

Symposium: Arthur Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty**

Embodiment, Art History, Theodicy, and the Abuse of Beauty: A Response to My Critics

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I am deeply indebted to Jonathan Gilmore, Gregg Horowitz, and Fred Rush, first for their initiative in organizing a symposium on my book, *The Abuse of Beauty*, which took place at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in 2003, and then for turning their presentations into the papers that are published here. As they are among the most gifted philosophers of art in their generation, they have produced a remarkable set of essays – rich, ingenious, informed, and critical, though largely in sympathy with my own undertaking in the book. I have had to select from among their arguments those that I thought I might be able to respond to, with the hope that the interchange might be of mutual value, and at the same time of some interest to readers of *Inquiry*. I have, thus, addressed Jonathan Gilmore’s characterization of what I term embodiment; Gregg Horowitz’s suggestion that, because of the ambiguity of the genitive case, a quite different account of “the abuse of beauty” than mine might be given; and Fred Rush’s idea of what he terms aesthetic theodicy. In order to take

*Arthur Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago & LaSalle: Open Court, 2003). All further references to this book will be given in the text.

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on these topics, I have had to neglect others, but these seemed at once central to their positions and to mine.

I begin, however, by stating what I meant by “the abuse of beauty.” It is a phrase I borrowed from Arthur Rimbaud’s 1873 poem, *A Season in Hell* – or rather from a somewhat loose translation of Rimbaud’s language: He spoke of *injuring* rather than *abusing* Beauty – “je l’ai injurié”. What action this specifically designated is, of course, difficult to identify, inasmuch as the poet was speaking allegorically: “One day I sat Beauty on my knees, and found her bitter, and I injured [abused] her.” One might conjecture that as a poet, Rimbaud was fed up with beautiful verse, and decided to write anti-aesthetic verse instead, with *A Season in Hell* the result. Certainly by comparison with the self-consciously “beautiful” poetry of his lover, Paul Verlaine, with its regular rhymes and rhythms, its “poetic” vocabulary, and the sentimental evocation of his titles, there is something almost savage in Rimbaud’s. This happens in art. When the American painter Philip Guston found his lyrical abstractions unsuited to what he regarded as the brutality of his times, he began to paint “badly,” producing a series of raw images employing the idiom of comic strip cartoons, showing Ku Klux Klan figures tooling down filthy streets in open jalopies, smoking fat cigars. But this cannot be the whole answer, if it is an answer at all in the case of Rimbaud. The body of his poem portrays a state almost of madness, as if he had paid a terrible price for having abused beauty, which in the context must be seen as a crime, and beauty itself as an almost holy good, the abuse of which, as sacrilege, merits the harshest retribution. It was this implied exaltation of beauty, scarcely intelligible in a culture for which beauty is merely cosmetic and “in the mind of the beholder,” that marks a deep difference between Rimbaud’s era and our own. But what the crime precisely consisted in is still difficult to identify.

In my view, it was in part because of the presumed internal relationship between art and beauty that art itself attained its sanctified status in the Romantic era. So when the artistic avant-garde of the early twentieth century produced art that willfully abjured beauty, it was a double desecration. I had specifically in mind Dada, whose members believed that a society capable of a morally unforgivable war did not deserve beauty. But only in a culture in which artists were venerated because they create beauty could the withholding of beauty have been regarded an effective form of protest. In the uneasy peace that overtook Germany after the war, Berlin Dada undertook to attack the almost priestly position of The Artist by aggressive buffoonery, which in due time caused the Nazi reaction that modern art in general was “degenerate” and pathological – which can be seen as a political effort to reinstate beauty to its previous high condition. In his essay, Jonathan Gilmore contributes a valuable illustration of how the conflict persists in the deliberately disgusting performances of the Vienna Actionists of the early 1960s. Beauty was *too good* for their society as they

perceived it, and their work was meant to be doubly offensive to those who looked to art for aesthetic consolation.

Though my aims in the book were philosophical, they were grounded in art history – in what actually took place. I felt that in the conflict between what one might term *Kalliphobia*¹ and *Kalliolatry*, at least one consequence of moment for the analytical philosophy of art emerged, namely, that if there can actually be art that is not beautiful, beauty does not belong in the definition of art. I felt that in the canvassing of intuitions, which usually stands as a moment in the philosophical analysis of a concept, beauty would almost intuitively have been advanced as a necessary condition for something being an artwork. Or it would have done had the canvass been transacted in the early twentieth century, when the ascription of beauty to art had the status of an analytical truth. I was thinking of such Edwardian aestheticians as G. E. Moore and George Santayana. And I was struck by the way that aesthetics in general had vanished both from art and from the philosophy of art by the mid-sixties, when certain analytical philosophers like Richard Wollheim, George Dickie, and I were bent on an analysis of art that took the traditional form of identifying necessary and sufficient conditions. For what it is worth, I thought that the history of the twentieth century avant garde had already done the spade work, that art had been producing its own philosophy through its often politically motivated experiments, and since a definition of art would have to compass the art of Dada and Marcel Duchamp, aesthetics in general could safely be left out of the picture. *The Abuse of Beauty* was a tentative effort to take it up again, and to see how, in the post-avant-garde period, aesthetics might be dealt with.

Jonathan Gilmore on Embodiment

Jonathan Gilmore grasps this agenda perfectly in characterizing my intended achievement as, “showing how we can both recognize the avant-garde insight that beauty is no part of the essence or definition of art, yet see how there is a form of specifically *artistic* beauty that is not continuous with natural beauty.” Gilmore is correct that the core of this thesis lies in the distinction between what I term “internal” and “external” beauty. It was really for the sake of developing this distinction that I wrote the 2001 Carus Lectures, and the book that incorporates them. But though it was beauty which was the fulcrum of the conflicts between orthodoxy and avant-garde – and which remains, in my view, the one aesthetic quality that is also a fundamental value – there is a very wide range of aesthetic qualities or, as we say, aesthetic predicates, from “beautiful” and “sublime” to “ugly” and “disgusting”. There are also “dainty” and “dumpy,” to cite two terms that J. L. Austin brought forward² as well as “dashing,” “dirty,” “drab,” “dreary,” and “dull,” just to cull a sample from the d’s. What makes a

predicate aesthetic must be left to one side here,³ but it is worth noting that most if not all of the predicates I've cited have an ordinary descriptive use. When, in "Pied Beauty," Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "Glory be to God for dappled things," he was advancing an aesthetics of dappledness – though one of the descriptive marks of the trout is that it has a dappled belly, which may thus have a taxonomic use without anyone before Hopkins taking an aesthetic interest in that particular distribution of speckles. Any predicate that has an aesthetic use may designate a property that is internal or external in an art work. By this I mean: an aesthetic quality is internal *if it is part of the meaning of a work*. And this, as Gilmore recognizes, requires a distinction along the lines of that between a *work* and an *object*, which takes us to the heart of the metaphysics of art.

Let me offer an example before proceeding further. The Russian artist, Kazimir Malevich, founded a movement in 1915 that he named Suprematism. One of the first, if not the very first, Suprematist piece was a painting of a black square on a white ground. In fact Malevich did several *Black Squares*, to give the work its title. In 2003, the original *Black Square* was exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. It had not, one can see, withstood the passage of time. It was covered with the kinds of cracks an enameled surface might show if were exposed to extremes of cold and heat. Probably Malevich was reckless about material considerations when he painted it; almost certainly it was ill treated at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, where the staff must have been uncertain what responsibilities if any a Soviet institution had toward "bourgeois formalism", for which Malevich was condemned. In any case, it is a pretty ugly thing, and it is a wonder that it has been preserved at all. The issue concerns the reference of "it". Is it an ugly object or an ugly work? That depends upon whether the *craquelure* is internal to the meaning of the work, or merely an external and contingent matter of what happened to the physical object. A half-ruined surface is inconsistent with the spirit of Suprematism, so it must be the object rather than the work to which the cracks belong. The philosophical question concerns the relationship between work and object, and this takes us to the metaphysical heart of the philosophy of art. And it brings me as well to my chief problem with Gilmore's paper.

Gilmore rightly observes that, in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, I "showed that the properties of a work of art are not identical with the properties of the material object the work is identified with". That Gilmore understands this fully is demonstrated by the example he uses: That the fact that Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* is made of plywood is not a feature of the work in question, whereas "the plywood that Donald Judd used in many instances to create his minimalist works does bear a meaning". The quality of plywood is or can be internal to the meaning of these works by Judd, but external to the meaning of *Brillo Box*, which could have the meaning it does

if it were, for example, made of corrugated cardboard instead. Or sheet metal. Or – who knows? – Styrofoam. My problem has to do with how Gilmore describes the relationship between work and object. On several occasions, he uses the term “association” for this, which I find far too weak and “external”. The work is not, as it were, a mere conjunction of a meaning and an object. I have spoken of the work as materially “embodied”, and count this part of art’s philosophical definition.

I think of the relationship between work and object analogously to the way we think of body and mind – or, if you like, body and soul. Possibly someone might think that the mind is “associated” with the body. That would make it an accident that it is associated with one body rather than another. My thought is that there is something more like an internal relationship between them, and that in much the way in which the mind may be thought to be embodied, the work of art is embodied. Of course this is an analogy, and not entirely a useful one at that, since nobody knows how the mind is actually embodied. But at least it is a stronger relationship than association. If it were association merely, the two might co-vary in total independence of one another. And that would make it difficult to explain, say, why the mind gets confused when the body’s blood sugar index falls, or gets flooded with intolerable sensations when a feather is rubbed lightly across the soles of the feet. There is some kind of causal relationship that connects mental clarity with glucose in the blood, or mental confusion with light insistent touching of a person’s soles.

With art at least, we have a much clearer idea of what embodiment entails. The two components of the work *W* are the material object *O* and the meaning *M*. *O* has an indeterminate number of physical features, only a subset of which belong to *W*. Which do and which do not is a matter of interpretation, where by “interpretation” I mean a thesis of how some given feature contributes to the meaning *M* of *W*. Let’s consider an example – Raphael’s *Madonna of the Chair*. It is in tondo form, that is, it is painted on a round oak panel. I cannot easily imagine that the fact that the panel is oak contributes to the meaning of the work, though there might be reasons, important to connoisseurship, why it, rather than pine or poplar, was selected. I cannot, on the other hand, imagine that the circular form of the panel means nothing. There is a myth that Raphael portrayed the daughter of an innkeeper and her new baby on a barrelhead: “tondo” after all means “barrel.” Someone might suggest that the fact that she is depicted on a barrelhead connects with the fact that she is a humble personage – an innkeeper’s daughter – that then suggests something about the Madonna as a humble personage. If the chair in the painting is a simple rustic chair, then the idea that the simple young mother, if seated, is the Madonna enthroned is a thinkable interpretation; and the shape of the panel might be seen in a parallel way. I don’t actually believe the myth of the barrelhead, but the decision to use the tondo form seems to me to mean something in a way in

which it may mean nothing special that Raphael's *Belle Jardinière* is painted in the standard rectangular format. But this has to be worked out. When Maya Lin presented her design for the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, which consists in two long triangular wings joined at their bases, she was told that the join had to mean something. It could be read as a hinge: If the two wings are hinged together, it is as if they can be read as if the leaves of an opened book, and that the names of the inscribed dead are, as it were, disclosed, like the names of the chosen on an angelic scroll.

In any case, interpretations identify the ligature through which a work is embodied in a material object. That means that we have to identify the meaning of the work and then identify the way its material body contributes to the meaning, how, if at all, the fact that it is painted on the walls of a cave, for example, contributes to the meaning of the antelope or bison painted there. The ascription of a specific meaning is in the nature of an hypothesis. It is always possible that one has overlooked some feature, which deepens or changes the meaning. My concern here, however, lies in the aesthetic qualities of the "body" of the work, and whether and which of these are part of the latter's meaning. If the feature is beauty, the work is beautiful if it contributes to the meaning of the work – if it has to be taken into account in what I suppose we might just call the art criticism of the work. Of course, it can be a criticism of the work that the beauty of the body has nothing to do with the aesthetics of the work – but for the moment this is as far as I care to go with the matter here.

One can say that interpretation "tethers" M to O. It is a far more tractable connection than that which holds between mental states and bodily states. In the *Transfiguration*, I generated an example in which a number of indiscernible red squares were distinct works of art. Someone might propose that we could imagine a single red square, but several interpretations of it. But each of the interpretations singles out different properties of the square – the corners, for example, are important in some cases, of no importance in others. The picture plane is part of one work, but not of another. So the different interpretations are not merely *associated* with the red square. Even the fact that it is square may be meaningful for some of the works, but not for others. What I like about this way of thinking about the matter is that the descriptive art criticism of a work is integral to its identity as a work of art. Interpretation is part of what holds meaning and object together as a work.

Gregg Horowitz on Double Genitives

Gregg Horowitz imagines an implied narrative in which Beauty is *first* dethroned, and *then* abused, as if there were two art historical events, in which rowdy courtiers, so to speak abuse a dethroned king (or more likely a queen, inasmuch as Rimbaud uses the feminine pronoun). Why is it, he asks,

that “the overcoming of beauty as the highest artistic value by twentieth century avant-gardes should have required [a] “revolutionary second act?” My sense is that there are not two acts, but two descriptions, one an allegorical redescription of the other. Beauty was dethroned *by* abusing her: It's not as though she were first unseated and then submitted to indecencies. The abuse consisted in making art that wasn't beautiful when it was initially believed that if it was not beautiful, it could not be art. What, aesthetically, was it instead? It was silly, shallow, buffoonish, trivial, and the like, but nonetheless it was art.

A superb example would have been Hannah Hoch's masterpiece – a photomontage titled *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* [Cut with the Dada Kitchenknife through the latest Weimar Beerbelly Cultural Epoch of Germany]. Hoch assembled fragments of photographic images clipped from current newspapers, giving a cross-section of the era – politicians, freaks, machine parts, mobs, factory-buildings, a dancer tossing her own head in the air like a balloon – which made a composition when pasted on a panel. The work was displayed with other of her montages on a dedicated wall in the 1920 Dada exhibition in Berlin, along with a poster proclaiming the death of art – *Die Kunst ist Tot*. Her photomontages elicited responses of, “alienation, exultation, and dislocation,” according to her biographer, Maud Lavin.⁴ “How beautiful!” would not have been the predicted response, other than as an ironic sneer. “That is not art!” would have been the predicted response, given the willful absence of beauty. I do not intend to write out a menu of aesthetic qualities to which Hoch's work is subject. She has abused beauty by making a work of art that lacked it – and, by doing so, dethroned it.

In my view, this blocks the ambiguity of the double genitive, and renders merely entertaining Horowitz's ingenious riff on Beauty as an abusive tyrant. It would be surprising if a book titled *The Abuse of the Environment* turned out to be about how we are the environment's victims, or if one called *The Abuse of Children* were a tract in which adults are portrayed as needing protection from tots. Beauty did not turn around and abuse Rimbaud, bonking him with her scepter! His readers would have found something shocking and almost sacrilegious in the thought that someone would injure Beauty – and this set the context for the later way in which the Dada movement decided to punish a society that venerated beauty by making art as it did. After World War I, the same artists undertook a program of deflating the Teutonic adulation of The Great Artist as Cultural Hero by behaving as cultural delinquents. This included Hannah Hoch, George Grosz, John Heartfield (both of whom took English names in order to dissociate themselves from the stigma of Germany), Otto Dix, and later Max Beckman and the members of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement. Their aim was to portray society as morally ill and corrupt, and this required

shifting from Dada to realism, so that people could recognize their moral monstrosity. One former member of Dada who helps prove the point by reversal, was Christian Schad, who felt compassion for German suffering and dedicated himself to making beautiful art in the spirit of healing.⁵ Incidentally, the abuse of beauty was an avant-garde reflex in Japan after World War II in the movement known as Gutai. No pretty women in kimonos under cherry blossoms for a society whose rulers brought such devastation on their nation! My intention in *The Abuse of Beauty* was to use art historical truth to help explain the lingering hatred of beauty that has characterized so much of modern art to the point that Dieter Roth, affiliated with the international Fluxus movement, confessed that when a piece of his showed signs of being beautiful, he abandoned it. So his work is aggressively messy, marked by bad smells and general noxiousness. The double genitive accordingly is neither here nor there.

Horowitz more or less concedes the point by arguing that Kant conceived of ugly, hence unbeautiful art, much earlier than Dada. Let me put this in context by discussing one of Kant's contemporaries, Francisco Goya. In 1792, Goya composed a remarkable document intended to reform the training of artists in the Royal Academy of San Fernando. His intention was to nourish spontaneity, and he declared that there are no rules in painting – *No hay reglas en la pintura*.

Even those who have gone furthest in the matter can give few rules about the deep play of the understanding that is needed, or say how it came about that they were sometimes more successful in a work executed with less care than in one on which they had spent most time. What a profound and impenetrable mystery is locked up in the imitation of divine nature without which there is nothing good.⁶

Goya was at that point a Rococo artist, whose chief employment had been to design cartoons for tapestries to be woven at the royal tapestry works. These showed happy people doing happy things, assuring the king that all was well in the kingdom. But in 1792, Goya was struck by a strange illness, and he became a very different artist afterward. He executed a series of cabinet paintings depicting extreme violence: rape, murder, robbery, insanity, cannibalism. Much of his most characteristic work after that was not seen by the public. He suppressed his great suite of etchings, *Los Caprichos*, and never published the *Desastros de la Guerra*. His so-called “Black Paintings” were evidently done for himself. He became an artist like none then living, depicting a world in which, to quote from *Los Caprichos*, “The sleep of reason produces monsters”. Recently, one of his Black Paintings – *Saturn Devouring One of his Children* (1820–1824) – was appropriated by the sculptor, Richard Serra, for a political poster, in which Saturn's head was replaced by that of George W. Bush. When this was

reproduced in the *Nation*, hundreds of letters of protest were received from writers obviously unfamiliar with the provenance of the image, who felt that the image was horrible beyond permissible limits – even for the Bush-haters who support the magazine.

I mention Goya here because beauty and taste almost vanish from his work after 1794 – and because something very like his recommendations to the Academy of San Fernando appear in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, written very nearly at the same time. Something fundamental was stirring in a culture that was steering its way from Enlightenment to Romantic values, with both Kant and Goya living through that transition. The two stages of Goya's career are philosophically replicated in what I think of as the two stages of Kant's book, which begins with the concepts of beauty and taste, and then moves to something much darker, in which neither of these concepts, so narrowly associated with Kant, have much if any authority. I think the transit from the beautiful to the sublime, that Kant struggles to deal with, shows that Kant was responsive to the same forces in Prussia that Goya felt in Spain.

This comes up in the discussions of genius in the *Critique of Judgment*, to which Horowitz draws our particular attention. Genius is required for the production, taste for the judgment, of beautiful art.⁷ Kant does not speak, really, of ugly art, but of beautiful representations of ugly things, which I treat under the heading of "beautification" in my book. "There is only one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction, and consequently artificial beauty, viz. that which excites disgust", Kant writes. Goya's *Saturn* would have given Kant an example of this, had it existed at the time, but I don't know whether Kant envisioned the existence of disgusting art. What especially interests me is the way in which, with Kant as with Goya, the concept of genius "represents the imagination as free from all guidance of rules".⁸ It is a "free employment of [the genius's] cognitive faculties". Kant's famous phrase, "Nature through the medium of a genius supplies the rule" for beautiful art, has usually been taken out of context. He meant that once the genius has created a piece of beautiful art, it can be imitated: "His example produces for other good heads a school, i.e. a methodical system of teaching according to rules, insofar as these can be derived from the peculiarities of the products of his spirit". Genius precisely produces beautiful art – and "gives the rule to the rest of us".⁹

But the case of Goya certainly does give Horowitz his point. The production of ugly art did not originate with the twentieth century avant-garde. In fact its abuse of beauty was not especially ugly at all. It just was not beautiful but, rather, ludic, trivial, farcical. It was not serious or tragical, none of what the good, solid war-making bourgeois of Europe demanded of art, and which the avant-garde refused to give them. Their art politicized

beauty merely by withholding. But ugliness had found its way onto the stage of European art in the nineteenth century by way of Manet's appropriation of Goya, in such widely reviled works as his *Olympia*, in which, as in Serra's poster, there were transposed heads: the provocative mug of Victorine Meurant – a model, a courtesan – was put on the body of an Olympian goddess with dirty feet. Kant – by no means, as Horowitz suggests, my *bete noir* – writes: “Taste, like the judgment in general, was the discipline (or training) of genius; it clips its wings, it makes it cultured and polished”. What Manet lacked was “taste”. So there is a conflict between genius and taste. If, “in the conflict of these two properties in a product something must be sacrificed, it should be on the side of genius; and the judgment, which in the things of beautiful art gives its decision from its own proper principles, will rather sacrifice the freedom and wealth of the imagination than permit anything prejudicial to the understanding”.¹⁰ So Kant felt that art ought always to be beautiful. Goya thought it could be ugly – but then kept it to himself. Twentieth century avant-garde artists finally broke this injunction. But the injunction is precisely what Rimbaud violated in the abuse of beauty.

Fred Rush and Aesthetic Theodicy

Fred Rush's paradigm of beauty abused – the sliced eyeball in Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali's film, *Un chien d'Andalou* – almost certainly alludes to Hegel's provocative passage in Chapter III of his *Aesthetics*: “The Beauty of Art or the Ideal”.

If we ask in which particular organ the whole soul appears as soul, we will at once name the eye; for in the eye the soul is concentrated and the soul does not merely see through it but is seen in it. Now as the pulsating heart shows itself all over the surface of the human, in contrast to the animal, body, so in the same sense it is to be asserted of art that it has to convert every shape into all points of its visible surface into an eye, which is the seat of the soul and brings the spirit into appearance... art makes every one of its productions into a thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the inner soul and spirit is seen at every point.¹¹

Hegel adds: “It is one thing for the artist simply to imitate the face of the sitter, its surface and external form, confronting him in repose, and quite another to portray the true features which express the inmost soul of the subject...The ideal work of art confronts us like a blessed god”.¹²

Lydia Goehr has a theory of artistic examples in the philosophy of art – of the difference between a mere illustration of a philosophical point, and an example through which a philosopher generates an entire philosophy of art

– Heidegger's use of Van Gogh's shoes, Merleau-Ponty's of a Cezanne landscape, Adorno's of a composition of Schoenberg, I of Warhol's *Brillo Box*. Hegel was unfortunate in not having as the example he needed for his position the archaic torso of Apollo in Rilke's eponymous poem: the statue's head is missing, so we do not see the figure's eyes, but somehow we feel ourselves seen by the entire body – “there is no spot that does not look at you”. What art displays, Hegel writes, “Is this pure shining and appearing of objects as produced by the *spirit*”.¹³ This, I think, is the meaning of one of his earliest observations in his magnificent book – that artistic beauty is superior to natural beauty because, “it is born of the spirit and born again”. What Hegel achieves is the replacement of an aesthetics of forms with an aesthetics of meaning. What he terms spirit transfigures things into meanings – and, in particular it transfigures natural beauty into something meaningful, which is what I had in mind by the concept of internal beauty. In any case, the razor through the eyeball does not just abuse beauty, but destroys the spiritual basis of artistic beauty.

There is no point of Rilke's archaic torso that does not “see” the spectator, and if Hegel's view has merit, this is perfectly general: the work of art addresses the viewer as a whole. It is not something that is merely looked at – it somehow looks back. We do not merely see the beauty – the beauty, as it were, sees us – and this may be what Horowitz wants us to understand by the double genitive, in which beauty abuses *us*. The viewer of the archaic torso of Apollo feels that he *must change his life*. It puts his life in perspective. None of this bears on the philosophy of art history developed in *The Abuse of Beauty* – but perhaps it bears on a thesis I had not considered in the book, namely what Rush, in debt here to Raymond Geuss, brings forward as *theodicy*. Hegel's view on the end of art is that art, “no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it, and found in it alone”.¹⁴ Theodicy is the view that the world is such that our spiritual needs will be satisfied or at least not fatally thwarted – and if indeed art gave its viewers that assurance, there is certainly a sense in which art and theodicy are connected. There was a slogan used by General Electric for its products at the time of the 1939 World's Fair in New York – that they were “designed with you in mind”. I guess the thought is that art was reassuring in that way – that the world is designed with “the true interests of the spirit” in mind. Rush's striking thesis is that “aesthetics has been an increasingly secularized form of theodicy” in this sense, and he finds this in Kant's requirement that, “a subject making a judgment of taste view[s] nature as purposive without purpose”. The very practice of aesthetic judgment implies “a world in which subjective spontaneity is ‘at home’”. I am not entirely sure this applies to art, even if it applies to nature – though on a mimetic theory of art, a picture of a world found beautiful is a picture of a world in which we are “at home”. But when mimesis recedes as an artistic definition, the connection is correspondingly weakened – and by the

time of the avant-garde, has all but vanished. And when beauty too vanishes, it is hard to see where theodicy has any purchase.

At the end of his essay, Rush raises the question of what art should be valued and why. When it was taken for granted that art must be beautiful, the answer was easy, since beauty itself is a value, mainly because of the way we are built. But once beauty was no longer seen as a necessary condition for art, the answer must lie elsewhere. In *The Abuse of Beauty* I gave several examples of post avant-garde art that is internally beautiful. That alone does not explain why they are valued. The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial uses beauty because beauty heals, and the purpose of the monument was, "to heal a nation", which it really helped do. But it provided a site in which viewers will meditate on war, death, loss and beauty long after the war that occasioned it has subsided into history. It really does what Hegel says that art once did – it satisfies the highest needs of the spirit. He thought that philosophy would take over that great task – but that's not the way things have worked out. The needs remain, however, and art is one of the ways they are dealt with – which is one of the reasons it continues to be valued. But there are other ways and other reasons for the esteem in which we continue to hold it.

Notes

1. Arthur C. Danto, "Kalliphobia in contemporary art." *Art Journal*. 63.2 (Summer 2004). pp. 25–35.
2. J. L. Austin, "A plea for excuses." *Philosophical Papers*. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (eds.) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, p. 131.
3. But see "Kalliphobia in contemporary art" for some considerations.
4. Maud Lavin. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Hoch*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 29.
5. See my "Sex and the city: The erotic dreamworld of Christian Schad." *The Nation*. 276, 13. (June 9, 2003.) pp. 33–36.
6. Robert Hughes. *Goya*. New York: Knopf, 2003, p. 175.
7. Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgment*. Tr. J. H. Bernard. New York: Hafner, 1951. §48.
8. *Ibid.* §49.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.* §50.
11. G.W.F. Hegel. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. trans. T.M. Knox. Vol. 1, p. 153.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 2
14. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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