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Abstract: Arthur Danto argued from the premise that artworks are essentially cognitive to the conclusion that they are incidentally aesthetic. I wonder why Danto, and the very many of us he persuaded, came to believe that the cognitive and the aesthetic oppose one another. I argue, contrary to Danto’s historical claims, that the cognitive and the aesthetic did not come into opposition until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and that they were brought into opposition for reasons of art-critical expediency rather than philosophical necessity. I conclude that a robustly cognitive notion of the aesthetic remains an option for us.

Title: Intelligible Beauty

I. *Introduction*. I join with Professor Schellekens in seeking to vindicate the practice of ascribing beauty to objects that address themselves to intellect rather than sense. Because we both believe there was a time when philosophers understood how purely intelligible objects might be beautiful, we both attempt to vindicate that practice by appealing to the history of philosophy. The unlikely hero of Professor Schellekens’s excursion into history is Christian Wolff, an early modern figure all but forgotten by present-day aestheticians; the unlikely hero of mine is Wolff’s equally forgotten contemporary, Francis Hutcheson. Professor Schellekens gives Wolff a starring role because she believes that we can vindicate the practice of ascribing beauty to purely intelligible objects by restoring Wolff’s cognitivist account of aesthetic pleasure, an account she takes to have been displaced by the non-cognitivist accounts of Hume and Kant. But Hutcheson’s account of aesthetic pleasure is no more cognitivist than Hume’s or Kant’s and this did not prevent him from giving purely intelligible beauty pride of place in his aesthetic theory. Nor can I see why it should have: the practice of ascribing beauty to purely intelligible objects needs vindicating, it seems to me, because beauty is a sensible property and purely intelligible objects, by definition, have no sensible properties. If that’s right, vindicating the practice requires nothing less than an explanation of how an object that has no sensible properties has one, or, putting the point less paradoxically, it requires an explanation of how what we mean when we say that an object is purely intelligible is consistent with its being beautiful, given what we mean when we say that beauty is a sensible property. Hutcheson supplies that explanation, or so I shall argue.

II. *Theoretical Revolution*. Though my historical narrative will eventually extend back to Antiquity, it begins with Arthur Danto’s 1964 essay ‘The Artworld.’ There Danto asks us to consider ‘certain episodes in the history of art’ in light of ‘certain episodes in the history of science’, which he describes as episodes in which

a conceptual revolution is being effected and [in which] refusal to countenance certain facts … is due to the fact that a well-established, or least widely credited theory is being threatened in such a way that all coherence goes. (1964, p. 573)

Danto does not name which scientific revolutions we are to regard as sources of illumination, but, given that ‘The Artworld’ appeared just two years after the publication of Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, we may surmise that he has in mind episodes that preoccupied Kuhn, episodes which Kuhn associates with the names of Copernicus, Newton, Lavoisier, and Einstein (1962/1996, p. 6). As for the artistic revolutions to be illuminated, Danto indicates two: one is the revolution by which the Post-Impressionists overthrew the idea that works of art are essentially copies of reality, replacing it with the idea that works of art are formal creations in their own right (1964, pp. 573-4); the other is the revolution by which Dadaists and Pop Artists overthrew the idea that works of art are essentially aesthetic, installing in its place the idea that works of art are essentially cognitive (1964, pp. 574-5, 580-81).

The latter of these art-historical revolutions is of greater moment for Danto, who wrote ‘The Artworld’ not merely to document this revolution but to spread its influence to philosophical circles. Here is how Danto later recalls the event that prompted his writing of ‘The Artworld’:

I had … been overwhelmed by a 1964 exhibition … in which Andy Warhol displayed a large number of wooden boxes painted to resemble the cartons in which Brillo pads were packed and shipped from their place of manufacture to the stores in which they were sold. I was struck by the question of how it was possible for Warhol’s boxes to be works of art while their counterparts in everyday life were but utilitarian containers with no artistic pretensions whatsoever. Aesthetics seemed to bear on this issue not at all, since the two sets of boxes, which seemed to have distinct philosophical identities, so resembled one another that it seemed scarcely credible that one of them should have aesthetic qualities the other lacked. So aesthetics simply dropped out of the equation. (2003, p. 3)

[A]esthetics could not explain why [Warhol’s pile of boxes] was a work of fine art [while the stockroom pile was] not, since for all practical purposes they were aesthetically indiscernible: if one was beautiful, the other one had to be beautiful, since they looked just alike. (2003, p. 7)

These considerations led Danto to conclude that it was time to retire the aesthetic theory of art, well-established since the eighteenth century but increasingly unable to countenance twentieth-century facts. He proposed to supplant it with a cognitivist theory of art according to which works of art embody meanings accessible only to those who bring to them the right cognitive background, that is, the right grounding in art history and theory. It is the fact that Warhol’s stack of Brillo boxes embodies this kind of meaning, while the grocer’s perceptually indiscernible stack does not, that explains the arthood of the former and the mere objecthood of the latter.

III. *Theoretical Beauty.* That Danto succeeded in his revolutionary aims is a matter of historical fact. The principle that works of art are not essentially aesthetic but instead essentially cognitive soon became less a matter of philosophical debate than a common starting point from which philosophical debate could proceed. Yet, if Kuhn is right, it is possible to wonder whether Danto invites transgression of his own principle when he compares artistic revolutions to scientific. Danto seems to treat scientific revolutions as if they were purely cognitive affairs—one theory overthrows another simply because of its greater capacity to account for the facts (1964, p. 573). That is not Kuhn's view. Kuhn finds that purely cognitive considerations are ‘neither individually nor collectively compelling’, which leads him to think that

Men have been converted by [aesthetic considerations] when most of the articulable technical arguments pointed the other way. When first introduced, neither Copernicus’ astronomical theory nor De Broglie’s theory of matter had many other significant grounds of appeal. Even today Einstein’s general theory attracts men principally on aesthetic grounds, an appeal that few people outside of mathematics have been able to

feel. (1962/1996, p. 168)

Now it would be a strange development if aesthetics played an essential role in scientific revolutions and an inessential one in artistic. But the world is strange, and besides Kuhn might be wrong. James McAllister argues that Kuhn is wrong—that aesthetic considerations do not drive scientific revolutions, as Kuhn thought, but rather hinder them, the aesthetic appeal of the incoming theory never being found to override the aesthetic appeal of the outgoing until overriding empirical evidence has been presented (1999, p. 138). But whether aesthetic considerations favour new theories over old or old theories over new, Kuhn and McAllister agree that aesthetic considerations favour some theories over others, and this is what spells trouble for Danto’s view. Danto maintains that aesthetics cannot explain the artistic difference between Warhol's boxes and those in the stockroom because ‘they look[] just alike’ (2003, p. 7). But every scientific theory looks just like every other scientific theory for the simple reason that that no scientific theory looks like anything. So if Danto is right, aesthetics could never explain why scientists favour some scientific theories over others, but if Kuhn and McAllister are right, that is exactly what aesthetics does.

Are Kuhn and McAllister right? To many aestheticians, apparently, it has seemed as if attributions of aesthetic value to scientific theories are rare enough, or perhaps hesitant enough, that an account of aesthetic value need not make room for them. Perhaps this is because such attributions are both rare and hesitant among aestheticians. The theories to which scientists regularly and unhesitatingly attribute aesthetic properties belong by and large to the exact sciences, principally to theoretical physics, and are therefore expressed in a mathematical language few aestheticians understand. Consider Einstein’s general theory of relativity. Kuhn tells us, in the passage already quoted, that ‘few people outside of mathematics have been able to feel [its aesthetic appeal]’. For those with the right grounding in mathematics, however, its aesthetic appeal is not controversial: the general theory is, as one author has recently put it, ‘the gold standard for beauty in physics’ (Holt 2006, p. 80). The beauty of other theories is obviously more controversial. Many physicists apparently find string theory to be extraordinarily beautiful and regard its beauty as a criterion of its truth; others disagree, denying both that there is particular beauty in string theory and that there is any connection, in any case, between a theory’s being beautiful and its being true (Holt 2006, p. 90). But no physicist, as far as I have been able to tell, has denied that string theory, or any other scientific theory, is beautiful on the grounds that theories, being purely intelligible, cannot be beautiful. Every physicist, it seems, knows better than that.

Suppose that you, like Danto, trace every aesthetic difference to a sensible one. What might you say in light of the behavior of the physicists, many of whom seem to regard making aesthetic appraisals of purely intelligible objects as part of what it is to do physics?

One strategy is to compromise with the physicists. Why not allow for two equally legitimate notions of the aesthetic: a narrow one, which binds the aesthetic to the deliverances of the five senses, and a broad one, which does not? I see no reason why the physicists should resist such a proposal, but Danto must. That the two sets of Brillo boxes look just alike is supposed to show that aesthetics cannot explain what makes art art, not that one of two equally fine notions of the aesthetic cannot. I presume Danto intended his comparison between sets of boxes to accomplish what it did in fact accomplish, which is to set us searching for a non-aesthetic theory of art, not for an aesthetic theory broad enough to accommodate art.

Another strategy is to claim that the physicists can only be speaking metaphorically when they use aesthetic terms to describe their theories (Zangwill 1998, pp. 78-9). They cannot be speaking literally since, by definition, aesthetic terms have literal application only to objects of sense. The term *aesthetic*, after all, derives from the Greek for sensory perception. To make an aesthetic judgment, by definition, is to make a sensory judgment. To be an aesthetic object, by definition, is to be an object of sense. What, after all, can an aesthetic object be if Einstein’s general theory is one?

Now I think the physicists would be surprised to learn that their aesthetic talk is metaphorical. They seem to think they have got hold of the real thing. Take Kepler. Surely he does not take himself to be speaking metaphorically when he refers to mathematics as ‘the archetype of the beauty of the world’ (cited in Heisenberg 1974, p. 182). His is the self-consciously Pythagorean or Platonic view according to which the beauty of the visible world is a derivative form, a shadow of a deeper, truer beauty belonging to the underlying mathematical structure of things (Heisenberg 1974, pp. 168-74). Or take this remark of Poincaré’s:

The scientist does not study nature because it is useful; he studies it because he delights in it, and he delights in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing, and if nature were not worth knowing, life would not be worth living. Of course I do not here speak of that beauty which strikes the senses, the beauty of qualities and of appearances … I mean that profounder beauty which comes from the harmonious order of the parts and which a pure intelligence can grasp. (1913, pp. 366-7)

Poincaré may be right or wrong in holding that it is ‘that profounder beauty … which a pure intelligence can grasp’, and not ‘that beauty which strikes the senses’, which makes nature worth knowing and life worth living. But he is either literally right or literally wrong.

This then is our puzzle. Treating the physicists’ utterances as metaphorical does them injustice. But we don’t seem to know how to treat them literally, since once we deny any relation between the sensory and the aesthetic we lose our grip on the latter. We gain little asserting that scientific theories literally are aesthetic objects when the cost is not knowing what we mean.

IV. *The Sense of Beauty*. It is in order to know what we mean that I turn to the first treatise of Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, one of the founding works of the field of modern aesthetics. Nowadays we remember that work, if we remember it at all, mainly for two doctrines: one, that it is in virtue of our possession of what Hutcheson calls a ‘sense of beauty’ that we are capable of finding things beautiful, and, two, that it is in virtue of their possession of what Hutcheson calls ‘uniformity amidst variety’ (roughly, ordered complexity) that objects are capable of being found beautiful by us. But Hutcheson’s treatise deserves to be known also for its treatment—perhaps the most extensive in the philosophical literature—of the beauty of mathematic and scientific theories. Hutcheson accords such theories a privileged status among aesthetic objects. It isn’t so much that the most beautiful of them—Hutcheson singles out Newton’s gravitation principle and certain of Euclid’s propositions for especially high praise—are among the most beautiful things known to him (1726/2004, p. 36). It is rather that our capacity to find things beautiful, and their capacity to be so found, have their purposein our having a motive to know the universe in the way that only mathematical and scientific theories make it known. Hutcheson’s idea is that in a universe as ordered and complex as ours, ‘[t]he manner of Knowledge by universal Theorems … must be most convenient for Beings of limited Understanding and Power’ (1726/2004, p. 79). But in that case a benevolent God who wishes us to know his creation may be expected to provide us with an immediate motive to know it. Since theories necessarily unite uniformity and variety—a theory simply is the unification of various particulars under a single principle (1726/2004, p. 36)—Hutcheson conjectures that ‘the Author of Nature has determin’d us … to receive from uniform Objects the Pleasures of Beauty and Harmony, to excite us to the Pursuit of Knowledge, and to reward us for it’ (1726/2004, p. 99). Of course this does not commit Hutcheson to the view that only theories are beautiful. But it does commit him to the view that when something that is not a theory is beautiful—a work of art, for example—it is beautiful because it is theory-like. And it does commit him to the view that if anything is literally beautiful, a theory is.

So Hutcheson anticipates Poincaré in holding beauty to be a motive to exact science. But he goes beyond Poincaré in holding our having such a motive to explain our capacity to be conscious of beauty at all. We have a sense of beauty so that we may apprehend the beauty of theories. But theories are immaterial. They are objects of intellect rather than of sense. So what can Hutcheson mean when he talks of our sensing their beauty?

Hutcheson begins his treatise by warning against an oversimple picture of the mind, prevalent in his day and ours, that sharply divides the mind between a lower sensory component and a higher rational one. He brings out the inadequacy of this picture by remarking two ways in which the operation of the five senses differs from the operation of reason. One is that whereas the operation of reason is mediated by inferences, and so occurs in steps, the five senses are not so mediated in their operation, which occurs all at once. Hutcheson marks this difference by saying that the five senses operate *immediately* whereas reason operates *mediately*. Hutcheson marks a second and more complicated difference by saying that whereas the five bodily senses operate *externally* or *directly* or *antecedently* upon the world, reason operates *internally* or *reflexively* or *subsequently* upon it (1726/2004, p. 24; 1747, pp. 12-13; 1755, p. 48). To say that the operations of reason are internal (or reflexive or subsequent) is to say that reason depends for its objects on the prior operation of other mental powers. Unless some other power, or powers, operates to place some object before the mind, there is nothing about which to reason. But while this dependence may seem a limitation on reason, it is compensated by the freedom with which reason ranges over those objects that have been placed before the mind. The situation is opposite with the five senses. They, being external (or direct or antecedent) in their operation, are capable all on their own of placing objects before the mind. But each is circumscribed in its operation to a very particular kind of object. You can see colors, hear sounds, and smell odors, but you can’t see sounds, hear odors, or smell colors, let alone see, hear, or smell Euclid’s 47th proposition or Newton’s theory of gravity. You can however reason about any object you can bring before your mind, from those you bring before it through the simple and automatic operations of sense to those you bring before it only through the extended collaboration of every mental power you possess.

If we now ask how the power by which we find things beautiful—the power known in Hutcheson’s time as *the faculty of taste*—fits into this scheme, Hutcheson’s answer is that it operates with all the immediacy of external sense and all the internality of reason. Its immediacy is manifest in the fact that we do not infer or otherwise figure out that things are beautiful, but are rather struck all at once by their beauty. For Hutcheson this consideration suffices to justify grouping the faculty of taste among the senses:

This superior Power of Perception is justly called a Sense, because of its Affinity to the other Senses in this, that the Pleasure does not arise from Knowledge of Principles, Proportions, Causes, or of the Usefulness of the Object; but strikes us at first with the Idea of Beauty. (1726/2004, p. 25)

The internality of the faculty of taste is manifest in its dependence on the operation of other faculties for its objects, or, as Hutcheson puts it, in the idea of beauty’s arising only ‘upon the previous Reception and Comparison of various sensible Perceptions … or intellectual ideas, when we find Uniformity … among them’ (1742/2002, p. 16). And its internality is also manifest in its capacity to operate over a range of objects, or, as Hutcheson puts it, in the fact that we are able to ‘discern a sort of Beauty’ even in objects ‘where our External Senses are not much concerned’, such as ‘Theorems, or universal Truths’ (1726/2004, p. 24).

So perhaps this is what an aesthetic object can be if Einstein’s general theory is one. It can be what Hutcheson calls an object of internal sense. Bringing Einstein’s theory before the mind may be an intellectually heroic task. But the difficulty of bringing an object before the mind is no argument against the immediacy of the judgment pronouncing it beautiful once that difficulty has been overcome. Hume, who follows after Hutcheson in regarding the faculty of taste as an internal sense, makes this point with characteristic clarity:

[I]n order to pave the way for [a sentiment of internal sense], and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained.… [I]n many orders of beauty . . . it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment. (1751/1986, p.173)

Perhaps we may sum up the difference between the aesthetic theory Hutcheson develops and the one Danto applies by saying that for Danto an object is made aesthetic according to the immediacy of the process that brings it before the mind, whereas for Hutcheson an object is made aesthetic according to the immediacy of the process that pronounces upon it once there.

V. *Pretty Much the Entire History of Aesthetics, from Hutcheson to Plato*. Perhaps it will be thought that Danto’s narrow, external-sense-bound aesthetic theory is historically the rule, whereas the broad, intellect-embracing theory developed by Hutcheson is historically exceptional. This certainly seems to be Danto’s position, given that he regards Duchamp’s readymades as a repudiation of ‘pretty much the entire history of aesthetics, from Plato to the present’ (2013, p. 26). But Hutcheson is hardly the first to hold objects of intellect to be at least as capable of beauty as are objects of external sense. Hutcheson acknowledges a philosophical debt to Shaftesbury in the Preface to his *Inquiry* (1726/2004, pp. 9, 12). One thing he borrows from Shaftesbury is the notion of an inward, intellectual sense by which we grasp beauty, though this notion is relatively undeveloped in Shaftesbury (Cooper 1711/2001, pp. 17, 238). Another is the idea that objects of intellect have primacy over material objects as objects of beauty, though this idea takes on a more extreme from in Shaftesbury, who holds the beauty we discover in material objects to be nothing more than reflection of the purely intelligible beauty of the Divine Mind (Cooper 1711/2001, pp. 225-228). Nor are these two doctrines—the doctrine of a hierarchy of beautiful objects in which lower material manifestations point beyond themselves to higher immaterial manifestations, coupled with the doctrine of some sort of inward, intellectual sense required to grasp the latter—original to Shaftesbury, but rather form part of his neo-Platonic inheritance, having been central to aesthetic thought throughout the Renaissance and Middle Ages (Eco 1986, pp. 22, 57- 8). Indeed, the gap between the purely intelligible beauty favoured by medieval thinkers and the exclusively material one favoured by present-day aestheticians has not gone unremarked by medievalists. Umberto Eco takes this gap to express a cultural difference:

The Medievals did in fact conceive of a beauty that was purely intelligible, the beauty of moral harmony and metaphysical splendor…. [Intelligble] beauty was in medieval experience a moral and psychological reality; if it is not treated in this light we fail to do justice to their culture.… [T]he realm of the aesthetic was much larger than it is nowadays. (1986, p. 5)

E. R. Curtius is more willing to place blame on one side:

‘Contemporary’ man places an exaggerated value on art because he has lost his feeling for the intelligible beauty which the neo-Platonists and the Medievals possessed…. Here we are dealing with a type of beauty of which [contemporary] Aesthetics knows nothing. (1953, p. 224, n. 20)

I think there is something both to embrace and to resist in each of these passages. Eco is right to cast the difference between the Medievals and us as a cultural one, but only so long as by *us* he means those of us who belong to a certain subculture of artists, curators, critics, theorists, and philosophers living in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. It is relative to the diminished realm of the aesthetic favoured by this group, and to those who have fallen under its influence, that the medieval realm of the aesthetic is much larger. After all, no present-day physicist needs a primer on medieval culture to have the idea of purely intelligible beauty restored to her. I therefore think Curtius is right to suggest that it is contemporary aesthetics in particular that has forgotten what the Medievals knew, and that we have forgotten what they knew because we have trained our attention too exclusively on art. But the problem is not so much that contemporary aesthetics places too much value on art, as if we knew how much value to place on it. The problem is rather that contemporary aesthetics is overly impressed with recent developments in the history of art, particularly the developments that fueled the two art-conceptual revolutions, formalist and anti-aesthetic, to which Danto directs our attention in the ‘Artworld’. (I mention these two art-conceptual revolutions in Section II and say more about them in Section VI.)

There is, moreover, a danger in over-identifying the notion of intelligible beauty with the Medievals, who after all took it from the Ancients. Plotinus regards ‘the beauties of the realm of sense’ as nothing more than ‘shadow-pictures’ or ‘fugitives’ from a higher world (1991, 1.6.3), holding that those who wish to behold beauty in its highest manifestations ‘must close [their] eyes [to material beauty] and call instead upon another vision’, an ‘inner vision’ by which they may grasp the highest beauty of all, the ‘Absolute Beauty in Its essential integrity’ (1991, 1.6.7-9). Plotinus’s talk of the ‘Absolute Beauty’ is an allusion to Diotima’s talk of ‘the universal beauty’, as related by Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*. Diotima there explains that while love for beauty may begin with love for the beauty of some human body, it should progress to love for the beauty of the soul, compared to which bodily beauty is ‘as nothing’, and, ultimately, to love for ‘the universal beauty [which ] dawns upon … inward sight’(1989, 210a–211d).

It therefore appears that the history of aesthetics from Plato to Hutcheson is largely a history according to which beauty is primarily a property of intelligible objects, grasped through non-inferential operations of the intellect. To regard it as a history according to which beauty is exclusively a property of material objects, grasped exclusively by the senses of sight and hearing, is to commit the error against which Eco and Curtius warn us. It is to fail to do justice to the theories of early aestheticians by reading into them a restrictive conception of the aesthetic that did not gain favour among aestheticians until much later. Just when did this restrictive conception gain favour? And how did it manage to gain favour so as not merely to displace its expansive rival, but to expunge its very memory?

VI. *Pretty Much the Entire History of Aesthetics, from Hutcheson to the Present*. I think we can safely say that the restrictive conception did not gain favour anytime during the eighteenth century, not at least in the English-speaking world. I have observed that Hume follows after Hutcheson in regarding the faculty of taste as an internal sense. So too does Reid, who moreover revives the neo-Platonic, Shaftesburian view that material objects, by themselves, can be neither sublime nor beautiful:

Upon the whole I humbly apprehend that true [sublimity] … is found, originally and properly in qualities of mind; that it is discerned, in objects of sense, only by reflection, as the light we perceive in the moon and the planets is truly the light of the sun; and that those who look for grandeur in mere matter, seek the living among the dead. (1813, p. 531)

Though Archibald Alison, author of perhaps the last great British theory of taste, breaks from Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Reid regarding the internal sensibility of beauty, he emphatically retains what he refers to as their ‘Platonism’:

The opinion I have now stated coincides, in a great degree, with a DOCTRINE that appears very early to have been distinguished the PLATONIC school; … which has been maintained in this country, by several writers of eminence—by Lord Shaftesbury, Dr. Hutcheson, Dr. Akenside, and Dr. Spence, but which has no where so firmly and so philosophically been maintained as by Dr. Reid …. The doctrine to which I allude, is, that matter is not beautiful in itself, but derives its beauty from the expression of MIND. (1811, p. 418)

Alison’s *Essays* appeared in 1790, the year Kant published his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and here it will seem that we have at last arrived at a work that breaks from the Platonic school to which Alison refers. In §§13-14 Kant can seem to assert a perceptual formalism according to which nothing is relevant to a pure aesthetic judgment except the play of shapes in space and sensations in time (1790/2000, p. 107-11). There is debate among Kant scholars as to how narrow a formalism these passages endorse (Zuckert 2006). But even granting them straightforwardly to endorse the narrowest of formalisms, we cannot grant Kant’s aesthetic theory to be straightforwardly formalist without ignoring both the distinction Kant goes on to make between free and dependent beauty in §16 and the theory of the fine arts he goes on to articulate in §§43-54 (1790/2000, pp. 114-16, 182-212; see Costello 2013 for discussion). Free beauty is beauty a thing has merely in virtue of its perceptual features and so irrespective of the kind of thing it is. Dependent beauty is beauty a thing has respective of the kind of thing it is and so not merely in virtue of its perceptual features. Artistic beauty is a variety of dependent beauty, being the kind of beauty a work of art has respecting the kind of thing a work of art is (1790/2000, p. 190). And the kind of thing a work of art is, according to Kant, is one that aspires to the exhibition of ‘aesthetic ideas’—ideas incapable of direct expression and whose content cannot be exemplified in sensory experience, such as the ideas of God, the soul, and freedom (1790/2000, p. 192-5). Because some arts are generally better than others at exhibiting aesthetic ideas, and because artistic beauty just is the capacity to exhibit such ideas, it follows that some arts are generally more beautiful than others. The most beautiful of the arts is poetry, given its unrivaled capacity among the arts to penetrate into the realm of ideas (1790/2000, pp. 203-5). Music, given its incapacity to play with anything but sensation, is the least beautiful (1790/2000, pp. 205-7).

If this is an accurate outline of Kant’s theory of artistic beauty, it should be clear that it constitutes less a break from Platonic intellectualism than Kant’s own particular twist on it. Though Kant does not hold to the traditional Platonic line that lower beauties of sense point beyond themselves to higher beauties of intellect, he does hold that all artistic beauties point beyond themselves to higher objects of intellect, and he does rank artistic beauties as such according to their capacity to so point. And this Kantian strain of Platonism persists in the aesthetic theories of Hegel and Schopenhauer. Hegel and Schopenhauer, for instance, both follow Kant in ranking artistic beauties according to their cognitive import; both follow Kant in ranking poetic beauty at or near the top and architectural beauty at or near the bottom because of the former’s capacity and the latter’s incapacity to express or represent mindedness (Hegel 1835/1975, pp. 626, 888, 939; Schopenhauer 1818/1969, pp. 213-8; 242-55). Schopenhauer’s ranking breaks with Kant’s in one telling respect, however: whereas Kant places musical beauty at the bottom of the scale because it addresses itself to sense merely, Schopenhauer places it at the very top—if not off the scale altogether—because of its unrivaled capacity to directly represent ‘the innermost being of the world’ (1818/1969, p. 255-67). History’s judgment as to who is right is complicated. A great deal of what has become the standard classical concert repertoire—Mozart’s last great works, Haydn’s best-known works, most all of Beethoven’s compositions—was written between the publication of the third *Critique* in 1790and that of *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818. By 1818 music had taken on a cultural importance that made its status as a very great art very hard to deny, and this importance only grew over the remainder of nineteenth century as the achievements of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Chopin, and others, piled on. But if Schopenhauer’s high opinion of music won out, his explanation of its greatness did not. However influential Schopenhauer’s writings on music have been, his claim that music is a representational art—indeed the representational art, *par excellence*—is difficult to sustain absent a commitment to his idiosyncratic metaphysics. By contrast, Kant’s claim that absolute music has no representational content has seemed plausible on its surface. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that a compromise view emerged according to which music’s evident greatness as an art owes precisely to its having no extra-musical content. It is a version of this view that Hanslick advocates in *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854/1986); it is a version of this view that underwrites Pater’s remark that ‘all art constantly aspires to the condition of music’ (1888/1986, p 86); it is a version of this view that Bell presupposes in urging that content has no more significance in the visual arts than it has in music (1914, pp. 30-35); and it is a version of this view that Greenberg takes for granted when he claims, in his 1961 essay ‘Modernist Painting,’ that representational content lies outside of painting’s ‘proper area of competence,’ which encompasses only those features given in ‘pure optical experience’ (1993, p. 89).

Hanslick, Bell, and Greenberg, unlike the other figures I have mentioned in this historical sketch, were all professional critics as well as theorists, and the theories of art they developed both informed and were informed by the specific art-critical causes to which they devoted themselves. Hanslick’s cause was to advocate for the pure music of Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms over the dramatically impure music of Wagner; Bell’s was to champion the Post-Impressionists, especially Cézanne; Greenberg’s was to defend the abstract expressionists, especially Pollock. But it is difficult to theorize well about the nature and value of some form of art while advocating effectively for some particular development within it. Your advocacy tends to warp your theorizing; you are apt to be overly impressed with the artistic developments with which you yourself are concerned; you are apt to generalize from the nature and value of the works for which you advocate to the nature and value of all works of that same form, and from there to the nature and value of the arts in general. If it is clear in hindsight that the artists for whom Hanslick, Bell, and Greenberg advocated were worth advocating for, it is equally clear that the theories by which they advocated are myopic. There is nothing wrong, of course, with advancing the works of Brahms, Cézanne, and Pollock as counter-examples to the mimetic theory of art. But Hanslick, Bell, and Greenberg had grander designs. Hanslick was not content to argue that a Brahm’s sextet could be musically good simply because of the tonal movement of its forms; he wished to argue that a Wagner opera could not be musically good because it puts its tonally moving forms to dramatic use. Bell was not content to argue that a Cézanne still life could be artistically good simply because of the way it combines colors and lines; he wished to argue that a Rembrandt portrait could not be artistically good in virtue of what it reveals about the inner life of its sitter. Greenberg was not content to argue that a Pollock splatter-painting could be artistically good simply because of the way it calls attention to its flatness, to the shape of its enclosure, and to the paint splattered upon its canvas; he wished to argue that any painting that goes beyond calling attention to such features trespasses on terrain proper to some other discipline. In short, Hanslick, Bell, and Greenberg—and they, of course, are merely examples of a larger art-cultural tendency—were not content to argue that works could be good merely in virtue of their sensible properties; they wished to argue that works could be good only in virtue of their sensible properties; they wished to argue not for an expanded conception of artistic value, but for a restricted one, one that excluded works insufficiently like the works they promoted. But because it had never occurred to anyone to question whether artistic value is a species of aesthetic value, a restricted conception of artistic value required a correspondingly restricted conception of aesthetic value. And so the broad, intellectual conception of the aesthetic, the one we have traced from Plato to the nineteenth century, became a theoretical encumbrance, came under pressure, and eventually gave way to the narrow, formalist conception that Danto presupposed as a matter of conceptual truth in 1964. The means by which the narrow conception of the aesthetic unseated the broad were less a matter of explicit argumentation than of self-induced amnesia, achieved by taking a very selective approach to the history of aesthetics. The result is the state to which Curtius and Eco testify. We are no longer able to conceive of the intelligible beauty which the Ancients, Medievals, and Early Moderns knew, and which physicists and mathematicians, shielded by their unconcern for recent artistic developments, still know. Our realm of the aesthetic is much smaller than theirs.

But it doesn’t have to be. Danto urged us to move beyond aesthetics on the grounds that aesthetics is without the intellectual resources to grasp the thought Warhol embodied in his brillo boxes, and so without the intellectual resources to grasp the artistic difference between those boxes and their stockroom counterparts. Danto is free to use the term *aesthetics* any way he likes, but if he means to suggest that the philosophical discipline of aesthetics, the one that had its golden age in the eighteenth century, has left us without the theoretical resources to make sense of Warhol, he’s wrong. If, as Kuhn tells us, there is an aesthetic difference between the theories of Einstein and Newton, or between those of Copernicus and Ptolemy, I see no reason why there cannot be an aesthetic difference between Warhol’s boxes and the ones piled up at the grocery store. The problem is not that aesthetics cannot tell the difference between one set of boxes and another. The problem is that we can no longer tell the difference between the aesthetic and the cosmetic when the difference between them is literally a world.

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