The Aesthetic of Ugliness — A Kantian Perspective

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Abstract. In the history of aesthetic thought, beauty has been construed as aesthetic value *par excellence.* According to aesthetic theories, beautiful is that which gives rise to the feeling of pleasure within us. Hence, aesthetic value of both nature and art works is measured in terms of the feeling of pleasure they occasion in us. Ugliness, correlated to the feeling of displeasure, on the other hand, has been traditionally theorized as an aesthetic category that stands in opposition to beauty, and therefore associated with aesthetic disvalue and worthlessness. In recent years, and particularly with the development of modern art, this traditional aesthetic picture has been widely criticized. It has been pointed out, based on the proliferation of art works that evoke intense feelings of displeasure, that ugliness can be greatly appreciated. A general objective of this paper is to propose an account of ugliness that entails, as its necessary part, the explanation of its possible appeal. In particular, I propose a solution to the problem, known in philosophical aesthetics as 'the paradox of ugliness', namely how we can value something that we *prima facie* do not like and find positively displeasing. I develop my explanation of ugliness in light of Kant's theory of taste.

1. Introduction

In an episode of the comedy show, *Seinfeld*, there is a scene of an elderly couple standing in front of a painting in which is depicted a character from the show named Kramer. The couple is arguing about the aesthetic value of the art work. The woman is pleased by the painting, finds it beautiful, and expressive of spiritual ideas, whereas the man finds it displeasing, dreadful, and ugly. Surprisingly, however, they are both moved by the painting, admire it and cannot look away from it.

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This scene illustrates two significant issues in philosophical aesthetics. *First*, a widely discussed question is whether aesthetic judgments of beauty and ugliness are merely subjective judgments, which have only private validity, or if it is possible a characteristic for them to have universal validity. *Second*, a question which has drawn little attention and research from aestheticians is how it is possible that something that we find displeasing and ugly can nevertheless retain our attention and even be highly appreciated.

Immanuel Kant, the founder of modern aesthetics, offered a sophisticated and intricate solution to the first question, claiming that judgments of taste have a subjective - universal validity, but unfortunately did not write much on the nature of experiencing ugliness. This is not surprising for 18th century aesthetics which was occupied primarily with taste and beauty as aesthetic values *par excellence*, while ugliness was considered an unfavorable aesthetic concept, denoting lack of aesthetic value and therefore not deserving much attention.

Contemporary artistic production, however, has challenged this traditional aesthetic picture. This is demonstrated by the proliferation of art works that evoke negative aesthetic feelings of ugliness and the positive appreciation of them. Examples that evoke negative aesthetic experience, yet are recognized as valuable works of art, include Asger Jorn's semi-abstract painting *Letter To my Son (1956-7)* in a childlike and chaotic style, Francis Bacon's distorted depiction of a human face in *Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne (1966)* and Jean Dubuffet's flattened figure of a female body in *The Tree of Fluids (1950)*. The problem that such examples illustrate is known in philosophical aesthetics as "the paradox of ugliness", namely, how we can like, attend to, and value something that we *prima facie* do not like, find positively displeasing or even repellent?

In contemporary aesthetics two main solutions to this problem have been offered. Briefly, the first solution claims that an art work may evoke negative aesthetic feelings due to the ugly objects that it depicts, but what we value is the creative artistic representation of ugly subject matter. What we value is therefore not ugliness, but the beautiful artistic representation of ugliness.[1] The second solution claims that such works of art have cognitive, not aesthetic value. That is, through artistic ugliness, cer-

[1] This solution has been suggested by Ruth Lorand (Lorand 2000, p. 260-262).

tain cognitive ideas and attitudes can be represented and explored, that could not otherwise be. So what we value in such art works is not ugliness, but the pleasure of intellectual exploration that artistic ugliness affords.[2]

Even though these two proposals can explain some cases of pleasure we feel when confronted with artistic ugliness, they do not, however, explain the fascination with ugliness itself. More particularly, they cannot account for the appreciation of those works of art that have no representational elements, such as abstract art, and which do not engage our cognitive interest, yet which are considered to be aesthetically displeasing (for example see Asger Jorn's *Oui, chérie, 1961).* Moreover, they cannot explain our experience of ugliness in nature, which can retain our attention and be fascinating, even though it is not artistically converted into something beautiful, nor does it have as its purpose the exploration of cognitive ideas.[3] The bizarre appearance of the Madagascan primate *aye-aye,* or the monstrous looking *angler fish,* hold our attention and captivate our interest precisely because of those features that cause displeasure and frustration in the first place. What is required therefore is an account of ugliness which explains this appeal.

A general objective of this paper is to provide such an account of ugliness, by exploring and refining Kant's theory of taste, which was put forward in part one of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment.* Even though Kant did not write about ugliness, I argue that his explanation of the beautiful has much to say about its opposite. The discussion will proceed as follows: *first*, I explore Kant's conception of free imagination in judgments of taste. I point out the main difficulty with this conception and then provide an interpretation that can resolve it. *Second*, I focus on the meaning of the notion of free harmony or what Kant calls 'lawfulness without a law'. I argue that the principle of the purposiveness of nature, which Kant identifies as the principle of reflective judgments fits the role of the indeterminate law underlying judgments of taste. *Third*, based on my interpretation of the notion of free harmony I propose a solution to the paradox of ugliness.

[2] This idea has been proposed by Noël Carroll (Carroll 1990, p. 182-186).

[3] Brady (2010) in particular emphasizes the significance of ugliness in nature.

2. The Concept of Free Imagination in Kant's Theory of Judgments of Taste

Kant's task in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was to give an account of how genuine judgments of taste, that is, judgments of the beautiful (and ugly), are possible. His objective was to resolve an apparent contradiction between the two characteristics pertaining to judgments of taste. The first idea is that judgments of taste are subjective, that is, their determining ground can be nothing else but the subject's experience of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, without the consideration of the concept of the object. The second idea is that it is a characteristic for judgments of taste to have universal validity. We argue in matters of taste, which suggests that judgments of taste contain an implicit demand that others ought to agree with us and that some universal agreement can be established. Yet, the validity of judgments of taste cannot be objective (as in cognitive judgments), since beauty is not a property of objects. Since beauty resides in the subject's feeling of pleasure, the validity of judgments of taste must be a 'subjective universal' validity.

The reconciliation of the seemingly incompatible characteristics of judgments of taste, that is, subjectivity and universality, is the main objective of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment:* "How is a judgment possible which, merely from one's own feeling of pleasure in an object, independent of its concept, judges this pleasure, as attached to the representation of the same object in every other subject, *a priori*, i.e., without having to wait for the assent of others?" (§36, 5:288)[4]

Kant found the solution to this question in the concept of the harmony of the cognitive faculties in their free play. His argument can be roughly summarized in the following way: the universal validity of pleasure can be justified by claiming that the feeling of pleasure depends on the state of mind that we all share. But what we all share is the state of mind "that is encountered in the relation of the powers of representation to each other insofar as they relate a given representation to cognition in

[4] Citations not otherwise identified refer to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Citations to the *Critique of Pure Reason* utilize the customary first (A) and second (B) edition format.

general" (§9, 5:217). This is the state of mind of harmony between imagination and understanding. Kant claims that cognition is necessitated by the mental activities of imagination, whose function is to synthesize the manifold of intuition, and of the understanding, which unifies this manifold under the concept of the object. This harmony between the imagination and understanding is required for cognition, and is universally communicable, because without it "human beings could not communicate their representations and even cognition itself" (§38, 5:290). Presumably, pleasure in judgments of taste is based on such harmonious relation of cognitive powers, and therefore it must be universally communicable.

On the other hand, Kant claims, the perception of the beautiful is also different from cognition. He draws the distinction by claiming that in judgments of taste the harmonious relation of cognitive powers is in free play, because "no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition" (§9, 5:217). Accordingly, while the relation between cognitive powers in cognitive judgments is not merely subjective, but ends in the application of the concept to the object, and therefore in a cognitive judgment, the relation between cognitive powers in judgments of taste is merely subjective (it does not apply concepts) and it results in a feeling of pleasure alone.

The distinction between the harmony required for cognition and the harmony required for judgments of taste is derived from the distinction between the two different functions performed by the faculty of imagination, and which refers to Kant's distinction between determining and reflective judgments, respectively. In determining judgments, imagination must synthesize the manifold of intuition according to the specification of the concept, which serves as the rule. Accordingly, imagination in determining cognition is not a free and autonomous activity, but it is subordinated to the faculty of understanding and its rules. But in a judgment of taste (as a reflective judgment) the imagination plays freely in the given form of the object and is not governed by determinate rules of understanding. Because the role of imagination in judgments of taste is different to its role in determinative judgments, then its interaction with the understanding in these kinds of judgments is different. Hence, what it means for this interaction to be harmonious differ in these different kinds of judgments.

Indeed, Kant offers numerous passages supporting the idea of free har-

mony, not as an instance of cognitive harmony (in determining judgments) in which the imagination is rule-governed, but as a special kind of harmony that takes place between *free imagination* and understanding. For example, he writes: "...in the judgment of taste the imagination must be considered in its *freedom*" (§22, 5:240).[5] In §40: "Only where the *imagination in its freedom* arouses the understanding, and the latter, without concepts, sets the imagination into a regular play is the representation communicated, not as a thought, but as the inner feeling of a purposive state of mind[2EE?] (§40, 5:296). And in §59: "*The freedom of the imagination* (thus of the sensibility of our faculty) is represented in the judging of the beautiful as in *accord* with the lawfulness of the understanding" (§59, 5:354).

Based on the quoted passages, we can see that Kant makes a clear distinction between (i) the *free play* of imagination, and (ii) the *harmony* of the *free play of imagination* with the understanding. In order to have (ii) which is necessary for the occurrence of pleasure, we must in the first instance have (i) free imagination. The concept of free harmony between cognitive powers is primarily dependent on the notion of free play of imagination. For example, Kant writes that in judgments of taste "the understanding is in the service of the imagination" (§22, 5:242), which indicates that the faculty of understanding is not free, but only imagination. In fact, Kant's conception of understanding prevents the possibility of thinking of it as free. That is, understanding is a faculty that continues to attempt to apply concepts to the manifold in order to produce the unity. It never ceases to attempt to establish order over the heterogeneity of the manifold, even though the existing concepts might not be sufficient to fully determine the particular sensible manifold. As Kant claims in the first *Introduction*: "discovery [of the order of nature] is a task for the understanding, which is aimed at an end that is necessary for it, namely, to introduce into it unity of principles" (VI, 5:187). So, since this task is necessary for the understanding, this is the task it will continue to perform whether in judgments of taste or determinative judgments. So what explains the difference in harmony between judgments of taste and determinative judgments is the role of the imagination. In particular, that it is free in the case of judgments of taste.

[5] In this and the following quotations in this paragraph the emphases are mine.

3. Towards a Positive Account of the Concept of Free Imagination

Contemporary scholars have major difficulties with Kant's conception of the notion of free harmony between imagination and understanding, required for judgments of taste (of the beautiful). In particular, as Paul Guyer has pointed out, Kant's conception of free harmony is incompatible with his epistemological theory (Guyer 2005). Kant explains in the Critique of Pure Reason that concepts are not merely applied to the synthesis of imagination, but they determine the process of that synthesis. A concept, Kant says, is a rule for the synthesis of the manifold (A106). The imagination combines sensible manifold and produces a perceptual image according to the concept. That is, in order to recognize a particular object, say a dog, the imagination must follow the dog-rule, that is, it combines specific features such as a tail, four legs, a head, etc., as the dog-rule prescribes. Imagination and understanding must be in harmony in order to present an object of perceptual experience, and this harmony is governed by concepts. However, if the subject of judgments of taste is the form of the object, as Kant claim, and if the form of the object is conceptually determined, then how can there be after all a free play of imagination, as is required for a judgment of taste?[6]

[6] The reconciliation of Kant's account of the role of imagination and understanding in ordinary cognition with their role in judgments of taste is the main subject of the contemporary debate on Kant's aesthetics. It is not surprising that it has resulted in a variety of different interpretations. Guyer classified these interpretations into three main classes: precognitive, multicognitive, and metacognitive interpretation, the last one is argued for by Guyer (Guyer 2006). None of these approaches are however fully successful. The difficulties with the first two approaches have already been tackled by Guyer. In short, his main objection against the precognitive approach is that it leads to the 'everything is beautiful' problem. Namely, if free harmony is constituted by the satisfaction of the same conditions that are required for ordinary cognition (yet, without the application of the concept), then it follows that every object of cognition must be in principle beautiful (Guyer 2006, p.172). On the other hand, he writes that the main difficulty with the multicognitive approach, in addition to being the least supported by Kant's text, is that this interpretation does not explain the connection between perceptual shifting and pleasure. That is, this interpretation does not explain why a play between the manifold and the multitude of concepts (shifting back and forth from one concept to another and not settling down to any of them) should be pleasurable, rather than confusing and irritating (Guyer 2006, p. 177). For a critical discussion on Guyer's version of a metacognitive

The solution to this question can be found in the following passage: "in the use of the imagination for cognition, the imagination is under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the limitation of being adequate to its concept; in an aesthetic respect, however, the imagination is free to provide, beyond that concord with the concept, unsought extensive undeveloped material for the understanding, of which the latter took no regard in its concept, but which it applies, not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, for the animation of the cognitive powers" (§49, 5:317). Two things are suggested by Kant in this passage. *First*, that the subject of the judgment of taste is not the material that is used for cognition, that is, the empirical content determined by the concept, but the additional content, which is not determined by the concept of the object. It is this additional material that occasions aesthetic reflection. *Second*, that this material is reflected on subsequently to the cognition. Hence, determining judgment precedes aesthetic reflection. In what follows I propose an account which can reconcile the two ideas that Kant holds.

In order to have a perceptual image, conceptual harmony between imagination and understanding is necessary (as following from Kant's epistemological theory). We must perceive a sensible manifold under some empirical concepts.[7] However, even though recognition of objects proceeds by the means of a schema, an abstract form shared by all members of a certain kind, each particular image also differs from others of its kind. That is, they differ in the additional features which are not determined (entailed) by the concept. For instance, I recognize the flower by the application of the flower-rule to the sense data. The flower-rule is an abstract representation of numerous instances of the same kind. Yet, a particular image of a flower may have a distinct shape of petals in a particular combination of colors. But these distinctive features of this particular flower are not entailed by the concept of a flower. In other words, even though my perception of the flower is governed by the concept of a flower, the concept of the flower is not sufficient to fully determine the combination of

approach see (Kuplen 2013).

[7] To a great extent this has been pointed out by Guyer (2006, pp.178-181). In short, the argument is that categories cannot differentiate between various images, because they are abstract concepts, and hence in order to have any particular image my sense impressions must be governed by empirical concepts as well.

sensible manifold in this particular presentation of a flower. The presence of these additional features which are not entailed by the concept shows that the activity of imagination is not fully determined by the concept, and therefore it is in free play. A form of the object in which imagination is free occurs, if the sensible manifold apprehended by the imagination exhibits such features that exceed the general conditions (schema), which are necessary requirements for the concept to be applied. The schema is provided so that the concept can be applied (cognitive harmony), but the manifold affords more than what is required by the application of the concept. However, these additional features can nevertheless be either in harmony or disharmony with the understanding. It is the accord or discord of the free imaginative manifold with the understanding that results in a positive or a negative aesthetic reaction, respectively.

In sum, in the given form of the object the imagination can be in free play because the objective (cognitive) relation needs to be restricted only to the extent that it permits the possibility of cognition, and this extent still allows for the free activity of the imagination. For example, when drawing a chair, my imagination can extend beyond the conditions that are necessary in order to think a chair, seen as a figure supported by legs and a seat. Imagination is restricted in drawing a figure with legs and a seat, but it is not restricted in the numerous possibilities of how this figure comes into being in a particular case (numerous different designs of a chair). A particular form of the object can contain such a synthesis of the manifold that extends well beyond the unity provided by the concept of the object. Concepts serve as a rule only for the features of the object common to members of a certain kind, but they cannot be a rule for the individual features and their combinations which are distinct and unique for the particular object itself. As Sarah Gibbons, in her analysis of Kant's imagination, puts it: "Concepts can only provide a discursive unity of diverse representations possessing some common feature; they do not represent those diverse representations as parts of a single encompassing whole" (Gibbons 1994, p. 44).

To conclude based on my interpretation of the concept of free play both of the premises that Kant seems to hold can be true. The occurrence of a judgment of taste depends on a concept without which no perceptual experience of the form of the object would be possible. But it is also

true that the outcome of judgments of taste do not depend on the concept of the object, because in different perceptual experiences the same cognitive judgments may be made, while judgments of taste differ. For example, a colorful Danxia landform greatly differs in its aesthetic character from the landscape of Cappadocia, even though they both satisfy the same concept, that is, being a rocky landscape. The determinate concept of the object cannot be the criterion of whether an object is beautiful, because that concept does not determine the distinctive combination of the manifold of intuition that we take into consideration in judgments of taste. While the concept of the object is necessary for the representation of an object in the first place, it is not sufficient for a judgment of taste, because the properties responsible for the beauty (or ugliness) of the object are not those properties that are required for recognizing the object as a member of its kind. Hence, knowing for instance that a turkey is a bird, is irrelevant for making the judgment of taste regarding its form, even though on the basic level its form is conditioned by the concept of the object (such as concept of a bird).

4. The Notion of Free Harmony and the Indeterminate Principle of Purposiveness

In the previous section I discussed the notion of free imagination as an essential element in judgments of taste (of the beautiful and ugly). I argued that aesthetic reflection is occasioned by the free play of imagination, that is, by the aspects of the manifold that are not fully determined by the concept of the object. If in such reflection the free play of imagination harmonizes (or disharmonizes) with the understanding, then pleasure (or displeasure) is produced. Accordingly, an additional explanation of the possibility of such free harmony (or disharmony) is needed. That is, how is it possible that a certain combination of elements, which is not produced in accordance with any of the rules of the understanding, is after all in harmony with it? Kant claims that a beautiful object expresses *'lawfulness without a law'*. That is, an object is beautiful if the combination of its elements is in harmony with the understanding (it is lawful), but without this harmony being determined by any particular concepts of the understanding (it is without a law). The experience we have of *lawfulness without*

a law, when we feel that a certain combination of elements in the object is just the right one, in which elements suit and complement each other, without however having any determinate rule that would serve as a basis for the justification of the appropriateness of the specific combination. It is the feeling of pleasure (or displeasure) alone that expresses the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of a certain composition. Kant says that the feeling of pleasure is the confirmation of a certain a priori principle, which we cannot state (§18).

In fact, when in the two Introductions to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant discusses the difference between determining and reflective judgments, he writes that the latter is governed by the *a priori* principle of the purposiveness or systematicity of nature (V). He claims that this principle is a necessary presupposition that guides us in our reflection on nature. The presupposition is that nature in its empirical diversity and heterogeneity is after all arranged coherently and systematically, and that it is therefore compatible with our faculty of understanding and our ability to cognize nature.

Even though Kant introduces this principle as necessary for our cognitive investigation of nature, in particular for empirical concept acquisition there is reason to believe that the same principle is also responsible for our ability to make judgments of taste. Kant expresses the connection in numerous passages. For example he writes: "The self-sufficient beauty of nature reveals to us a technique of nature, which makes it possible to represent it as a system in accordance with laws the principle of which we do not encounter anywhere in our entire faculty of understanding, namely that of a purposiveness with respect to the use of the power of judgment in regard to appearances" (§23, 5:246). The claim is that a beautiful object exhibits a technique of nature, that is, a purposiveness that allows us to represent nature as a system. But, as Kant writes, it is not nature itself that is technical (that is, purposive), but rather "the power of judgment is properly technical; nature is represented technically only insofar as it conforms to that procedure of the power of judgment and makes it necessary" (F1, VII, 20:220). In other words, this means that a beautiful object is the result of the conformity of the object with the power of judgment. That is, an object is considered beautiful when it satisfies the principle of purposiveness, which guides the procedure of the power of judgment. But the

principle is also satisfied in the case of finding the concept under which to subsume a particular: "The reflecting power of judgment thus proceeds with given appearances, in order to bring them under empirical concepts of determinate natural things, not schematically, but technically (...) in accordance with the general but at the same time indeterminate principle of a purposive arrangement of nature in a system, as it were for the benefit of our power of judgment, in the suitability of its particular laws (about which understanding has nothing to say) for the possibility of experience as a system" (FI, V, 20:214). Accordingly, both beautiful objects and finding the concept for a particular represent the satisfaction of the same principle of nature's purposiveness for our cognitive abilities.[8]

The connection between judgments of taste and the principle of purposiveness of nature can be legitimized by pointing out, what, at the basic level, judgments of taste, as reflective judgments, amount to. Namely, the aim of the reflective power of judgment is to find the universal for the particular, that is, to conceptualize the experience. This happens in logical reflective judgments, where the universal found is an empirical concept. But judgments of taste are also merely reflective judgments (FI, VIII). Kant understands *merely reflective judgments* as judgments concerned with finding the universal. He writes: "If, however, only the particular is given, for which the universal is to be found, then the power of judgment is *merely reflecting*" (IV, 5:179). This indicates that a judgment of taste is also one in which universals for a particular form is being sought, just as in logical reflective judgments. Indeed, if we take a closer look at the passage where Kant describes the two types of reflection (logical and aesthetic), he claims that both are made "in relation to a concept thereby made possible" (FI, V, 20:211). Similarly, he states: "The satisfaction in the beautiful must depend upon reflection on an object that leads to some sort of concept (it is indeterminate which)" (§4 5:207). Based on this, we can say that Kant understands both types of judgments as leading to a concept, and since the principle of purposiveness is precisely that which allows the power of judgment to find concepts, it must be that each type of judgment is made in reference to this same principle. Accordingly, both beautiful objects and

[8] This is also the view suggested by Ginsborg (1990, p. 66-68). See also Matthews (2005, p. 63-79) and Baz (2005, p. 1-32).

finding the concept for a particular represent the satisfaction of the same principle of nature's purposiveness for our cognitive abilities, which refers to the same cognitive need we have, that is, to systematize experience. It remains to be seen, then, in what way the two types of reflective judgment are in fact distinct.

I argue that the difference between logical and aesthetic reflective judgments is that the concept found in the former case is determinate in the sense in which the criteria of its application can be explicitly articulated, whereas in the latter case the concept is indeterminate, with the judgment depending only on the feeling of pleasure. Even though a judgment of taste does not result in a determinate concept, it does after all satisfy the need of a reflective judgment to conceptualize experience. Finding an object beautiful, similarly to finding a determinate concept for the particular, reveals that the object fits with our idea of nature as a system. In the case of logical reflective judgments, the principle of purposiveness is satisfied through finding a determinate concept, this latter being a relation that we recognize as holding between the forms of different objects. In the case of judgments of taste, on the other hand, no determinate concept is found, and so this is not a case of recognizing a relation between objects. Given that the principle of purposiveness is only satisfied in judgments where the systematicity of nature is exhibited, and that judgments of taste do not pertain to relations between objects, this systematicity must be exhibited in the relation between the particular object alone and our cognitive faculties. Put another way, there are several levels at which the systematicity of nature can be exhibited, corresponding to the levels of generality with which concepts can be applied. For example, the differing levels of generality exhibited in the following hierarchically ordered concepts: organism, vertebrate, fish, shark and so on. At each level at which a determinate concept can be found, this is the result of the recognition of common properties between different objects. We feel pleasure in such cases because they indicate the contingent conformity between nature and our cognitive faculties, that is, the satisfaction of our assumption of the systematicity of nature. The satisfaction of this assumption without the need for the recognition of common properties between objects (and hence without finding a determinate concept) can then only be the result of the relation between a specific concrete object and our cognitive faculties. The systematicity of

nature is thereby exhibited not through a relation between the forms of different objects, but rather through the relation that a particular object alone has to our cognitive faculties. As mentioned previously, only in cases where common properties are found to hold between objects is it possible to find a determinate concept for the particular and so explicitly articulate the way or ways in which the principle of purposiveness is satisfied. In judgments of taste the principle is satisfied without finding common properties, and hence without the possibility of finding a determinate concept, and hence without the possibility of explicitly articulating the criteria by which the principle is satisfied. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of the principle is manifest to us through the feeling of pleasure. That is, a beautiful object discloses the systematicity of nature at the most particular and concrete level and it does that through the feeling of pleasure alone.

A judgment in general, Kant claims, is the ability to think the particular under a universal. A judgment of taste is not an exception. The difference is only that in a judgment of taste, of the form 'this X is beautiful', the predicate does not refer to a determinate concept, since the criteria for its application cannot be explicitly articulated, but consist only in the feeling of pleasure. Hence, in judgments of taste no determinate cognition can be made.

This is because Kant understands concepts as representing general properties that different objects share with each other. Purposiveness can result in a determinate concept only when we compare different forms with each other in order to find commonalities among them, since only general features can be explicitly communicated. But in judgments of taste, Kant claims, we reflect on the particular form itself, without comparing this form with others. Aesthetic reflection is a reflection on an object's individual and distinctive properties; hence this purposiveness cannot be grasped in a determinate concept. We can explicitly articulate criteria for why we would classify something as a flower, or a face, but we cannot state such criteria that uniquely identify particular objects in all their detail. For instance, it is impossible to give a description that would apply completely accurately and uniquely to the flower on my windowsill, and yet this particular thing is the object of aesthetic reflection. A direct acquaintance with this object is the only way to make a judgment of taste concerning it. This contrasts with the case of a logical reflective judgment,

since in this case we could know whether a determinate concept applies simply by a sufficient enumeration of its properties, without having to be directly acquainted with the object itself.

The distinction I make between aesthetic reflection and logical (conceptual) reflection can solve some of the major difficulties pertaining to Kant's conception of free harmony; in particular it can avoid the 'everything is beautiful' problem. If aesthetic reflective judgments concern a particular combination of properties, whereas logical reflective judgments concern properties shared with other objects, then this means that aesthetic purposiveness is fundamentally different from logical purposiveness, even though both kinds of reflective judgments depend on the subjective principle of purposiveness. In other words, it allows for the possibility that not all objects, for which empirical concepts are found, are aesthetically pleasing or beautiful. Beauty is a purposiveness of an object's individual properties, while cognition is a purposiveness of an object in virtue of its common properties, and this allows for the possibility that objects of cognition can be ugly in virtue of the particular combination of properties being in disconformity with the principle of purposiveness. For example, we can recognize that an object belongs to the class of *Angler fish*, hence finding its concept in the hierarchy of species and genera (logical purposiveness), while nevertheless finding it ugly (aesthetic contra-purposiveness).

5. The Solution to the 'Paradox of Ugliness'

Based on my interpretation of Kant's notion of free harmony, I will now propose a solution to the paradoxical character of ugliness.

I argue that this phenomenon can be explained by referring to Kant's notion of the free play of imagination. The idea that objects attract our attention due to the free play of imagination is suggested by Kant in §22. He writes that only when the imagination in the given object plays freely and spontaneously (that is, the sensible manifold is not constrained by determinate rules), then such an object "is always new for us, and we are never tired of looking at it" (§22, 5:243). This idea is additionally supported by Kant's claim that aesthetically indifferent objects such as regular and symmetrical forms, which are constrained by determinate rules, and therefore

do not allow for the freedom of the imagination, do not hold one's attention, that is: "the consideration of it affords no lasting entertainment, but rather (...) induces boredom" (§22, 5:243). These passages imply that an object holds (or fails to hold) one's attention due to the presence (or lack) of the free play of imagination. Since free play of imagination is constitutive not only for the experience of beauty, but also for ugliness, as discussed previously, then one can expect that ugliness as well as beauty will hold one's attention. The argument is the following: Kant claims that ugliness is constituted by the free imagination being unrestrained by the understanding's need for order, which means that ugliness pushes the freedom of the imagination to a high degree: "the English taste in gardens or the baroque taste in furniture pushes the freedom of the imagination almost to the point of the grotesque" (§22, 5:242). But if it is the free play of imagination that underlies one's attention to the object, and if ugliness in particular generates a rich degree of free imagination, then it is reasonable to conclude that ugliness holds one's attention more than beauty does, where the free imagination is restricted by the demands of taste. However, the degree of the freedom of the imagination is not the sole factor which governs one's attention, since in the case of beauty the pleasure engendered by the harmonious relation between free imagination and the understanding motivates us to hold our attention on the object, while in the case of ugliness, the displeasure arising from the disharmonious relation between the cognitive powers is a factor which reduces our propensity to attend to the object. Therefore it is not a necessary consequence of this position that our attention is held to a greater degree by an ugly object than by a beautiful object. But the free play of imagination that is constitutive of the experience of ugliness is nevertheless a cause of our continued attention to ugly objects. This continued attention is easily noticed in one's phenomenological experience of ugliness. Namely, one can notice that ugliness not merely captivates our attention, but also paralyses our senses and continues to linger in our minds long after the object ceases to be present to the senses.[9] One can mention as examples the striking appearance of the *aye-aye*, a Madagascan primate, or the monstrous *angler fish*.

The feeling of displeasure in an ugly object depends on the experience

[9] The stirring effect of ugliness is nicely described by Rickman (2003, p. 85-86).

of a disharmony between the free imagination and understanding. But if the attention to ugliness depends on the free play of imagination itself, regardless of whether this imagination is in disharmony with the understanding, then one can explain the concurrence of displeasure at an ugly object and continued attention to it by referring to their different sources. That is, displeasure arises from the disharmony between free imagination and the understanding, while our attention is held by an object in virtue of the free play of imagination that it produces. So while displeasure by itself would cause us to withdraw our attention from the cause of the displeasure, the degree of free play produced by an ugly object nevertheless holds our attention. I will now examine the reasons for this connection between free play and continued attention.

According to Kant, the apprehension of the free imaginative manifold stimulates our cognitive need to find a resolution or harmony for the manifold. Pleasure (or displeasure) indicates that a harmonious (or disharmonious) relation between cognitive powers has been attained. A disharmonious relation is one in which free imagination conflicts with the understanding's need for order and the experience of such disharmony is itself painful and frustrating. Nevertheless our attention can be held because of other features of this state. While in comparison to beauty, where the resolution of the manifold proceeds smoothly or harmoniously, in the case of an ugly object, the resolution is thwarted due to the disagreement between the particular manifold and the understanding. Ugliness generates substantially rich and excessive imagination, which is more difficult for our cognitive abilities to process and to find a resolution for it. But it is the search for a resolution which is the manifestation of the principle of purposiveness, the *a priori* belief that the world is amenable to our cognitive abilities. This means that our search for order in the manifold does not end at the first failed attempt, but we are instead enticed to continue our reflection on the manifold in the expectation that a prolonged observation of the manifold will eventually bring resolution. In other words, one keeps reflecting on an ugly object, in spite of the frustration that it causes, because of the expectation that a certain order and harmony will eventually be found. The principle of purposiveness will continue to guide our reflection on the object even though the object fails to show its conformity to our cognitive abilities. That is, we will keep expecting that the

object must eventually find its agreement with our mental structure. This explains why a rich and unrestrained degree of free imagination holds our attention to the object.

So far I have given an explanation as to how an ugly object can hold one's attention in spite of the feeling of displeasure it occasions. However, as pointed out previously in this section, ugliness is not only considered to be aesthetically interesting, but it can also be captivating, exciting and aesthetically significant. This appears to be the case, considering in particular the proliferation of ugliness in contemporary artistic production and the positive appreciation of it. For example, De Kooning's painting *Woman I* (1950-1952) is in spite of its displeasing appearance considered to be one of the greatest works in modern art. This shows that artistic ugliness is not an indicator of an artistic failure and that works of art can be valuable even though they are not beautiful. The positive aesthetic experience (beauty) of the work of art is not the sole criterion of its aesthetic value. In fact, this idea is implied in Kant's distinction between free imagination, required for the richness and originality of artistic production, and the reflective power of judgment, required for the judgment of beauty. Kant claims in §50 that it is in virtue of the productive (free) imagination that inspiring objects are produced, but it is in virtue of the reflective power of judgment that beautiful objects are produced. He writes: "Now since it is in regard to the first of these [imagination] that an art deserves to be called inspired, but only in regard to the second [the power of judgment] that it deserves to be called a beautiful art, the latter, at least as an indispensable condition (*conditio sine qua non*), is thus the primary thing to which one must look in the judging of art as beautiful art" (§50, 5:319).This suggests the possibility that an object can be valuable (inspiring) due to its rich formal properties, which is the product of the free imagination, even though it might not be beautiful. I will give now an explanation of the relation between free imagination and the production of valuable works of art.

We know so far that the object's form stimulates the free play of imagination if it exhibits a combination of sense data that is not determined by any rules. But if the form of the object is not determined by any known rules and concepts, then this suggests that such an object affords a novel and unique experience, since any production that is governed by known rules must be to that extent imitative, whereas genuine creativity must go

beyond these rules. Kant writes that when the artist exercises his power of free imagination, which means that his creation of the work of art is not governed by any known rules, then creative and original works of art are produced. Kant accordingly ascribes to artists a "talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule, consequently that originality must be its primary characteristic" (§46, 5:307). But this talent to produce original works of art is in fact the power to exercise free imagination. Kant's describes productive imagination as one that transforms "another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it" (§49, 5:314). It generates a new combination of existing concepts, ideas and perceptual features. But ugly works of art are also products of the artist's ability to exercise free imagination, since, as mentioned previously, any departure from aesthetic indifference must be the result of free imagination, and this means that ugly works of art can exhibit originality and creativity, and can therefore be valuable in this sense.

Indeed, many examples of art works that are evaluated as aesthetically displeasing reinforce this point. For example, John Cage's work *Imaginary Landscape No.2* (1942) is composed of various sounds produced by unconventional instruments, such as tin cans, buzzers, water gongs, conch shells etc. The combination of these sounds produces a raucously noisy and chaotic work; it lacks melody, harmony, and organization, and it is therefore difficult to listen to. However, its originality gives rise to an element of admiration, due to the use of unconventional instruments, exhibiting a novel compositional technique based on chance, and introducing new, unusual and radically different combinations of sounds. His work goes against the traditional rules of music and in this sense exhibits great imaginative freedom and novelty, which is itself valuable.

Another example is Stockhausen's *Helicopter String Quartet (1995),* which is a highly appraised work, due to its creativity and originality. It combines the rhythm of the helicopters' rotor blades and four string players flying in the helicopters. The unconventional combination of classical music and the sound of the helicopters is highly disharmonic and unpleasant, yet it also affords a rich, unusual and novel aesthetic experience.

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