

From Tomas Kulka on Kitsch and Art to Art as a Singular Rule

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Abstract: The article takes as its starting point the work of Tomas Kulka on Kitsch and Art to further a philosophical move aiming at the very logical core of the question of art. In conclusion, the idea of Singular Rule is offered as capturing the defining logic of art. In so doing, the logical structure of a singular rule is uncovered and in that also the sense in which the idea of singular rule both explains and justifies the role that art plays in our life.

In his *Kitsch and Art* Tomas Kulka extends Karl Popper's refutation principle in science to the arts. He asks of a true work of art to be open to "refutation" by way of evaluating it against its own admissible alterations or variations. An admissible alteration according to Kulka is a change or a modification of the work that does not "shatter its basic perceptual gestalt". In considering alterations that are aesthetically better, worse or neutral with respect to the original picture, Kulka offers us a rational reconstruction of key aesthetics concepts such as unity, complexity and intensity. His reconstruction will show that a work of kitsch does not qualify as art in direct analogy to a proposition that cannot qualify as scientific if it is not (potentially) refutable. Kitsch cannot be "refuted" by any of its possible alterations as they are all of equal aesthetic value. This explains the aura of empty perfectionism that accompanies the experience of kitsch since the work of kitsch does not carry any promise for improvement nor does it show itself superior to any of its possible alterations.

Notwithstanding Kulka's novel analysis, its premise we must note is grounded in the work of art impressing on us a single basic perceptual gestalt with respect to which an alteration can qualify as admissible. But in acknowledging the possibility of a gestalt-switch or the fact that the work of art can impress on us a variety of mutually-exclusive perceptual gestalts, Kulka's analysis loses the logical anchor necessary for it to work. However, in what might look at first sight as an unrecoverable logical deficiency, we find an anchor to a novel analysis to the question of art. This is our analysis to the idea of art as a singular rule. Indeed, the concept of a singular rule - a rule onto itself which has exclusively itself as its own argument - must strike us as paradoxical. But in offering to reconstruct the work of art through the complementary concepts of background and figure - to match respectively the how and the what of the work - we are able to provide a structural resolution to the idea of singular rule as what defines art. In this we believe we deliver a definitive answer to the question of art.

Keywords: Tomas Kulka, Representation, Nelson Goodman, Kitch, Art.

Tomas Kulka on Kitsch and Art

Tomas Kulka's celebrated body of work on aesthetics has its logical groundings among other influences in the works of Karl Popper in the philosophy of science and Nelson Goodman on art and symbolic systems. We will revisit these two anchors to draw the philosophical move Kulka takes in his *Kitsch and Art* and use it to further a philosophical move of our own aiming at the very logical core of the question of art.

Kulka, Popper and Refutation

In Karl Popper's philosophy of science, we find his known refutation principle as answering to the old Induction problem replacing inductive corroboration as the engine of progress in science with refutation. But in extending Popper's refutation principle to art and art appreciation we must immediately feel the necessary logical tension. For refutation has its anchor in a propositional claim that is meaningful - or in Popper's more limited version "Scientific" - in as much that it can be refuted; that there is or there could be a propositional evidence that contradicts it. But if the analog to the scientific propositional claim is the work of art then in what fashion could we argue that it can be refuted?! Refuted by what? For sure not by rigid artistic rules say

of composition or perspective since the history of art is also the history of the breaking up with old rules and setting anew grounds for new epochs of art that are governed by new rules and considerations.

It is therefore on the face of it an ambitious task that Tomas Kulka took upon himself in introducing Popper and his refutation principle of philosophy of science to the discussion on the logical underpinning of art and aesthetics.

What we would like to suggest in this short essay is that not only did Tomas Kulka put into important use the refutation principle in the discussion in art but that in extending his daring philosophical move further we may get closer to a better understanding of the logic of art and Art's role as social and cultural power functioning as an opposing force to the Sciences. From here also to the intimate connection between aesthetics and ethics the way can be shown to be short.

But what then can refute the work of art? Kulka's answer is simple: it itself. The work of art is set against itself as a standard. It is therefore can be said in a sense to refute itself. But how could this be done?

For this Kulka offers us to envision “variations” or “alterations” of the work of art that can be compared against the original work of art. He defines more closely what would count as an alteration in arguing that “*a change in a work only counts as an alteration if it does not shatter its basic perceptual gestalt*”. He then invites us to evaluate the alterations or the versions against the unaltered work of art and classify them as better or worse from the perspective of aesthetics. He follows this with an ingenious rational reconstruction of core aesthetics predicates such as “unity”, “complexity” and “intensity” to come up with a calculative formula that can capture our aesthetics evaluation of the work as a byproduct of the interplay between these three basic aesthetics predicates.

“Unity” for one is correlated with the number of alterations that damage the work of art minus alterations that improve it. In the end of the spectrum we may consider a work whose manifold of possible alterations only damage the aesthetic value of the work and in this its unity therefore will score the highest. “Unity” Kulka is quick to observe can truly deserve praises only if it does this against the “Complexity” of the work which in his presentation will be correlated with the sum total of all possible alterations of the work: the sum of the better, the worse and the neutral alterations; last ones are those that do not improve nor damage the work or our appreciation of it. “Intensity” will have an inverse correlation to the number of neutral alterations (+1 for technical reason) divided by the sum of alterations that do make a change, either for better or worse. This works nicely as a measure of redundancy. When for example the number of neutral alterations overshadows the number of “meaningful” alterations, alterations that are either better or worse, intensity of the work must suffer.

In offering his “formula”, multiplying his three measures for “unity”, “complexity” and “intensity”, Kulka is of course careful to sideline criticism accusing him of offering “calculative machinery” for computing aesthetic value of works of art. He will label his analysis in the terminology of a “rational reconstruction” of these key aesthetics standards, an inquiry into the epistemology of art criticism as one of his followers put it. Kulka is also careful to distinguish “aesthetic value” from “artistic value”, e.g. as pertains to *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* of Picasso some and perhaps Tomas Kulka himself may argue that it is a work of art that is revolutionary in magnitude and carries great and challenging “artistic value” and yet one that may score less on “aesthetic value”.

Kulka rational reconstruction of aesthetics value is extremely helpful when we look at the question of Kitsch. Kitsch in this analysis is a work which provides for no “meaningful” alterations, neither better nor worse, all its alterations are neutral and therefore they can replace the original work to no effect. It is therefore categorically different from art, bad or good, since a work art must carry a promise. Its constitution, by way

of opening before us its possible alterations, introduces ways to improve on the original work. Good or bad it sincerely aims at being a good work of art and therefore must carry with it the very possibility of being “refuted” and consequently improved upon. Kitsch does not present itself to this possible test. It cannot be refuted. It is therefore no art in direct analogy to propositional claim rendered not scientific by Popper as it offers itself to no possible evidential refutation.

Kulka, Wittgenstein, Goodman and Representation

As we follow the analogy of refutability from Science to Art it is inviting to further the analogy and equate the case of propositions of analytic or tautological nature with the case of Kitsch. The former cannot be rendered scientific according to Popper as they offer themselves to no possible evidential refutation. This for sure is a move with its own nest of difficulties, from how to address certain formulations of Evolution Theory to scientific counterfactuals where the antecedent is always false; consider according to Newton the fate of an object set in motion in the presence of no friction. But this is not in our main line of reasoning here. What could be interesting for us here is to move with Ludwig Wittgenstein from the question of propositions qualifying as scientific to propositions qualifying as having meaning or being meaningful to start with.

It accords well with Wittgenstein to consider only propositions capable of being negated as meaningful. As in refutability in Popper, here only that which can be negated can be meaningfully asserted. This the exact sense in which the Metre in Paris setting the standard for the length of one Metre can neither be said to be of one metre in length nor that it is not.¹ The proposition asserting nonetheless that the Metre in Paris is one metre in length is a “grammatical proposition” or “fact of meaning” as some would have it and therefore has only the facade of a meaningful proposition. Pseudo proposition that it is, it can neither be asserted nor negated. The Metre in Paris cannot be asserted as having satisfied its own standard (of length), since, as it were, the assertion to this effect cannot be negated.² In analogy, revisiting Kitsch as pseudo art, as having only the facade of a work of art works well with Kulka's philosophical move. Kitsch as it were cannot be negated, it is therefore not an artistic assertion; it is not art.

Before we continue we should touch briefly on the second major influence on the work of Tomas Kulka and this is the philosophy of Nelson Goodman. Nelson Goodman is known for his paradox of “Grue” which strengthens the futility of looking for corroborative or probabilistic mechanism answering to the problem of Induction - to which Popper offers his refutation principle. Goodman inquired equally well into questions of philosophy of science, such was his interest, for example, in counterfactuals, as well as into the question of art and aesthetics. The subject of symbolic systems and the relation of representation is key to his thought. Realism he considered is but the acceptance of what he labeled “entrenched conventions” of representation and in many respects though art according to him was strictly speaking not a language he did analyze the question of art from the perspective of language and symbolic systems as the title of his prominent book, *Languages of Art*, must indicate. The question that I think is relevant to our discussion here is whether art is representational or referential, a question to which Goodman answers in the affirmative. Our use here in “representation” or “representational” is looser in definition than that of Goodman's i.e. we use

¹ “There is *one thing of which one can say neither that it is one metre long, nor that it is not one metre long, and that is the standard metre in Paris.—But this is, of course, not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a metre-rule?*” (Wittgenstein, 1953, § 50).

² For an in-depth inquiry into the question of the Metre in Paris, see Avital (2008, pp. 318–339).

“representational” as simply: seeking to portray an object or aiming at a subject matter or an outer aim.³ We will further suggest that it would be instructive to our case to model the use in the term “object” on the basic distinction of the “what” and the “how” and offer to approach the work of art through what is it about or is its message if we wish, and the way, the “how” through which the “what” is being delivered.

For Kulka's philosophical move to work he had to anchor the possibility of variations or alterations in what he labeled a “perceptual gestalt”. This is the *constant* with respect to which we could render alterations as better, worse or neutral. In this respect, his move is modeled on the distinction between the “what” and the “how” of the work of art. Also, in admitting the distinction, it should be clear that we cite with Goodman that art is representational or referential. In Kulka's analysis the “what” is *the perceptual gestalt* of the work, each alteration is a possible “how” that in turn when coupled with the constant “what” creates a version than can be rendered better, worse or neutral with respect to the original picture.

It should be noted that there is something very tempting in the attempt to evaluate the work of art against as it were its possibilities. We may envision the artist herself grappling as she works through the creation process with competing venues of how to proceed. We could envision the preliminary sketches, the layers erased to pave way to new versions, and we could as experts sometimes do when they examine classical works of art, try to reverse engineer, as it were, the working of the artist, thereby gaining a deeper insight into the final outcome as it is presented against what was optional in the creative process. All these variations could support a better aesthetics evaluation. They can enable us to read or see the picture through new venues as if they were lenses allowing us to discover hidden potential. In fact, it is this intuition that Kulka utilizes in offering his rational reconstruction of key aesthetics standards. But what is important to the case we are going to make next is to understand that Kulka's move can only be evaluated against the fashion in which variations are deemed admissible and that in his analysis this is done by fixing a single “perceptual gestalt” as constant; in our terminology, as the “what” of the work of art.

But in insisting on a single, if you wish, “perceptual gestalt” as the “what” or technically as a constant with respect to which variations are defined and then evaluated we forget that the work of art may be approached through many different venues, ways of seeing or approaching the work, much as a poem can be decoded through different semantic trajectories. Even by way of presentation, with each time a poem is either read out loud, read softly or sang, we may anticipate that its poetic gestalt will impress us differently.

To make this point clear we may consider the fashion in which mutually exclusive “perceptual gestalts” can compete on our visual attention. This becomes evident when we observe the following famous duck-rabbit (**fig. 1**) that not accidentally figures center stage with the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. For what plays “what” here, what plays “how” is arbitrary or rests on what visually impresses us first and is completely open for visual rotation or exchange.

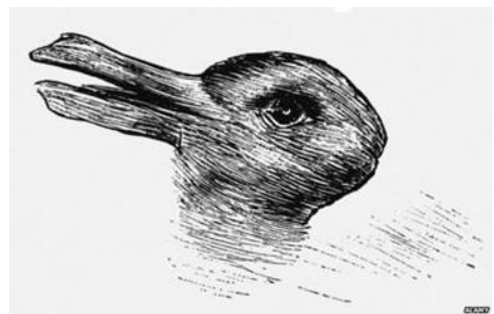


Fig. 1: duck-rabbit

What we have in this gestalt scheme are two pictures, two “perceptual gestalts” that can now compete on being the (original) picture. This in turn may be shown to be at work at any traditional picture where the gestalt switch may be less evident. We could model pictures on

³ Nelson Goodman's terminology of representation, as Tomas Kulka once pointed out to me, is much more refined: for him, all art is referential, although it might be not representational. Such is the case regarding the functions of expression and exemplification which, according to Goodman, are species of non-denotational reference and not of representation.

the distinction between figure and background, the first plays “what”, the second plays “how”; gestalt switch will be at work when they switch roles.

Consider for a moment a picture of a fully-fledged, eighteenth century aristocrat proudly standing before a landscape view featuring his estate. Here we could easily discern the two elements, background and figure, and consider a gestalt rotation: we could read the picture perhaps untraditionally as a landscape picture, to which a proud aristocrat serves as background. We can suggest the term “diagonalization” to this rotation of roles. While it rarely crosses our mind to “diagonalize” traditional pictures, we may find it hard to resist “diagonalization” in the case of the duck-rabbit. In both cases the two readings of the pictures are mutually exclusive, you can switch from one “diagonalized” reading to the other but cannot see them both all at the same time.

Back now to Kulka's analysis: point in question is the identity criterion for what would count as the “same” picture. For example, in our picture of the proud aristocrat, we may replace the landscape with some other background, for instance, some velvet curtains from the gentleman's estate. After this change, we may make the case that this is the “same” picture which had undergone an alteration; that the perceptual gestalt stayed intact. Had we kept the original landscape and replaced the aristocrat with his wife, standing proudly etc. we would feel unease in making the same claim. We would probably suggest that we are presented here with two different pictures that share the same landscape as background.

If you envision that whatever plays figure functions as constant, such that if it is modified the picture loses its identity, then the only possibly admissible alterations are these that modify the background. We could then ask what modifications of the background that do not alter the picture as a whole - since if figure is yellow circle, background modified to yellow will not work - are better or worse or neutral in the fashion that Kulka suggests.

It is important however to note that from the perspective of logic as it were, we are free to choose what plays figure and therefore is constant and what plays background and hence could be modified or altered. This free play to choose among competing perceptual gestalts might at first sight look damaging to the analysis that Kulka offers us. But next we will show that what might look as deficiency or weakness in Kulka's analysis can be transformed into a powerful model for what art is. This is our analysis to art as a singular rule.

Art as a Singular Rule⁴

The very idea of a singular rule carries with it the flavor of a paradox.⁵ It is a rule whose only instantiation is it itself. It can admit as an argument only itself and what it prescribes as a rule, the condition it asks itself to satisfy is not grounded in any prior condition. It is both the condition and the object that satisfies it as a condition. We can go back to Immanuel Kant and his *Critique of Judgment* where we can encounter his analysis of the predication of beauty. We learn that “_is Beautiful” does not behave as general predicates do, say, predicates as “_is Rolling” or “_is the End”. The latter can figure in propositions expressed by sentences such as: “The stone is rolling” or “This is the end”. In these propositions the meaning of the predicate as a condition can be grasped prior or independently of the instantiation of the argument; for we can grasp what *is-Rolling* or *is-the-End* are prior to the encounter with the *Stone* or with whatever *This* refers to in the context in which it is being used. Not so with “_is Beautiful”. Here the predication is indexical or in Kantian fashion “*with no concept antecedent to the given intuition*” (Kant, 2007, s. 333). No concept here means no general concept

⁴ The reader that would like to explore the subject in a better detailed fashion is invited to read my study (Avital, 2007).

⁵ For a more detailed inquiry into the logic of Singular Rule see, Avital (2007, pp. 20 –37).

or rule that we could grasp its meaning independently or prior to encounter with the object playing argument to the rule.

But before getting entangled with singular rule we may ask first how can a work of art be a rule or prescribe a rule to which it itself can be subjected as an argument?

To this question, Kulka offers us a rather easy venue. In following his analysis, we can transform works of art into rules. By fixing the “perceptual gestalt” constant - in our terminology, that is the “what” of the work - we design a rule that takes as arguments all possible variations of the work and admit only variations that keep the gestalt intact. Surely the unaltered work itself is such a variation and can function therefore as an argument. Furthermore, it is easy to see that it must be admitted as falling under itself as a rule, since it clearly does not refute its own gestalt. Next we can compare the admissible versions with respect to the question of whether they improve, damage or stay neutral with respect to the original picture.



Fig. 2: Mosaic by M. C. Escher

But the difficulty arises as we pointed in previous section when the work of art is open to different or competing visual readings as is in the case of a gestalt switch. How can we then apply the idea of the work of art as a rule?

Let us then revisit the phenomenon of gestalt switch. This time with the following Mosaic by M. C. Escher (**fig. 2**).

The Mosaic here is composed of two types of “figures”: white figures and black figures. The two types exclude each other; for you cannot see them both all at the same time.⁶ They are both capable of playing either one of the two roles, that of figure or background. When combined, they complete each other and makeup for a picture. The point here is to consider the picture as one unity rather than a mere concatenation of components. We may ask then when do two things, an element for figure, an element for background, complete each other to form a single unified whole, in this case a picture? The answer carries a transcendental twist: for if it were not for the intrinsic tension - that each of the elements is capable of playing either figure or background, even though both cannot play the same role at the same time - that we would end up with two distinct entities rather than a single unified picture.

The Mosaic here as in duck-rabbit forces us to acknowledge the possibility of switch in roles. Since if white-figures play “what” or “figure”, black-figures are forced to the background, they become as it were transparent. This, however, is not to say that they vanish - for assume white-figures as background and black-figures miraculously come back into the foreground; they now play “what” or “figure” while white-figures in background play now the “how”; the medium if we wish through which the presentation of the former figures is made possible.

⁶ The notion of modality that is introduced in the expression: “*you cannot see them both all at the same time*” is of a transcendental nature, i.e. if one insists that she does see “them” both, all at the same time, we will have to conclude that she does not master what are the “them” in question. Similarly, in the case of an agent who insists that she encountered an object that is both black and white all over, we will conclude that she does not master the terms black and white.

We are now set to introduce the structure of Singular Rule. To follow Kulka we could assume now a rule which takes as its arguments the possible variations of the picture. The rule is defined as with Kulka: admit a variation if it does not interfere with perceptual gestalt. We follow our analysis and equate here “perceptual gestalt” with what plays figure in the picture. Figure stays intact plays the criterion for the picture not losing its identity. Let us then in Mosaic of Escher fix white-figures as figure or constant. White-figures are constant, we hereby define a rule that admits variations of the original picture with different backgrounds than that of the black-figures, e.g. ones that figure monochromatic color as background as long perhaps the color is not white. We could then switch roles and fix black-figures as a constant defining now a rule that admits as its instantiations variations with different backgrounds than that of white-figures, e.g. from monochromatic colors perhaps with the exclusion of black to lovely blue skies or what have you.

Since there is no priority to either one of the elements, it would seem at first sight that we are unable to follow Kulka and apply his aesthetic evaluation analysis. The switch in roles would result in the two rules blocking admissible variations of each other. To conform with the picture or its perceptual gestalt staying intact possible variations offered by the two rules cancel each other out.

But a moment of reflection shows us a new prospect: for what we have encountered here is the schematic structure of a singular rule. The two possible rules, each fixing one of the elements as a constant, exhibit here the logical structure of a singular rule. Preserving the identity of the picture mandates both that the white-figures be constant, call it the white rule, and that the black-figures be constant, call it the black rule. It is only in the working in tandem of the two competing yet completing rules that the identity of the picture is secured.

In fact, when we, as observers, switch between the two possible, diagonal readings of Escher’s Mosaic, we vacillate between seeing the picture as the manifestation of one or the other of the two corresponding rules. Seeing the picture as produced by one of the rules, the second rule unfolds as the former unique extension and vice versa. This is what we mean by a singular rule: that it is both the rule and its unique extension.

Escher’s Mosaic is an impressive illustration for what it means for something to be a singular rule. This can be phrased in the terminology of the “what” and the “how”. By keeping the “what” constant, we define a rule which takes as arguments the different ways by which the same “what” may be achieved. Assume that the work of art is a singular rule, then there is only one, unique way that satisfies this rule. This structure is completely symmetric, i.e. we can keep the “how” constant, define a rule, and take the “what” as its unique extension. But this, in final analysis, puts the “what” and “how” on an even plane. These are not different metaphysical categories. For whatever we consider constant comes over as the “what”, thus we form a rule and present the “how” as the unique extension of this rule.

This is then what we mean by the work of art as a singular rule and it is something that also offers us a better understanding of the discussion we briefly mentioned in the context of Nelson Goodman that concerns the question of whether art is representational. Art is representational in the sense that it does relate to an “object”, in the loose sense we offered in which its makeup must be that of the concatenation of “what” and “how” that are uniquely and interchangeable tailored to each other.

In what is said here about singular rule we must be echoing a basic intuition we all share. That art is about the unique tailoring of form and content, of the what and the how. For what is a great poem if not a message delivered in a fashion tailored to this exact effect, such that the message could not have been delivered in no other way and that this very vehicle of delivery is only suited to deliver this message and no other.

Art Appreciation

Now that we outlined the logic of singular rule I would like to follow Tomas Kulka and suggest in the matter of art appreciation that the work of art must both set the standard for its evaluation and present itself as a candidate for the fulfillment of this standard. For this we should transform the idea of a singular rule into a normative demand. In other words, the work of art should set itself as a singular rule and the extent to which it succeeds in achieving this goal would determine whether and to what extent it is worthy of our appreciation.

In fact, what we ask ourselves as we examine the work is how well does the work withstand the challenge of being both its own rule and its unique extension?

In this we are back to Popper refutation principle as Kulka utilizes it in aesthetics. We look to refute the work by setting it as it were against itself. The vehicle here as it is with Kulka is in the attempts to find admissible variations to the work since if there is an adequate variation, we know that something else besides the work itself falls under the extension of the work as a rule, i.e. the work has failed the test of singular rule.

However, by using the general idea that Kulka suggests, we can think in terms of a measure that tells us how close the work is to its “ideal”: to it being a singular rule. This can be done via attempts to alter the work: we fix a (non-trivial)⁷ feature of the work as constant, thereby introducing a rule, and we can then examine the extent to which this rule may take as an instantiation something other than the work itself. The extent in which we will value the work will be determined by how limited we are in our attempts to locate such occurrences of the work’s own rule.

In fact, the case of Kitsch may get similar treatment like in Kulka since Kitsch defies the very idea of the unique tailoring of what and how and in this does not show any sincere inclination to comply with singular rule. As such its verdict will be as in Kulka. In a similar fashion art that is merely imitative can also be said to refuse the duality of what and how which is constitutive to singular rule and therefore will earn similar condemnation akin to the notorious verdict Plato assigned to the Arts, as a useless third degree remote from the truth type of imitation.

We could further illustrate by comparing the work of art to a game. The variations of the work we try to introduce in our attempt as it were to refute the work are our moves in a game whose rules are constituted by the work itself. The mark of good art is that it is a good and stubborn opponent in the very game that it sets. This explains our sense of being mesmerized or captivated when we are confronted with great works of art. There, we are simply seduced into playing a game where we are sure to be defeated. A work of art then is an invitation to a game. The observer, who enters the game, obeys its rules, only to find himself acknowledging the work as the superior player. In refusing defeat, the observer might re-enter the game from another perspective, following a different set of rules, only, if this is indeed good art, to surrender once again.

This is the exact sense in which Escher’s mosaic exemplifies our case so well. It displays exactly this kind of a gaming structure however in a simplified and schematic version. The observer enters the game through either of the figures, the whites or the blacks, only to affirm the move of introducing the opposed figures as a winning move in the game.⁸

⁷ In Non-Trivial feature we mean a feature that impresses on us a gestalt-like view of the work, e.g. fixing the artist's signature as a constant will not do.

⁸ Escher’s picture indeed displays this structure, but is it art? Formulating an answer to that, we might find ourselves caught between two conflicting intuitions. On the one hand, we can, as we do in this paper, put the picture into words, i.e. coming up with adequate linguistic variation of the picture. This perhaps hints that this is a case of Kitsch. On the

That the work of art be a singular rule - that it be its own rule and its own unique instantiation - is therefore our yardstick for determining what qualifies as art. To the extent that a work sincerely attempts to be a singular rule, it qualifies as a work of art, worthy of our respect. To the extent that a work either sets a problem which is not its own or recites an answer already given, it is not a singular rule nor a sincere attempt to be one, and, thus, is not a work of art. If it nevertheless assumes this status, it is worthy of condemnation. A work of art that is a singular rule, setting its unique problem and exclusively solving it, is the mark of genius.

Art and Science, Aesthetics and Ethics

The work of art as a singular rule implies that the work of art is unique. It is important to note, however, the distinction between a thing being unique and a thing being a particular. A particular object in and of itself does not imply that the object is unique. We tend to think of particulars as if they were our prime examples for the application of the idea of uniqueness. But if we follow this line of reasoning, we expose our analysis to the objection that particulars qua being unique are exemplification of singular rules, and therefore qualify as works of art. The point of our analysis, however, is rather reversed: we need a grasp of the structure of singular rule in order to grasp the true meaning of uniqueness.

We might therefore say that it is Art, qua being a singular rule, which tells us what uniqueness is. And hence a particular, if it does not exhibit the structure of singular rule, is simply not (genuinely) unique. Consider a particular chair: this chair is not a singular rule, since many other objects (chairs) can achieve “what it does” i.e. all such objects achieve the same thing - they can all serve the purpose of sitting. The circumstance under which we nonetheless acknowledge “a chair” to be unique must therefore be only the circumstance when it exhibits singular rule. In this case, we may say that this object is genuinely unique, since under this condition, we note that the object escapes the general classification as a chair - or any other general concept we may offer as a heading under which this object may fall.

The point about singular rules is that their structure exhibits the duality of figure and background or that of the “what” and the “how”. This structure, as we have shown, entails that the “how” and the “what” are interchangeable. And hence the “how”, the way in which the genuinely unique chair-like object serves its purpose, would equally well function as the “what” i.e. what this object does or serves. In switching the roles of “what” and “how” for this object, we would see it no longer as a chair, but rather as something else, that is, something new would be brought up to the surface or to the foreground - by way, let us say, of utilizing the chair-like-qualities of this object. In such a case, the “chair” would rightfully make the case for its being unique and hence we would acknowledge it as a work of art.

I think it is only appropriate to introduce here two beautiful art works. Two chair-like singular rules: one is Duchamp’s (**fig. 3**) on the left and the other is Mona Hatoum’s on the right (**fig. 4**). The analysis we offered of singular rules - as well as the interplay of figure and background - is vividly present in both works. In Duchamp the chair competes-with and completes-the the bicycles’ wheel and with Hatoum we have the wheelchair and the hospital-food-tray association communicate in a similar fashion.

other hand, we clearly feel that there is something unique and singular about this work. Thus, I think that Escher’s picture is neither Kitsch nor a work of art (nor a work of science, as some would suggest). Without arguing any further, I would suggest it belongs to the domain of Philosophy.



Fig. 3: Marcel Duchamp



Fig. 4: Mona Hatoum

The point about particulars we should note is that they fall under general concepts whose extensions have as members potentially and as a matter of fact more than one particular. This says of a particular which is not singular rule that it does not present a real case of uniqueness. Science, for example, treats all particulars as falling under non-singular concepts and in this way it obliterates their claim for uniqueness. We could, for sure, resist this over sweeping tendency towards generalization, the subjecting as it were of nature and our immediate surroundings to our concepts and needs, e.g. we may consider an element of our surrounding or of nature unique, as something that does not fall under a concept. But in so doing, in considering for example the scenic view of a landscape unique and inimitable, we actually treat it as a singular rule, that is, we treat it as art. This is where nature presents itself as art, as an ideal or as a model for what art is or should be about. This introduces art's role in society as a constant reminder of nature's uniqueness and hence also as a reminder of the uniqueness of our lives. In that art presents itself as a counterforce against social institutions like the sciences, whose task can be viewed as that of the enslavement of nature to our concepts and pragmatic needs. This is the exact sense in which we could - without falling into a cliché - say that it is art that sets nature and therefore us free.

This also presents the real significance of art and art sensibility and education to our lives, since it may be viewed as the sensibility required for us to be able to observe uniqueness, against a background - science and the practicality of life - that seems to force on us a world view, within its frame genuine uniqueness has little role to play. Here also, we must note, lies the intimate bond between ethics and aesthetics, since the ethical dilemma must also be conceived as a singular scenario that escapes a labeling under general headings or concepts.

In conclusion, we may say that the idea of singular rule offers us also an insight into the ways in which diverse concepts and social forces are at work together, completing and making sense of each other. In center place, as was hinted in these concluding remarks, is the quintessential opposition between the sciences and the arts, as given in terms of the enslavement of nature versus the setting free of nature; as well as the interplay between the ideas of freedom, genuine uniqueness and the question of the meaning of art as well as of life.

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