Time”, paper presented at *Perceptual Attention*, University of Antwerp, September 1, 2012. Forthcoming in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 2012) which answers Richard Block’s question, ‘What ... does it mean to attend to time itself?’ (Block, “Models of psychological time” in R. A. Block (ed.) *Cognitive Models of Psychological Time*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, (1990): 22) with the suggestion that what we attend to is the passage of our thoughts. In doing so, Philips runs into similar problems as the EP theorists above. A simpler answer might be that we attend to the passage of contents; and our experience of time is a balance between changes in our attention and in the contents of our experience, relative to one another.

⁹⁶ Stephen Franconeri, Andrew Hollingworth, and Daniel Simons, “Do New Objects Capture Attention?”. *Psychological Science* 16, (2005): 275.

⁹⁷ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 100.

⁹⁸ Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Guyer, Paul and Wood, Allen W. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 162-165. Kant takes time to be *a priori*.

phenomenal content, rather than, as with the specious present, objective time, we don't have the problem of explaining continuity between successive local moments.

(39) There are two main problems with this response. Firstly it can be asked, why is our experience not obviously disjunctive? If I attend to the cherry tree and then to the wall, there does not seem to be an obvious break in my experience. This is because our mind fills in these sorts of gaps. The colour phi phenomenon⁹⁹ is where 'a red spot is lit for 150ms and then 50ms later a displaced green spot is lit for another 150ms. Subjects report that they experience a red spot moving and changing colour abruptly to green in midcourse towards the location of the green spot'¹⁰⁰. So, at the level below conscious experience, we already have mechanisms in place to smooth continuity between discrete events. At the level of shifting attention, I think that something very similar occurs. Why should it not be the case, given successive experiences of continuity, that we struggle to discern the gaps between them? After all, by definition, there is no content present in those gaps, and so there is nothing to attend to. In the same way, if everything froze in objective time for a year, we would not notice the change from one subjective instant to the next; the perception of the passage of time is of relative change. It could also be pointed out that if the world has always been presented to us in this way, why should we perceive it as anything other than what we have come to call 'continuous'?

(40) It could also be objected that tying attention so strongly to phenomenal contents forces upon me the possibility of very long local moments; long enough that they come to resemble something similar to Tye's account of unity over time, which I was

⁹⁹ The original experiment was P A Kolars and M von Grünau, "Shape and Colour in Apparent Motion" *Vision Research* 16, 4 (1976): 329-335.

¹⁰⁰ Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, 90.

at pains to discredit (18). Here, I think I am helped by B. If we take it to be the case that the density, as it were, of a singular content increases over time, then the content limit will impose an upper limit on the length of time for which I can fully attend to a single object or complex of objects before I shift my attention, at least temporarily. To support this, move your finger slowly in front of your eyes. Try to attend just to the movement of your finger for a substantial length of time. I find that I cannot. I attend to my finger, then to my task, then to a particular point of my finger, then to the ticking of the clock in the background. There is a constant shifting of attention, which builds a sense of a phenomenal field. Indeed, the more closely I attend to the movement of my finger, the more I find I separate it out into lots of separate little movements¹⁰¹; I attend to each twitch as a twitch, and so experience a succession of contents, rather than one content with a very extended duration. In other words, B directly limits the ‘size’ of the local moment.

(41) **Chapter 1** comprised an exploration of the debate concerning two recent attempts that have been made to account for both the unity and continuity of consciousness using the same model. I concluded that Tye’s NEP account was the more appealing, but suggested that with respect to diachronic unity it required some sort of modification. I suggested this modification should be structural, and take the form of attention. **Chapter 2** has been devoted to arguing for such an attentional account, in spite of the objections that could be raised against it. I shall conclude this chapter by sketching how an attentional account might be brought to bear on the original problem; that of accounting for both the unity and continuity of consciousness.

¹⁰¹ A point very similar to this was made by Imogen Dickie at the September 2012 *Perceptual Attention* conference at the University of Antwerp.

(42) As I have said, (35), I think that the unity of consciousness is best considered as weakly synchronic, and attentional. The contents of each local moment are closed under conjunction, and comprise the contents of a single experience. This grants the experience of unity at a time, if we attempt to introspect it. As the objects experienced have temporal qualities, the experience of continuity is an intrinsic part of any act of attention, and thus experience. The thesis is really this:

Local Moment Thesis (D): Phenomenal unity just is the unity conferred by an act of attention, the closure under conjunction of the phenomenal content of any particular local moment.

That larger unities: spatial (in the case of the visual field); temporal (in the case of experience of extended periods of time); and arguably neither (in the case of the phenomenal field) appear to obtain is a product, I think, of the mereological structure of attention over time. Not only does any particular complex content contain multiple potentially attendable properties (I could attend to the individual notes of a scale, or the scale as a whole), but also the object of that particular attention is itself attended *pars pro toto* - as a part of a larger whole. Thus, when attending just to the notes *as* notes, the phenomenal character of attending to those notes as solitary notes is distinct from that of attending to them as part of a scale. Recognising the *potential* for a shift in attention further up the mereological structure grants us, as part of the phenomenal content of our current local moment, a sense of something larger than that to which we are currently attending. I think that this has the potential to satisfy that initial intuition that there is a non-trivial way in which all of a subject's experiences can be

unified (6). In **Chapter 3** I will try to show how this works with respect to those most complex of objects - aesthetic objects.

CHAPTER 3: Phenomenal Unity in Aesthetics

3.1- (43) Before I talk about aesthetic objects of attention in particular, however, I need to say a little about the objects of attention in general. Thus far, I have used ‘attention’ in a very intuitive manner. I have taken it as given that my reader has a good sense of what it is to attend to something. As with James, I have assumed that ‘every one knows what attention is’¹⁰². This was most apparent in my elision of attention and introspection; although in my defence, the theorists with whom I was engaging also do this¹⁰³. However, I have left myself open to a serious objection; that introspection and attention are distinct processes; particularly that there is something ‘special and distinctive about introspection, relative to perceptual processes’¹⁰⁴, and thus that conclusions drawn from the phenomenology of the one are inadmissible in discussing the phenomenology of the other. As much of my empirical evidence about attention is drawn from the psychology of *visual* attention, using it to inform a discussion about aesthetic or introspective attention, which is the object of this chapter, would seem wrongheaded in the majority of cases (with a very specific account of certain aspects of the visual arts being perhaps the one exception).

(44) This objection is misplaced. In developing an attentional account, I am interested in grounding myself in the structure of phenomenology, not in its character. The differences between introspective attention and perceptual attention are, I think, a result of difference in content, rather than a difference in the way that content is selected for uptake. Even between visual perception and aural perception, for example, there are differences; visual perception could be argued to be necessarily spatial, whilst simply considering the fact that the same note from two spatially

¹⁰² W James. *The Principles of Psychology*. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890) 403.

¹⁰³ Tye, for example, when distinguishing between phenomenal unity and introspective unity, even calls it ‘the introspective attention’ (*Consciousness and Persons*, 19).

¹⁰⁴ Brie Gertler. “Introspection”. *The Oxford Companion to Consciousness*, eds Bayne, Cleeremans, and Wilken. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Introspection entry.

distinct speakers is heard as a single note would suggest that aural perception is not¹⁰⁵. However we can still select sounds for conscious uptake from the presented soundscape much as we select visual objects for conscious uptake from the visual field. Similarly sudden loud sounds can capture our attention, in just the same way, I would argue, as ‘motion and looming’ and ‘some types of brightness change’ also capture visual attention¹⁰⁶. The difference in the phenomenal character of what we are attending to is a product of the difference in the kind of content we are processing. Indeed, such phenomenal distinctions allow us to easily categorise our environment; I would suggest that the most obvious phenomenal difference being between ‘externally generated sensory information’ and ‘internally generated information’, which as Felipe De Brigard puts it¹⁰⁷, is instrumental in defining that internal/external distinction *for us*. De Brigard agrees that the process, the structure, of attention, is the same in both cases; that attention is ‘a *filtering* process’, ‘essentially *selective*’, and ‘*modulates* the ease of processing the selected information’¹⁰⁸.

(45) A great deal has also been said concerning the relationship between attention and consciousness¹⁰⁹. I do not have the space to do this relationship justice here, so I take it that attention is necessary for consciousness (my arguments against the distinction between introspective consciousness and phenomenal consciousness (24) support this view). I am undecided as to whether attention is sufficient for consciousness, however. I think that this depends upon how flexible we are willing to be with our

¹⁰⁵ Casey O’Callaghan used this example in the September 2012 *Perceptual Attention* conference at the University of Antwerp.

¹⁰⁶ Franconeri, Hollingworth, and Simons. “Do New Objects Capture Attention?”, 275.

¹⁰⁷ Felipe De Brigard. “The Role of Attention in Conscious Recollection”. *Frontiers in Psychology* 3:29, (2012): 3.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* Emphasis De Brigard.

¹⁰⁹ For example, from Locke, Kant, Armstrong, Lycan. For a brief overview, see Lycan, ‘Consciousness as Internal Monitoring, I: The Third Philosophical Perspectives Lecture’, *Philosophical Perspectives* 9, (1994): 1-3.

definition of ‘consciousness’. A selection process that does not confer phenomenal character upon the contents selected is certainly conceivable. For the purposes of this dissertation, I do not need to express an opinion one way or another.

(46) Finally, let me say a little about how we might think about the objects of attention. It seems to me that we have to grant that anything that can be attended to must have the potential to be an object of attention. The sense that these basic units are parts of larger wholes comes from our ability to also attend to each larger whole *as a whole*. The firmer our sense of a whole *as a whole*, the easier it is to attend to a part as a part *pars pro toto* (and the harder it is to attend to that part as a whole in and of itself; I would be greatly put out if Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto Number 2 ended after the first 8 bars, but only because I have learned to experience those 8 bars as part of a concerto-to-come). A similar atomistic conception arises in Gracia’s definition of ‘features’ as ‘entities... [which are] perceptual, either in the sense that they can be perceived through the senses or in the phenomenological sense that they are capable of being experienced as percepts’¹¹⁰ and in Brook and Raymont’s definition of ‘object’ and ‘item’ (either internal or external) as ‘anything of which one can be conscious’¹¹¹. I am going to call these parts *features*, to allow for ease of debate with respect to aesthetics.

(47) My rough and ready conception is that an act of attention selects certain features that then comprise the complex contents of that particular local moment, and the object of the act of attention with which that moment is identified. Recognising the set of features *as an object*, of course, necessitates that those features are salient with

¹¹⁰ Jorge E. Gracia, “Relativism and the Interpretation of Texts”, in *The Philosophy of Interpretation*, eds Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 44.

¹¹¹ Brook and Raymont, “The Unity of Consciousness”, 2012.

respect to some recognisable category. It is the relationship between features and objects of attention that is mereological. *Any feature is a potential object of attention.* If you cannot attend to something, then *for you*, it is not a feature, and has no bearing upon the phenomenal character of your experience. *Causally*, it might still contribute, of course - imagine one of the leaves in Tye's leafy lane (32) to which one does not attend, for example. It is still a leaf, and because it is a leaf, your periphery contains a green blur (if it had been a blue flower, your periphery might have contained a blue blur), but *for you*, it is a blur, not a leaf. Categories define certain objects of attention that we have learned to pick out more readily than others; generally certain sets of features (I take it to be rare that we ever fully attend to content which is not in some sense complex, and thus involves multiple features) to which we ascribe a certain salience. To perceive an object of attention as in a certain category is to perceive the gestalt of that category in that object. In defining categories and features like this, I would be remiss in not mentioning a 1974 essay by Kendall Walton, 'Categories of Art'¹¹², which follows very similar lines. Walton suggests that relative to any particular category, features are standard, contra-standard or variable. A feature is '*standard* with respect to a category... just in case it is among those in virtue of which works in that category belong to that category', '*variable* ... just in case it has nothing to do with works' belonging to that category', and '*contra-standard* ... [when it is] a feature whose presence tends to disqualify works as members of the category'¹¹³. Walton's intuition is that this is why we can say a painting looks like a person, even though a painting is flat and a person is three dimensional; the comparative 'looks like' obtains between the *variable* features of the two categories (person and painting) only. Flatness and three-dimensionality are standard features, and so simply are not

¹¹² Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Lamarque and Olsen, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 142-157.

¹¹³ *ibid*, 144.

relevant. Elsewhere¹¹⁴, I have suggested that the distinction between variable and standard features arises because when attending fully to an object as in a certain category, variable features are those to which one attends, standard features are those to which one does not. I would like to suggest that the process is slightly more complicated. There are, I think, two successive acts of attention. The first involves attending to at least some of the features that are standard with respect to a certain category, and thus recognising the presence of that category. This prompts the second attention just to those features that are variable with respect to that category. The first attention is selective (with respect to the category with respect to which the second attention can be considered as the perception of the gestalt of that category in its object), the second consists of attending to (for example) a painting *as* a painting. Contra-standard features, if present in the first act of attention, would preclude the shift to the second.

(48) It could be objected that this conception of the relationship between objects of attention and features is flawed because it leaves open the possibility for recursion. It could be the case that an attentional object *a1* has as one of its parts a feature *f2*, but that when the feature *f2* is attended to as *a2*, it contains as one of its parts a feature *f1*, which is the feature correlate of the attentional object *a1* (i.e. would, if fully attended to, comprise the attentional object *a1*). Thus, the mereological conception is an inadequate one, as is potentially recursive. My response would be that only the *potential* relationship with respect to *each separate act of attention* is mereological. With respect to the act of attention that has *a1* as its object, *f2* is a part of *a1*. With respect to the act of attention that has *a2* as its object, *f1* is a part of *a1*. There is no

¹¹⁴ Matt Rounds, "Why are the emotions we have towards characters and situations we believe to be fictional rational?" (Submitted MA Essay, University of York, 2012), 8.

recursion *within* any particular local moment, and so there is no contradiction in my phenomenology. Apparent contradictions only arise when serial attentional states are mistaken as simultaneous. Indeed, the existence of some form of recursive loop would be fully supported by those who hold that such a loop is a necessary component for the presence of consciousness¹¹⁵. This is another reason I am unwilling to assume that attention is sufficient for consciousness; consciousness as we know it might be the product of a certain relation over time of successive attentions.

3.2 - (49) I have defended the application of the conclusions from **Chapter 2** to the following discussion about aesthetic responses. To help clarify an account of how attention works through time, I am first going to focus more closely upon B (22), and ask, how exactly is the phenomenal content of a particular experience limited? I have already suggested (40) something like an inverse relation between maximum duration and complexity, but my intuition is that the local moment is constrained by concepts and categories, particularly when the objects of attention are aesthetic in nature. What it is I attend to, and how I attend to it, are *learned* as part of our general immersion in a specific culture. An aesthetic object is one that rewards attention just to certain of its features. Secondly, in **3.3**, I will try to say a little more about the ways in which successive local moments relate to one another, to give a sense of larger unities. Finally, in **3.4**, I will combine my conclusions from **3.2** and **3.3** and suggest how the necessary unity of the local moment drives the ways in which we respond to aesthetic objects, by virtue of a search for what I will call appreciative unity.

¹¹⁵ For example, see Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*. (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

(50) To provide shape to the debate, I will be referring to Jerrold Levinson's *Music in the Moment*¹¹⁶, in which he outlines a concatenationist theory of the experience of music that I take to be a good example of my weakly synchronic conception of phenomenal consciousness (35). In 3.4 I shall use my model of appreciative unity to show that whilst Levinson is in one sense correct, his account is too reductionist, and ultimately fails as a full description of the way in which we interact with music. Levinson defends a position (which he attributes to Edmund Gurney), which argues that 'large-scale form in music is, at most, of minor relevance to the appreciation and evaluation of music'¹¹⁷. The opposite position, which attributes large-scale form an important role in the appreciation of music, emphasises the 'architectonic' aspect of music. Instead:

The *real* form of a piece of music is in effect exhausted by the constitution of the smallest independent units, that is, phrases and melodies, out of formless elements, and the specific manner in which each independent unit leads to the next. There is in no important sense an overall form to an extended piece of music; there is only formedness or cogency within and between bits that are successfully apprehended... musical enjoyment, likewise, is grounded entirely in the grasp of individual bits of various sizes and transitions between them.¹¹⁸

Firstly, it should be pointed out that Levinson is not suggesting that these 'bits' are synchronic. 'One does not' he says 'just aurally register each note in the fraction of a second it takes to present itself... one has an aural grasp on an entity spread out in

¹¹⁶ Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹¹⁷ Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, 2.

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, 9.

time'¹¹⁹. Thus, for much the same reasons that the specious present was postulated (16), Levinson takes the 'bits' of music to be extended in time. Like the local moment, however, these bits of music are plastic, 'of various sizes'. Levinson calls the 'entity spread out in time' the 'window of quasi-hearing'; 'although one literally *hears* only an instant of music at a time, one generally *quasi-hears*, or vividly apprehends, a somewhat greater extent of musical material'¹²⁰. For Levinson, the 'width' of this window of quasi-hearing is 'at any point a direct function of the reach of vivid memory and vivid anticipation at that point, which is a matter of the extent of virtual imaging backwards and forwards *that the musical material and one's familiarity with it allow*'^{121 122}. Now, the limit imposed by the musical material I take to be the basic content limit that B refers to. The limit imposed by one's familiarity to that content, however, is different, and deserves independent discussion.

(51) Earlier, when discussing the ease with which one could attend to a whole *as a* whole, I mentioned that the firmer one's sense of that whole, the simpler it is to attend just to it (46). I think that we could agree with Levinson that the 'firmness' of one's sense of a whole *as a* whole is a product of our familiarity with it. The whole point of aesthetic training is to increase our familiarity with certain sorts of objects or features. The more familiar we are with features, the more of them we can unify with the same act of attention, because the cognitive effort it takes to represent them is reduced¹²³. Consider, for example, the difference between what it would be like for an adult

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, 15.

¹²⁰ *ibid*.

¹²¹ *ibid*, 16. My emphasis.

¹²² 'Virtual imaging' I take to be a product of Levinson's assumption that there is something like a strong synchronic moment (he just thinks, rightly, that it isn't useful to an account of musical experience), so extra content that is present in the local moment must be 'virtual' in some way. I don't agree with the mechanics of Levinson's conception, so I shall avoid using his vocabulary.

¹²³ Mechanically, I take the content limit of my local moment to be a result of limited available cognitive resources at any one time.

fluent in English to read this page, and what it would be like for a five year old. The five year old's unfamiliarity with the language would force them to attend separately to letters and to small groups of letters, whereas an adult fluent in the language barely attends to individual words as individual words. This is why my reader may not have noticed the deliberate repetition of 'of' in the previous sentence; if the attention being shifted to the next line is not fine-grained enough to catch a preposition repetition, and as a feature it makes no difference to the grammar of the sentence, then you are unlikely to notice it. It's interesting that if you know the second 'of' is there, you can't replicate the effect. I suspect this is because you are partly attending to that knowledge when you re-read the sentence, and that modifies the way in which you attend to the text on the page. The five year old, I would hypothesise, *would* notice that 'of' was used twice.

(52) The second effect familiarity has upon our attention to our environment is that it allows us to pick out *new* features. I am unable to discern the separate flavours of wine, for example; the whole simply tastes a certain way. If I were to learn a little about wine tasting, I might well begin to be able to discern flavours that were not previously obvious to me¹²⁴. A further objection to the conception that attention can unify features might arise at this point. It could be argued that if, until I learned to do so, I could not attend to two particular features of the bouquet of a certain wine, then it could not be attention that unified those features. Indeed, the opposite. Those features were part of my unified experience until attention picked them out, in effect disunifying that experience¹²⁵. Given my earlier arguments for the reduction of 'an

¹²⁴ Barry Smith has several interesting publications on the phenomenology of wine tasting. For example, see Barry Smith, *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*, (Oxford: Signal Books Limited, 2007).

experience’ to ‘an attention’, however (see 2.3 in particular), this objection has little force. When I attend to the bouquet as a whole, if I am unable to recognise those features, they will simply be part of the content that contributes to my overall experience. If I am able to attend to them separately, then doing so does not affect the unity of the whole, because when I do so, my attention will have changed, and so the ‘whole’ will have changed. With respect to the new attention, what was a feature (i.e. a potential object of my attention), now *is* the object of my attention. This objection could also turn on the misapprehension that if one can attend to separate features then, to experience them together, there must be a relation between those features which cannot be itself attentional, because attention is present in their instantiation. This is a version of the EP side of the EP/NEP debate, which I have argued against elsewhere (see 1.2).

(53) The more expert I become, the more I will be able to attend to features of a flavour as objects *pars pro toto*, and the more I will be able to attend to the flavour *as containing* many ‘variable’, to use Walton’s terms (47), features. This latter is a product of the diminished cognitive effort required to represent each feature the greater our familiarity with it (51). As an expert, my experience of the wine would be much denser than that of a beginner, because the phenomenal character of my attention to the bouquet is feature-heavy, and I could shift fluidly between that attention and attention to particular features (with respect to those attentions, attentional objects), whose phenomenal character was presented to me *pars pro toto*. Thus, over time, I would be able to build the sense of a rich phenomenal tapestry

¹²⁵ Smith raised this objection in the September 2012 *Perceptual Attention* conference at the University of Antwerp.

unavailable to an inexperienced wine taster. This phenomenal tapestry is a kind of phenomenal field. As with phenomenal fields, I take it to be diachronic (35).

(54) In much the same way in the concatenationist account of music, ‘a *comprehending* listener is conscious of motion, direction, force, tension, and so on in the succession of tones reaching his ears - that is to say, he hears musical movement in those tones, however that be analysed, and then, often, gesture and expression in that movement’¹²⁶. More importantly, however, for Levinson and Gurney, ‘a listener who strictly only heard individual bits... could not be understanding the music’. Thus, one needs both the expertise to apprehend the several features of the music as potential objects of attention, and to be able to attend to the unified whole with those features as ‘variable’. The idea of a ‘comprehending’ listener, I take it, is to capture that the listener has sufficient ability to construct the phenomenal tapestry of the listening. Levinson also specifies that his examples take place at ‘the third or so auditioning of the piece by a knowledgeable listener’¹²⁷. This is partly because his interest parallels mine; he is exploring how familiarity affects the listening experience¹²⁸. It is also because the dialectic of his argument is concerned with the way in which a *knowledgeable* listener comprehends a piece of music.

(55) Levinson’s argument against architectonics turns on a particular addition to the outline of what it is like to attend to a stretch of music. This is that whilst he is listening to the music, the comprehending listener’s ‘attention is not necessarily

¹²⁶ Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, 23. My emphasis.

¹²⁷ *ibid*, 45.

¹²⁸ Familiarity with a particular piece of music is a function of the number of times one has listened to it (and remembers doing so), I take it. Familiarity with pieces of that sort, or music of that sort, would fit under the umbrella of *expertise*. With respect to the plasticity of the local moment’s content limit, the end result can be considered the same.

drawn to anything remote from the sounding present; he need bring no aural telescope into play, need consult no diagram of the sonic universe in which he is immersed'¹²⁹. That grasping the overall form of a work requires 'perceiving in a single mental act the relatedness of numerous temporally distant parts of the work'¹³⁰ means that *directly*, this cannot be apprehended. This relies upon the intuition of B, rephrased in terms of quasi-hearing. The only way that one can appreciate the full work is to represent it; Levinson says by 'the conception or imagination of such relatedness'¹³¹. Essentially, Levinson argues that attending to the whole of a piece of work which is, or structures of that piece of work which are, longer in duration than the local moment requires the object of that particular act of attention to be almost fully *constructed*. The object of the act of attending just to the music one is directly aware of (that one 'quasi-hears') will, by virtue of its sensory immediacy, therefore have a more compelling phenomenal character than the constructed object. The constructed unity can, in Levinson's words 'never be as vivid or gripping'¹³² as the sensory. This is, at heart, a distinction between the objects of internal and external attention (44). Levinson from this concludes that 'the focus of musical appreciation remains the currently audited part and it's immediate musical environment'¹³³.

(56) I will briefly mention one initial response to Levinson's argument before moving on. It could be argued that external objects of attention are also, in some sense, constructed: that properties are imputed to them. Levinson himself is explicitly anti-imputationalist¹³⁴. However, even if it were the case that the musical objects to

¹²⁹ Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, 23.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, 20.

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ *ibid.*

which one directly attends *were* constructed in some way; for example, if one argued that there must be a difference in the phenomenal character of a long and complex fugue for an expert listener or for an inexperienced listener, it does not follow that this character is still not more compelling than that arising from the cerebral contemplation of the ways in which the theme and countersubject of that particular fugue has been developed since the beginning of the piece (for example). Thus, Levinson's claim 'that the focus of musical appreciation remains the currently audited part and its immediate musical environment'¹³⁵ is unaffected either way.

3.3 - (57) The other structure that concatenationism refers to is the relationship between successive local moments, and how they flow into one another. I think Levinson's account of this is very useful as a way of getting to grips with how exactly the phenomenal field can be diachronic, rather than synchronic; what it means for A to be false.

(58) I have already stated (47) that features are potential objects of attention; that their recognition as such provides a sense of density in any particular local moment. Learning to recognise them is learning concepts and categories. With the discussion about what Walton calls 'contra-standard features'¹³⁶, we can start to see that this is related to how our attentions follow one another over time. If several attentions are directed towards the same aesthetic object (say, a painting), a feature in one attention that is contra-standard with respect to a certain category of painting would preclude in the (at least) following attention attending just to those features that are variable with

¹³⁴ Robert Stecker is another. Notable members of the imputationalist camp include Joseph Margolis and Michael Krausz.

¹³⁵ Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, 21.

¹³⁶ Walton, "Categories of Art", 144.

respect to that category. The gestalt would not be emergent, because there would be some feature which impeded its formation. On the phenomenal level, I think that this would manifest itself as a lack of *potential cogency* between the first local moment and a potential second in which the gestalt of that category would be perceived. Each particular local moment has a cogent set of potential following local moments. These include, but are not restricted to, all the features that contribute to the complex content (attending to a word after attending to a sentence is a perfectly valid shift of attention), and, if the object of attention is experienced as an object *pars pro toto*, the larger object of attention of which the initial object is a feature. Aesthetic concepts and categories impose limits upon these general possible moves, by delimiting areas of interest, and pushing the educated perceiver towards certain attentions that they have learned to associate with aesthetic reward.

(59) This account also provides a window into a necessary feature of the *unity* of the local moment, with respect to particular concepts. This is that it must have some sort of normative limit¹³⁷. Whilst it is surely the case that recognising a feature as contra-standard with respect to a certain category would preclude my subsequent attention to an aesthetic object as in that category, it must also follow that if whilst attending to an object with respect to a certain category, one recognises as part of the features which one had taken to be variable a feature which is in fact contra-standard with respect to that category, then that must destroy or damage the gestalt in some way. It becomes difficult to perceive that object as in that category (dependent upon how obvious the contra-standard feature is). Beauty is an obvious example of this. Sir Lancelot would struggle to attend to the face of the Lady of Shalott as beautiful¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Hurley (*Consciousness in Action*, 1998) also suggests a normative limit unified consciousness; that conscious states have to ‘cohere semantically’ (quoted in Brook and Raymond, “The Unity of Consciousness” 2012).

once he had noticed the overly large wart upon her nose, unless he could construct (or turn to) a concept of beauty with respect to which that wart was either a standard or variable feature. The latter would constitute him construing the wart as non-relevant to the beauty of the face. The former is the much more impressive move of attending to her face as beautiful with respect to a category of beauty with respect to which that wart is actually partly constitutive of her beauty. Perhaps this is why he describes her face as merely ‘lovely’.

(60) Another example of the effects of this normative limit is the gestalt flip effect. When attending to a shape that is ambiguous, such as the Necker cube, or the duck/rabbit¹³⁹, one can attend to the former as either a cube coming into the page or a cube going out of the page, and the latter as a picture of a duck or a picture of a rabbit. In this case, it is not the presence of any contra-standard features that precludes the attention to both gestalts simultaneously, but rather that features which are standard in with respect to the one category are variable with respect to the other, and visa versa. In the case of the duck/rabbit, for example, the duck is the ground of the figure of the rabbit, but the rabbit is the ground of the figure of the duck. To attend with respect to both of these categories would require one to simultaneously attend and not attend to the same feature, which is nonsensical. One could, of course, attend to all of the features present; but then one would not be attending to duck *and* rabbit. If one was familiar with the illusion, one might conceivably be attending to the *duck/rabbit* as a recognisable figure, an object of attention of which duck-shape and rabbit-shape

¹³⁸ ‘But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, “She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace;
The Lady of Shalott.”’ - Alfred Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott” in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* ed Ferguson, Salter and Stallworthy (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 988.

¹³⁹ See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by Anscombe, Hacker and Schulte. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009) 204-217 for the most famous discussion of this figure.

would be features. Some complementary categories one can simultaneously attend to, of course (as long as one does not exceed the content limit), and I would suggest that the experience of the nesting of features within objects of attention is, at higher levels of complexity, something like the experience of categories within categories. I say ‘something like the experience of’ because there is no guarantee that the features which are variable with respect to the feature of which they are parts are also variable with respect to the object of attention of which that feature is a feature. This does not damage the soundness of current local moment, because features are potential.

(61) For Levinson, the ‘rightness’ between successive local moments when attending to music what he calls ‘cogency of sequence’, and it is the ‘sine qua non of well-formedness at any level’¹⁴⁰. It is a cogency to be found between local moments, as our attention moves between varying parts of a piece of music over time.

[I]t is possessed by the succession of unprepossessing two- and three- note fragments that make up a melody, and it is possessed by the succession of melodic and transitional passages that make up a musical paragraph. In the first case, one has parts (the individual tones) that are not themselves impressive combined into a unit that is, whereas in the second case, the parts are already independently impressive, though they yield a whole that is impressive as well.¹⁴¹

By ‘impressive’ I take Levinson to mean something similar to my conception of ‘phenomenal density’. That he aligns this implicitly with our aesthetic response I shall

¹⁴⁰ Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, 6.

¹⁴¹ *ibid*, 6.

come to in 3.4, but it is interesting to remark at this point that the ‘melodic and transitional passages’ are arguably too long to be apprehended in a single local moment; a single stretch of ‘quasi-hearing’. This would suggest that there is, even in architectonic attention, cogency of sequence. And I think that this is right. I think that any succession of attentions have certain sensible paths which they can follow. The *content* of my attention, if I attend to cognitive representations, is very different from the content of my attention if I attend to ‘external’ representations, but the *structure* of attention, through time and at a time, is as I have argued in (44), the same.

(62) In short, I think that we could apply Levinson’s conclusions about music as heard to the way in which our attention to architectonic considerations also structures itself. We can only experience a sense of the unity of a piece of music as a whole, after all, if we are able to conceive of it in such a way as to attend to it in a single local moment. To attend to the piece of music as a fugue is to do this. Certainly, I am not attending to any of the detail of that piece of music, or responding in any way that I might if I was to attend to a part of that piece of music, but this is unsurprising. The phenomenal character of an experience also characterises my response to that experience. However, if I am familiar with fugues, and with a particular fugue to which I could be attending, then to attend to something as a fugue is to tie together many of its features into a certain, unified attendable whole; a concept. The substantiality of this whole, my familiarity with it, is a measure of the ease with which I can use it to scale and organise my attentions through and around the piece of music, to build, over time, a phenomenal tapestry. And the connections which bind this together through time are not merely potential, but exhibit a cogency which is the same sort of cogency by which we judge the rightness of the movement from one ‘bit’

of music to the next. This is the way in which I think any phenomenal field is diachronic. At any point we can only attend to part of it, but we have a sense that that part is a *part*, and this sense is substantiated by how we move our attention over time until we are convinced that the whole is present at any particular moment. So convinced, in fact, it becomes difficult to not find it completely intuitive that A should be true.

(63) It could be argued that there is a difference between the phenomenal field and the sense we have of a piece of music because the objects which would, if attended to over time, comprise the phenomenal field, are all there *at* a time - we simply can't attend to all of them. In the case of music, however, the objects are not given to us at once; they are given to us in *succession*. Thus, the cogency of *sequence* which exhibits itself in music cannot really apply to an art which presents its objects to the viewer all at once, such as painting. Kant gives the example of watching a ship floating down a river and looking at a house¹⁴². But cogency, as I have taken it, is the way in which larger unities are bound into the phenomenal unity of attention. If there were no cogency between successive attentions, there would be (for example), no sense of space when you attempt to formulate a sense of a painting as a whole, as thus you would be unable to unify the features of the painting. There would simply be an undifferentiated mess¹⁴³. Just as, if there were no cogency between successive attentions, there would be no sense of time with which to bind the parts of a piece of music into a whole. I do not deny that there is a very specific *kind* of cogency between the parts of a piece of music; the contents possess a specific directionality, and are not

¹⁴² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. 306-7.

¹⁴³ Individuals with apperceptive agnosia suffer something very similar; they are unable to bind the features of objects together into those objects (see, for example, Vecera, S and Gills, K. "What Processing Is Impaired in Apperceptive Agnosia? Evidence from Normal Subjects". *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 10, 5 (1998): 568-550).

all available at once, but I do not think that this precludes the existence of cogency between successive attentions to aesthetic objects which are stable in time. If this cogency were lacking, I do not think we would be able to appreciate them as unified objects.

3.4 - (64) What, then, does this tell us about aesthetics? I think the place to turn here is aesthetic value. As I have already mentioned (61), Levinson aligns the ‘impressiveness’ of a section or bit of music with its phenomenal density, which I take to be the amount of features we experience as part of it when we attend to it; namely the potential for us to attend to more and various parts, and for those successive attentions to be experienced as part of a fluid whole, rather than as discrete. Monroe Beardsley suggests that ‘at least a very large variety’ of the reasons that one can give for a positive aesthetic response, not merely to music, can be subsumed under what he calls ‘three General Canons: the Canon of Unity, the Canon of Complexity, the Canon of Intensity’¹⁴⁴.

(65) Unity is the concept that interests me here. Intensity, I take to be something like how compelling for me the contents of a particular aesthetic experience (by which I mean, experience of an aesthetic object) are. We can consider this as simply given with respect to each particular act of attention; if particularly compelling, one could speculate that something similar to the attention capture mentioned in (37) can take effect. Complexity, I take to be what I have called the phenomenal density instantiated in any particular local moment. Complexity is dependent upon the unity of the attentional act for its success; if something is too complex for me (perhaps I am not an

¹⁴⁴ Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 466.

expert at jazz), then it cannot be unified by a single act of attention, exceeds my content limit and thus becomes incomprehensible.

(66) The unity of the attentional act is the medium through which complexity and intensity can be appreciated. Beardsley's unity is perhaps a little different; we could say that if I can attend to an aesthetic object as aesthetically unified (in Beardsley's sense), then I can also appreciate its unity, but to attend to an aesthetic object as aesthetically unified just is attending to that aesthetic object *as* an aesthetic object. With respect to aesthetic objects what successive attention provides is *appreciative unity*, which is analogous to the phenomenal field in structure, and the penultimate claim of this dissertation is that when we respond to aesthetic objects, we try to find a way in which to attend to them such that we can appreciate them most fully.

Appreciative Unity Claim (E): In attempting to do justice to a work of art as a work of art, we strive to maximise appreciative unity.

If I am reading a poststructuralist novel, for example, attending to it with respect to the category of 'novel' will be highly unsatisfactory; my attention will be poorly unified. If I am unfamiliar with the category of 'poststructuralist novel', I shall probably just take it to be a very bad book. If, however, I *am* familiar with poststructuralism, I will attend to the novel *as* a poststructuralist work, and to the parts of the novel as parts of a poststructuralist work. As such, I will experience the work as much more illuminatingly unified, and so I will appreciate it more.

(67) What does this mean for Levinson and Gurney? Well, in one sense, they are correct; my responses to a piece of music as a piece of music are specific to my attending just to that music as music, moment to moment. My responses to a piece of music as an example of a certain kind of form are specific to my attending just to that music as an example of that kind of form. I have, however, argued elsewhere (44) against the importance, to an attentional account, of a distinction between *internal* and *external* attention. Certainly, their contents are obviously distinct in character, and thus I am sympathetic to Levinson and Gurney's efforts to keep them apart, but I think that they do the fluidity of our responses to aesthetic objects something of a disservice by doing so. If E is true, then it seems to me that there must be some pieces of music, for some listeners, where the maximal appreciative unity is derived from attending to features of both the piece of music itself and of the architectonics of it. When we listen to a piece of music, our attention is constantly shifting, and moving, and exploring. Limiting our valid responses to just those moments when we are attending just to the music itself seems an inadequate account of the pleasure and stimulation afforded to us by music.

CONCLUSION:

I hope that I have sketched a train of argument from phenomenal unity to aesthetic appreciation which, if not fully convincing, has at least been interesting. The limits of time, and of space, have meant that I have been unable to do full justice to many of the points along the way, and I have been unable to engage with some of the eminent figures of the Western tradition (Kant, Sartre, Hume, Husserl, Merlau-Ponty, to name but a few) whose input could only have improved my debate. Nonetheless, I hope that clarity has not been fully obscured by brevity, and that my reader can see something of the appeal of the weakly synchronic model of phenomenal unity and attention that I have outlined.

I think, as I stated in the introduction, that an adequate account of aesthetic objects requires, before all else, an account of our interaction with them. Let me conclude by being provocative. My final claim is that if it were the case that A were true - that our phenomenal field was unified at a time - then it would be the case that we would be unable to interact with (at least) fictional objects. This is because fictional objects are just those which provoke and reward a multitude of attentions, of responses. Some of those responses will contradict. In the case of fictional worlds, in fact, some of them *must* contradict; this is why we have the 'paradox of fiction'¹⁴⁵. For our interactions with fictional objects to succeed, it must be the case that we are not conscious of the full phenomenal field at any particular point in time. Otherwise, our fictions would simply fail. A stronger thesis would be that this is also true of any aesthetic object. On this point, I remain undecided.

¹⁴⁵ See Kendall Walton, 'Fearing Fictions', 1978 in Lamarque and Olsen eds, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 307-319.

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