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Aesthetic Judgments, Artworks, and Functional Beauty

In this paper I explore the tension between the view that art is to be appreciated for its own sake and the apparent fact that much art is made to serve extrinsic functions, such as the propitiation of the gods, the enrichment of ritual, the communication of religious and other lore, the illustration of virtue and vice, the glorification of its owners, and so on.

Because the idea of art for art's sake was not prominent prior to the nineteenth century in the West, and because the art (so-called) of most small-scale, pre-industrial societies is entirely functional, some authors deal with this tension by arguing that only fine art, as it developed in post-Enlightenment Europe, truly qualifies as art.[1] Art occurs globally now only because Western culture has colonized the world.[2]

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[1] See Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001).

[2] Moreover, the claims of mass and popular Western art have also been challenged. While these are recent products of the West, they lack the seriousness and "uselessness" that came to be central to the modern

I prefer to acknowledge the music, dance, drama, literature, and picturing found in all cultures as art, and to regard Western fine art as one species within a wider genus that also includes religious art, domestic art, and so on, though I do not argue for the position here. (I explain later how the current paper is relevant the wider debate about whether non-Western cultures have art.) This leaves two options as regards the tension mentioned above. I could challenge the intuition that art is to be appreciated for its own sake, arguing that this applies only to a subset of otherwise non-functional artworks. Or I could try to demonstrate that the tension is more apparent than real, because the notion of appreciating art for its own sake need not be at odds with understanding art as serving extrinsic, practical functions. In taking the second line, I develop a new model of the nature of aesthetic judgments concerning what I call an item's functional beauty.

Most philosophers who debate whether art is to be appreciated for its own sake, and what this entails, have no interest in considering the art-status of items produced in other cultures. They focus instead on the aesthetic theories of the eighteenth century in which such ideas came to the fore. In particular, they turn to Kant's distinction between free and dependent beauty and the interpretation put on this in the discussion of art by theorists early in the twentieth century. Though my primary concern is not with the history of ideas, it is important to provide the background against which the discussion

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concept. For critical discussion of such claims, see Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

that follows should be situated. Later, I outline the distinction between judgments of free and dependent beauty and argue that neither adequately characterizes aesthetic judgments concerning items in which non-aesthetic and aesthetic goals are mutually supportive.

Aesthetics versus the philosophy of art

In section 16 of the Critique of Judgment of 1790, Kant famously distinguishes between two kinds of beauty, free and dependent. The dependent beauty of a thing is the beauty it has as a thing of a certain kind with a certain function. To recognize or assess something's dependent beauty, one must first classify it as falling within a kind and then consider the extent to which its function is achieved. By contrast, the free beauty of a thing is independent of its kind and function. Recognizing or assessing something's free beauty does not involve bringing it under a determinate concept; indeed, naming and classifying it could get in the way of perceiving its free beauty. Because free beauty is independent of concerns with functionality and conceptual classification, and neither is it a matter of merely sensuous gratification, its source is identified as the pleasingness of its forms (there being little else left to items abstracted from their agreeability, their purposes, roles, or uses, and their identifying classes). The disinterested perception of free beauty is cognitively based, even while it does not involve conceptual categorization, because it rests on the free play of the imagination and the understanding.

The interpretation and application of Kant's ideas is fraught with controversy.[3] Fortunately, my concern is more with the legacy of the

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[3] For representative exchanges on the distinction between free and dependent beauty, see Robert Wicks, 'Dependent Beauty as the Appreciation of Teleological Style', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55 (1997), pp. 387-400 and 'Can Tattooed Faces be Beautiful? Limits on the Restriction of Forms in Dependent Beauty', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57 (1999), pp. 361-3 versus Paul Guyer, 'Dependent Beauty Revisited: A Reply to Wicks', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57 (1999), pp. 357-61, or Ruth Lorand 'Free and Dependent Beauty: A Puzzling Issue', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 29 (1989), pp. 32-40 and 'On "Free and Dependent Beauty" - A Rejoinder', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 32 (1992), pp. 250-3 versus Robert Stecker 'Lorand and Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 30 (1990), 71-4. Other discussions include Donald Crawford's *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), Eva Schaper's 'Free and Dependent Beauty', in her *Studies in Kant's Aesthetics*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), pp. 78-98, Geoffrey Scarre's 'Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 21 (1981), pp. 351-62, Denis Dutton's 'Kant and the Conditions of Artistic Beauty', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34 (1994), pp. 226-41, Paul Guyer's *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and 'Free and Adherent Beauty: A Modest Proposal', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42 (2002), pp. 357-66, Marcia Muelder Eaton's 'Kantian and Contextual Beauty', *Journal of Aesthetics*

tradition of theorizing that was initiated by Kant than with Kantian scholarship. Kant's theories were developed (and misinterpreted, no doubt) by subsequent philosophers.

By the early twentieth century, it was widely held that aesthetic judgments, including those made of artworks, involve the adoption of an attitude of distanced, disinterested attention that requires the bracketing out of all knowledge or concern with the item's origin, history, kind, function, or possible usefulness.[4] In other words, aesthetic judgments, including those made of artworks, were interpreted as judgments of free beauty.

In part, these views are a consequence of the nature attributed to aesthetic properties, typical instances of which are unity, balance, integration, lifelessness, serenity, somberness, dynamism, power, vividness, delicacy, triteness, sentimentality, tragedy, grace, daintiness, dumpiness,

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and Art Criticism, 57 (1999), pp. 11-15, Henry Alison's *Kant's Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Philip Mallaband's 'Understanding Kant's Distinction between Free and Dependent Beauty,' *Philosophical Quarterly*, 52 (2002), pp. 66-81, and Nick McAdoo's 'Kant and the Problem of Dependent Beauty', *Kant-Studien*, 93 (2002), pp. 444-52.

4 See Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960).

elegance, garishness, and beauty.[5] (Beauty and its opposites are typically regarded as complex, higher-level properties deriving from the manner in which lower-level aesthetic features combine and interact.) Aesthetic properties were characterized as objective, formal features of the item and as depending on its material properties but unaffected by relations connecting the work to its natal context and circumstances.[6] As such, perception of an item's aesthetic properties depended not on knowledge of the work's background, such as how it fitted with the tradition or what its maker intended, but on focused attention to the material properties that constituted the item as a perceptual object when considered purely for its own sake. Reflection on the item's "genetic" properties was appropriate to study of its sociology or history, but not to its aesthetic appreciation, it was held.

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, some analytic philosophers of art challenged the constellation of ideas that made up the inheritance of Enlightenment aesthetics.[7] It was argued that many properties

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[5] See Frank Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts', *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), pp. 421-50.

[6] See Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York: Harcourt and Brace and World inc., 1958).

[7] Among the key articles in this critique are George Dickie's 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1964), pp. 56-65 and *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), Arthur C. Danto's 'The Artworld',

crucial to the identity and content of artworks, and therefore relevant to art's appreciation as such, are not of the kind traditionally characterized as aesthetic. Call these further appreciation-relevant properties *artistic*. A work's artistic properties derive from such matters as the work's location within the tradition—if and how it is original or unusual, whether it emulates, subverts, rejects, or redirects the default conventions and art practices of the time, the extent to which its use of the tradition is self-conscious, the genres and styles within which it is located, influences to which it is subject—as well as from its title and its use of symbolization, quotation, allusion, parody, irony, allegory, and the like. Traditional aesthetic theory was faulted for not realizing that a piece's artistic properties are as or more significant in its identification and appreciation than are its aesthetic ones. And because a work's artistic properties can be identified only by a person with knowledge of aspects of the piece's treatment and history that are not always apparent in its outward appearance, the traditional account of aesthetic experience and appreciation was also criticized as inadequate to the appreciation of art as such. In light of this critique,

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Journal of Philosophy, 61 (1964), pp. 571-84 and 'Artworks and Real Things', *Theoria*, 39 (1973), pp. 1-17, Kendall L. Walton's 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970), pp. 334-67, and Joseph Margolis's 'Works of Art as Physically Embodied and Culturally Emergent Entities', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 14 (1974), pp. 187-96. More recently, Noël Carroll (op. cit., at pp. 89-109) has suggested that aesthetic attitude theorists have been wrong to take judgments of free beauty as the paradigm for aesthetic judgments about artworks.

accounts of art's identification and appreciation shifted from a narrow focus on the inner psychology and attitudes of its percipient toward a wider recognition of the crucial relevance played by the work's social and historical context, and by the traditions, practices, and conventions surrounding art's creation and reception.[8]

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[8] Moves are underway to rehabilitate the aesthetic—see Alan H. Goldman's 'Aesthetic Qualities and Aesthetic Value', *Journal of Philosophy*, 87 (1990), pp. 23-37, Nick Zangwill's *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), Kathleen M. Higgins's 'Whatever Happened to Beauty? A Response to Danto', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54 (1996), pp. 281-4, Peg Zeglin Brand's 'Beauty Matters', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57 (1999), pp. 1-10, Noël Carroll's 'Art and the Domain of the Aesthetic', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40 (2000), pp. 191-208 and 'Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content', in M. Kieran (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 69-96, James C. Anderson's 'Aesthetic Concepts of Art', in N. Carroll (ed.), *Theories of Art Today* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 65-92, James Shelley's 'The Problem of Non-perceptual Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43 (2003), pp. 363-78, and Gary Iseminger's *The Aesthetic Function of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) and 'The Aesthetic State of Mind', in M. Kieran (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 99-110. Sometimes, this involves widening the franchise of aesthetic properties to encompass those I have called artistic. Such an approach involves a significant

One idea to have survived the revisions that followed the undermining of traditional aesthetics maintains that art lacks practical utility. Any extrinsic use to which it might lend itself is irrelevant to its identity and features *qua* art. Sometimes art is described as lacking a practical function, which perhaps implies that it is useless and therefore worthless. A more accurate account holds that art does have a distinctive function, which is to provide an aesthetically (or artistically) pleasurable experience when contemplated for its own sake.[9] In other words, the value of art is held to be intrinsic and self-regarding.

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departure from the eighteenth-century models with which theorizing about the aesthetic began.

[9] "Pleasure" might not be the best term. There is disagreement among aestheticians over whether that notion is adequate to capture the life enhancing, identity defining value of aesthetic experience—compare Malcolm Budd's *The Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry, and Music* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1995) and Jerrold Levinson's *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) with R.A. Sharpe's 'The Empiricist Theory of Artistic Value', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58 (2000), pp. 321-32)—and there are reservations about whether it is sufficiently compatible with that of understanding, as the cognitive appreciation of art must require—see Robert Stecker's *Interpretation and Construction: Art, Speech, and the Law* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). These are issues I cannot address here. I stick with the present formulation, though it stands in need of

As I have already observed, this view calls into question the status as art of the art-like items created prior to the eighteenth century and in non-Western cultures, because most of these are intended and treated in a utilitarian fashion. They are rarely created and valued for their own sake alone, and disinterested contemplation is not the method by which they are approached and used.

In defending art's universality, I query the model of aesthetic judgment implying that a distinctive feature of art is its lack of extrinsic functionality. Before doing so, I ask what relation holds generally between a thing's functionality and the aesthetic judgments applied to it. I begin by examining the interpretation put upon the notions of free and dependent beauty by post-Kantian aestheticians.

Free beauty

Is there such a thing as free beauty? Is there a kind of beauty that attaches to the object of perception viewed not as of a kind but solely as an individual in its own right?

Consider a beautiful daffodil, dawn sky, and waterfall. Each is beautiful in its own way. This is not merely to observe that there are many ways

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development and refinement before it could be accepted as accounting adequately for the main function of Western high art.

things can be beautiful, because it is apparent that these different ways are not interchangeable. A daffodil that shape-shifted as the waterfall does and shared the dawn sky's blue-blackness is unlikely to strike us as beautiful. A waterfall that took the form and shape of a daffodil would most likely impress us as freakish rather than beautiful. Daffodils, dawn skies, and waterfalls are not likely to be judged beautiful if they depart too far from what is normal for their kind. Instead, they will be seen as odd, weird, and uncanny; at best as curiosities.

This is not to deny that we can be impressed and pleased by the rare instances of a given kind. Magnified size, complexity, fragility, intricacy, or delicacy, for instance, can strike us as beautiful. Among mountains, waterfalls, canyons, and deserts, uncommon height or size is impressive. In snowflakes, birds' feathers, shells, and crystals, an unusually high degree of intricacy or delicacy can attract our attention. Yet in all these cases, the notable feature is not transgressive, though it is comparatively infrequent within its kind. We expect the properties of natural kinds to be governed by processes, laws, and principles that establish both what is statistically normal for the kind and the degrees of deviation from this that are tolerable within properly formed instances. Excessive or inexplicable departures from the usual limits of its kind count against our judging a thing to be beautiful.

The point can be made more graphically if we turn to living creatures, for which form, proportion, and appearance may be crucial in attracting mates and fulfilling their biological destiny. For them, radical departure

from the structural norm almost inevitably signals maladaptiveness.[10] The long, spindly legs of a newborn fawn have a fragile beauty, but an elephant baby born with limbs like that would be a mutant, beautiful only in its mother's eyes. Cephalopods, especially cuttlefish, display their emotions via dramatically patterned ripples and flashes of color on their skin. These strike me as beautiful. But I would judge a person who betrayed his joyous empathy with others by turning green, with shoals of purple-colored spots swarming over his face, to be unfortunately deformed, a freak, a deviant.

I disagree with Nick Zangwill, who writes:

> "We should not lose sight of the fact that nature has considerable free beauty. Consider, for example, brightly coloured sea-cucumbers. They have a beauty that does not depend on what type of creature they are. Again, consider our judgment that an underwater polar bear moves elegantly. This judgment is arguably not hostage to its being a polar bear rather than a zookeeper disguised in a polar bear suit. Whatever it

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[10] The functions of natural or living things are best characterized as their roles in ecological or biological systems—see Robert Cummins, 'Functional Analysis', *Journal of Philosophy*, 72 (1975), pp. 741-64. These natural or biological functions should be distinguished from structural norms, which are the ones I refer to here. It is the biological function of spermatozoa to fertilize ova, but the vast majority of them never do so, whereas the vast majority of them do conform to the structural norm for their type.

is, it is plausibly elegant in virtue of how it is in itself and how it moves. It is not merely elegant *qua* polar bear".[11]

It seems to me that a puppy would not be beautiful if it were born with the gaudy stripes and colorful excrescences that make for beauty in sea-cucumbers. And if a person discovered that she was observing not a polar bear but a machine disguised as a bear, or a zookeeper in a bear suit, I doubt that the movements would appear to her to be elegant, as they did formerly.[12] For that matter, if this particular polar bear happened to be the size of an ocean liner, those same movements probably would look lumbering rather than stylish or graceful. The observer has these experiences because judgments of beauty make implicit appeal to statistical norms that implicate (natural or human) schema for kinds and the natural laws and processes to which they are subject.

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11 'Beauty', in J. Levinson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 325-43, at p. 333.

12 Kant appears to agree when he suggests that one would revise one's assessment of the beauty of what one mistakenly took to be a bird song on learning that the sound was mechanically produced (*Critique of Judgment*, J. H. Bernard (trans.), (New York: Haffner, 1951/1790), section 42). For Kant, aesthetic perception is not indifferent to the correct identification of the object judged.

Being familiar with bone, flesh, cartilage, and the like, the observer might need acquaintance with only a few instances of a biological kind in order to guess its norms and variants. Though she has seen a limited number of pictures of unicorns, she is likely to form a fair idea of what would count as a big, small, or deformed horn. Error is possible, of course. If she mistakenly believes Bald Eagles to have the greatest wingspan of all birds, she might revise her attitude to them on seeing a Condor or Wandering Albatross.

The percipient need not know just what biological function is served for it by the sea-cucumber's livery, but that does not mean she is indifferent to the nature of the beast. What will strike her as apt for beauty in a sea-cucumber depends on its being a sea-cucumber and not, say, a salad cucumber. Six-limbedness counts against beauty in people, but not in Hindu gods or insects.

A defender of free beauty might respond that the subject of a judgment of free beauty is a perceptual manifold. While this is brought under concepts (of color, shape, etc), it is not united in the concept of an object. A counter to this response is to deny that we encounter such perceptual manifolds in nature. We do not usually meet with colored and spatially organized arrays of sense data, but objects, processes, or events that may, individually or collectively, strike us as beautiful.

I have suggested that, among more or less normal instances, we prefer those that approach nearest to the statistical average, while we rate unusual or extreme cases as yet more attractive, provided they fall within the limits

of well-formedness for the kind in question.[13] Insofar as such judgments are aesthetic, they inevitably presuppose a concern with the class to which their subject belongs and with the structural norms and scope of that class. In fact, there is considerable empirical evidence in favor of the view I propose. In the nineteenth century, Francis Galton showed that pictures averaging the features of a set of human faces are judged more attractive than are the individual faces comprising the set.[14] In other words, human faces are considered to be more beautiful the closer they fall to the average in the disposition of their features.[15] But in addition, atypical faces are often estimated to be the most beautiful. This last result can be attributed to the much-analyzed *peak shift effect*, according to which a variant of an established stimulus elicits an amplified (preferential) response, but only so long as the degree of variation is within acceptable limits.[16] For example,

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[13] Kant (op. cit., section 17) presents a similar idea when he distinguishes the beauty of the mean for human features from that of the ideal for humans.

[14] *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: Dutton & Co., 1911/1883).

[15] D. M. Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) and Nancy Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

[16] If the preferred variant is adaptive and thereby becomes genetically selected within the population, what is normal for the population alters

exaggeration of the size of the breasts and hips, along with a narrowing of the waist in Chola and later period Indian bronzes of the goddess Parvati, Shiva's consort, are supposed to accentuate her femininity and beauty. Psychologists have argued that the peak shift effect underpins our aesthetic preferences and judgments of the beauty of artworks, and that developments in artistic styles can be explained by reference to it.[17]

I conclude: if judgments of free beauty are supposed to be indifferent to the kinds and conceptual classifications under which their subjects fall,

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accordingly. This can create the possibility of a new peak shift effect through further exaggeration along the same dimension. Over time, considerable alteration in the character of the population can result. Repeated applications of the peak shift effect explain how, through sexual selection, the peacock came to have its tail.

[17] See Daniel E. Berlyne, *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971), Colin Martindale, 'The Evolution of Italian Painting: A Quantitative Investigation of Trends in Style and Content from the Gothic to Rococo Styles', *Leonardo*, 19 (1986), pp. 217-22, and Vilayanur S. Ramachandran & William Hirstein, 'The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6, June-July (1999), pp. 15-51. To my mind, psychologists too readily equate beauty with sexual attractiveness, but the mechanisms they describe do seem to underpin the structuring of many preferences, including aesthetic ones.

aesthetic judgments are not of this type. Our aesthetic evaluations of, and reactions to, natural items inevitably pay heed to the kinds and classes to which they belong (or in which we judge them to belong). And this conclusion can be generalized to humanly created artifacts, including artworks, because our aesthetic reactions to them are governed, at least in part, by the same psychological mechanisms and principles.

For the sake of salvaging something for the notion of free beauty, someone might observe that the aesthetic judgment can disregard its object's function, role, or purpose, even if its object must be classified. I conceded as much when I observed that the person who is aesthetically heartened by the sea-cucumber's colorful costume need not know why it is so colored. The response might continue: In that case, the classifying that gets done is of a minimal kind. Its purpose is to come up with the statistical averages and ranges that then are plugged into the wetware and software that generate the aesthetic reaction, which is a response focusing primarily on formal and sensible properties rather than on the richer identity of its subject. Even if aesthetic judgments presuppose kind-relative assessments, and thereby are not entirely free of conceptual commitments, they do abstract away from much that characterizes their subject's type. Moreover, the processes underlying the relevant judgments may be largely non-conscious, or even inaccessible to consciousness.

It is doubtful that this suggestion is convincing when applied to humanly created artifacts. For them, classification and function are usually too closely integrated to be separated. It is not clear what it would be to recognize something as a teapot, say, while banishing from one's mind all

awareness of its function and origin. (Similarly, judging a painting of a teapot involving taking account of what teapots are and the structural norms that apply to them.) To ignore such matters would reduce the teapot to the status of a "found object", like a bit of driftwood sculpture, and then it looks as if nothing remains to the idea that it is being classified.

Abstract artworks obviously are not subject to structural norms deriving from the nature of their depicted subjects, since they have none, but this does not mean that appropriate aesthetic judgments of them are unconstrained. Consider the case of purely instrumental music. It is highly organized in terms of genres, forms, styles, and other purely musical conventions. These govern both the norms of musical well-formedness for the type in question and the deviations from these that can be tolerated. To be judged as music, not merely as sound, instrumental music must be approached in terms of the musico-historical norms and grammars that characterize it as such.

It is true that ignorance of what a thing is does not always inhibit an enjoyment of its aesthetic properties. An example might be that of ancient cave paintings, the intended functions of which are little understood. But such cases are not best considered as instances of free beauty. Though we must be blind to complex, context-relative symbolic and other meanings such pieces possessed for their makers, we acknowledge them as humanly made and as expressing art-like sensibilities and interests. Such classifications are crucial to the way we approach them. Rather than illustrating judgments of free beauty, these fit better with judgments described in a following section; namely, those of dependent beauty directed to an artifact's partial or subsidiary aesthetic functions.

And the proposed defense of free beauty is not always convincing, either, when applied to the beautiful in nature. The beauty of many natural or biological items depends on or is significantly enhanced by knowledge of their functions, and so is not free. The attractiveness of the mottling and blending of brown, gray, and black in the plumage of many birds is surely magnified by the knowledge that this cryptic patterning protects them as ground nesters. When seen as camouflage, feathering which otherwise might seem drab and understated takes on an exquisite subtlety in the success with which it mimics the nest's background.

Also, when we disregard the functions of natural or biological items, often we do so in order to re-conceptualize them, not to distance them as far as possible from all classifications and possible uses. A common approach is to consider nature in terms of human categories and purposes rather than its own. In Europe beginning in the late eighteenth century, people sought the picturesque in nature, which took the form of ruins, peasant dwellings, and rugged landscapes. As the etymology of the name indicates, nature was considered as pictures are. And more broadly, this is a route frequently followed by those who judge nature aesthetically. Some self-consciously look in nature for echoes of artistic styles, techniques, and genres. For others, though, their aesthetic responses to nature are unthinkingly shaped by background cultural knowledge that conditions their ways of seeing. Because they are unaware of cultural influences on their points of view, their aesthetic responses will seem to them to be demanded solely by the salience or power of the aesthetic qualities they perceive, but this does not mean their responses are to nature's free beauty. Rather than a mirror held up to nature,

art often serves as a prism that inflects our perception of the aesthetic in nature.[18]

A remainder of judgments of natural beauty might be free in the revised sense indicated above: they involve awareness of the relevant categories and natural kinds, but they abstract away from all but the structural norms and ranges of these and ignore any natural functions served by the features on which they focus; they do not go on to re-conceptualize nature, either deliberately or unthinkingly; rather, they approach nature as conceptually "unplugged" and directly experience its naked aesthetic properties. And perhaps this is how Zangwill views sea-cucumbers, or how the gaudy plumages of brightly colored parrots are considered. But I suspect this remainder of aesthetic judgments is much smaller in number than is frequently claimed, and that the amount of beauty detected in nature this way is less in magnitude than is usually asserted. In any case, it is doubtful that our interest in nature's aesthetic character is typically a concern with its free beauty.

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[18] Kant (op. cit., section 45) appears to endorse this idea when he writes: "Nature is beautiful because it looks like art, and art can only be called beautiful if we are conscious of it as art while yet it looks like nature". Yet in other sections (8, 30, 38, and 42 for example), he seems to suggest that beauty in nature and art differ and that the former is superior to the latter.

<u>Dependent beauty</u>

It is time to turn to the notion of dependent beauty, which is the beauty an item has as an item with a certain function. With natural things, their functions are the roles they serve in ecological or biological systems. In this section, however, I focus on articles that are humanly designed to fulfill a purpose. There are several respects in which the proposed theory of dependent beauty needs to be clarified and qualified before it is plausible, as I now explain.

For a start, we need to concede that, in some cases, several different functions might be equally important, with none plainly primary. In most cultures, clothing serves many purposes. Moreover, changes in the use or contextualization of an item may alter its primary purpose. When cups from the Japanese tea ceremony are housed in display cabinets in a European museum's ethnic art display, they can be considered to have acquired a new primary function. Though primary and secondary functions are discussed in what follows as if these are always straightforward and easily recognized, that is to be understood as a deliberate simplification.

As well, to avoid the possibility of deviant causal chains between the item's aesthetic properties and the pleasure these yield (as when we delight in the incompetence of the boss's poetry). To rule out such cases and to check that a person's consideration of an item's aesthetic properties is responsible for his response of delight, the judgment of dependent beauty must consider in what manner the aesthetic properties relate to that response. The pleasure of the response is supposed to come from recognition of the

item's beauty, and the interest in its aesthetic properties should be a concern with how they make it beautiful. In consequence, the judgment of dependent beauty must be process- as well as result-oriented. It draws the focus into the object and to a consideration of its features and the way they operate, not away from it to the outcomes it generates.

It would be an error to equate judgments of overall functional efficiency with judgments of dependent beauty. If it cuts well, we are more likely to say a knife is *good* than *beautiful* of its kind. Rather than considering all the features relevant to how a thing performs its function, the aesthetic judgment concentrates on those that could make it beautiful, which are its aesthetic qualities. As a result, the judgment of dependent beauty is narrower and more partial than the general, overall evaluation of the item's functional effectiveness.

If the judgment of dependent beauty treats its target as something to be examined for the sake of its aesthetic properties, as was just described, how, then, is the judgment concerned with its target's function? Judgments of functional efficiency and of dependent beauty come into line in two cases. The first is that in which the primary purpose of the thing is that it produce an aesthetic response through the contemplation of its aesthetic properties. Items with the primary function of being decoratively attractive, such as elaborate food garnishes sculpted from fruit or vegetables, are of this kind. The aesthetic evaluation of ornaments whose sole purpose is to be beautiful tracks their dependent beauty. The second is that in which an object is regarded as serving an aesthetic purpose that is subsidiary to its primary, utilitarian function, and then is evaluated in terms not of its primary function

but of this subsidiary one. Many utilitarian artifacts that are made to be aesthetically pleasing in addition to being practically useful. A Chinese brush-pot might be carved from ivory to resemble a bamboo brush-pot, and be intended to be beautiful, though its primary purpose is as a container for calligraphy brushes and the manner of its being beautiful makes no contribution to its meeting that function. In this case, the judgment of dependent beauty considers the pot with respect to how well it satisfies its ancillary, aesthetic function.

Though it applies to the cases just described, the story about dependent beauty fails to deal adequately with articles possessing aesthetic characters that complement or contribute to their non-aesthetic, primary functions. Moreover, the class of such items is a crucial one, because it includes artworks and the kinds of craftworks that have the strongest claim to the status of art.

The primary function of artworks is not to be contemplated for the sake of the beauty of their aesthetic properties alone. As I suggested earlier, the challenge to aesthetic theories of the early twentieth century led philosophers of art to accept that, as well as aesthetic properties, artworks possess artistic properties that are to be appreciated and enjoyed. Given the connections that can obtain between these two kinds of property, the idea that aesthetic judgments should be restricted only to the realm of aesthetic properties is problematic.

The worry is not that the judgment of dependent beauty is limited. I allowed earlier that such judgments are narrower in focus than the overall

evaluation of the success with which an item satisfies its primary function. The problem is that the judgment of dependent beauty, because it ignores the artwork's artistic and other qualities in order to focus exclusively on its aesthetic character, overlooks the relationship between these various properties and the manner in which this relationship affects the success or otherwise with which the work's overall artistic functions are addressed. The balance of tensions within a complex narrative can have an aesthetic character of its own. And recognition of the beauty distinctive to a representation might be inseparable from an appreciation of the techniques of depiction. (Consider, for example, how Monet's styles and methods of depicting the light striking haystacks contribute to the beauty of the works in which he depicts them.)

The aesthetic judgment of an artwork's dependent beauty considers it from the point of view not of its primary artistic function but in terms of a subsidiary aesthetic one. Doing so disregards many of the ways the work's aesthetic features contribute to the artistic effects it achieves and to the aesthetic character implicated in meta-level relations between artistic properties. The contribution of aesthetic features in relations of these kinds should figure in art's aesthetic evaluation, but is not covered by aesthetic judgments of dependent beauty. In consequence, the model of judgments of dependent beauty does not deliver what we expect from an adequate account of the role of aesthetic judgments in the appreciation of art.

The same is true when we consider utilitarian artifacts created so that their aesthetic properties are central to achieving their primary, practical purpose. It is a hallmark of great design in furniture, for instance, that the

qualities making a chair practically usable are at the same time the source of its elegance, grace, and beauty.[19] As an example, I offer Eero Saarinen's Tulip chair (images of which can be easily found on the web). The integrity and economy with which the practical result is achieved contributes positively to the chair's aesthetic value, and vice versa. When exceptional craftworks and pieces with an explicit religious, ethical, or other extrinsic purpose seem to qualify as artworks, they do so usually because of the success with which they *integrate* their practical and aesthetic functions. The model of dependent beauty is again inadequate to capture the kind of aesthetic judgment such pieces call for, because it makes the judgment of the item's aesthetic qualities blind to considerations of its primary, utilitarian purpose.

If judgments of dependent beauty are as I have described them, they separate consideration of their targets' aesthetic features from reflection on their targets' primary, practical purposes, except in the case where the target's primary purpose is to be contemplated solely for the sake of its aesthetic properties. This schizoid approach guarantees that the theory of dependent beauty cannot accommodate the kinds of aesthetic judgments appropriate to artworks and to artifacts in which practical and aesthetic virtues are brought into intimate, mutually supportive relationships. For

[19] Hume is one eighteenth-century philosopher who might find this idea congenial—see *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L. A. Shelby-Bigge, (ed.), revised P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987/1739-40), Book 2, Part 2, Section 5.

these, the aesthetic judgment must take account of the contribution made by the article's aesthetic properties to the success with which it realizes its non-aesthetic primary function.

Functional Beauty: A new model for aesthetic judgments

I have argued that neither the notion of free beauty nor that of dependent beauty successfully measures the logic of aesthetic judgments as they relate to human artifacts, including artworks, in which non-aesthetic (including artistic) and aesthetic goals interact and combine. I now propose an alternative account of such judgments, which I refer to as judgments of *functional beauty*.

For a utilitarian object, *U*, with aesthetic features that are not trivial or merely incidental to its overall character, aesthetic evaluation is relative to function, but is not an overall evaluation of how well *U* performs its function so much as a judgment about the input made by its aesthetic *properties to its doing so.*[20] *In other words, a functionally beautiful U* (evaluated as a *U*, not in terms of secondary functions that are not central to its kind as such) is a *U* possessing aesthetic properties that contribute positively to its performing its

[20] The view presented here develops ideas introduced in my 'First Art and Art's Definition', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 35 (1997), pp. 19-34 and 'Non-Western Art and Art's Definition', in N. Carroll (ed.), *Theories of Art Today*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 199-216.

intended, principal function. A beautiful chair is one having features that make it graceful and stylish and, at the same time, comfortable to sit on, stable, and supportive of the back.

Suppose the initial judgment that the chair's aesthetic qualities contribute to its functioning well as a chair turns out to be wrong. When we sit on it, we find the chair crippling for the user's back and unstable. We then should revise the judgment that the chair is beautiful as a chair. Either we now see the judgment as evaluating a purely aesthetic function that is independent of and secondary to the chair's being a chair, which, as such, has the primary function of comfortably supporting the sitter. Or we decide that it is appropriate to revise the initial verdict of the item's primary function, and hence of its nature. For example, we might come to see that it should be conceptualized as a chair-sculpture, not a chair. As such, it is not for sitting on.

A functionally beautiful *U*'s aesthetically valuable properties must enhance its fulfilling its primary function, even though it may not be a good *U* in virtue of other practical failings. A chair might be functionally beautiful because of the way its elegance suits it for its primary purpose, yet be a poor chair because it can no longer bear the weight of a human as a result of being internally riddled by borers.

How are the item's aesthetic features and its primary purpose specifically related? One possibility is that the aesthetic and the practical are different aspects of the same material properties, or in other words, that both supervene on the same base properties of the item. This certainly establishes

the intimacy of the connection, but it does not allow us to distinguish clearly enough between something's being elegantly practical, say, and its being both elegant and practical. It is the former that best describes the relation expressed in functional beauty. So perhaps the best account of the relation holds that aesthetic considerations constrain the manner in which the primary function is to be pursued, while the nature of the primary function is relevant to determining what aesthetic effects should be aimed at. The relation is one of mutual influence and dependence. To borrow a notion from biology, it is symbiotic.

The kind of beauty that arises from this mutual interaction between the item's aesthetic features and its primary function is distinct from beauties that attend the item in an incidental or secondary way. The color of the knife's handle might be aesthetically pleasing. In that case, the color adds aesthetic value to the knife, but not to it *as a knife*, since many other kinds of items would have their aesthetic value supplemented to the same degree if they were similarly colored. The knife is not more beautiful as a knife unless there is some relevant connection between the attractiveness of its color and its practical functionality.

Functional beauty is not always equivalent to formal beauty. If a weapon had the purpose of being intimidating (especially in its appearance, so that it did not have to be used), it might be better for having a kind of chunky brutality. The judgment is positive if the successful realization of the item's aesthetic properties contributes positively to its performing its primary function, and the successful realization of formal beauty will not always do this.

Because the evaluation of the contribution made by *U*'s aesthetic properties to its primary function focuses on *U* as a *U*, and not on aesthetic features that are only incidental or secondary to its being the *U* it is and having the functional value that it does, these judgments capture something often claimed as central to aesthetic judgments—namely, that they are concerned with the object *for its own sake*. This aesthetic evaluation takes account of the non-aesthetic, primary function that is crucial to its subject's identity.

In an earlier version of this view, I suggested that it is a necessary condition for a tool's being an artwork that its aesthetic and other art-relevant properties contribute essentially to its practical function, so that it cannot be evaluated properly without taking into account the aesthetic achievement it involves.[21] In objecting, Lauren Tillinghast writes: "How are we to understand the pronoun that appears in the middle of this answer? The feature must be essential to *its* function. Yes, but *qua—what?* Not *qua* tool, obviously, for then the presence of the feature would be relevant only to its being a good sort of tool of some sort. And not *qua* work of art, for then the explanation would be circular".[22] Tillinghast is right, if her point is that the

21 'Non-Western Art and Art's Definition', at p. 207.

22 'Essence and Anti-Essentialism about Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 44 (2004), pp. 167-83, at p. 177. Also relevant is her 'The Classificatory Sense of "Art"', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 61 (2003), pp. 133-48, at pp. 142-3.

overall evaluation of the tool *qua* tool differs from the aesthetic evaluation that considers the contribution made by its aesthetic features to its meeting its primary function. (She is also correct to suggest that assuming the evaluation concerns the tool's arthood would beg the question if its art-status is what is in doubt.)

Here is a gloss that should clarify my view: Something can be good as an aesthetic object and good as a chair, say, but this need not mean classifying it first one way, then another. Neither need it be a matter of evaluating the chair with respect to purposes other than its primary, practical one. Instead, the evaluation can focus on how the chair's aesthetic qualities are relevant to and take account of its functioning as a good chair. In other words, they can be judgments of the item's functional beauty. The object of this judgment is *chair*. Both the aesthetic judgment and an overall functional evaluation of the chair have the same object, but the aesthetic judgment has a narrower focus. In making the aesthetic judgment, we consider if and how its aesthetic features enhance the chair's functioning as a chair. We ask if it is beautiful in a functional way. Whereas, in arriving at the wider, comprehensive evaluation, we take account of *all* that is relevant to how well the chair functions as a chair.

Aesthetic judgments and artworks

The same account applies to artworks that have the function of being pleasing when contemplated for their own sakes. In other words, what is to

be assessed is how the positive values of the work's aesthetic features enhance the performance of its primary artistic function. In turn, this involves a concern that looks beyond the achievement of the primary function to seek the presence within the work of aesthetic properties and to consider the manner of their treatment and how this meshes (or not) with the artist's purposes, both as these specifically relate to the given property and as they regard the role of such properties within the wider creative project. Art is functionally beautiful if it has aesthetic properties that augment the pleasure its contemplation as art brings. The comprehensive judgment of an artwork's success takes in more than consideration of its functional beauty, however.

As previously indicated, this position is consistent with a reasonable understanding of what is meant by the notion that art is to be valued and appreciated for its own sake. The aesthetic evaluation of an artwork is concerned not only with the degree of pleasure the work's contemplation and understanding provides but also with the detail of the role played by the work's aesthetic properties in securing the response. The judgment does not divorce the external effect from consideration of the internal means. Moreover, the judgment applies to the work identified as the artwork it is. Artworks are not atomic singularities. They are early nineteenth-century Viennese piano sonatas, cubist painting by Braque, and Elizabethan revenge tragedies. Judgments of the artwork's aesthetic value, to be of *its* aesthetic value as the artwork it is, must contextualize it in the appropriate way.

This view of aesthetic judgment applies in the same way not only to items with non-aesthetic, practical functions but also to artworks that are for

contemplation. For that reason, it gives us a way to understand how some kinds of art can serve non-aesthetic primary functions.

Religious art has the aim of evoking awe and conveying knowledge of holy writ; some didactic art aims to teach an uplifting moral; mass and popular art typically serves the purpose of providing undemanding entertainment; folk and domestic art aims to lighten the burden of work or to decorate and personalize oneself or one's possessions. In small-scale, pre-industrial societies, most of the art that is produced is utilitarian. According to the ethologist Ellen Dissanayake, art is a brand of "making special" that has adaptive value in that it enhances the reproductive success of individuals by forging and solidifying cooperation, group cohesiveness, and a rewarding sense of social belonging.[23]

The aesthetic judgment of such works parallels the judgment of functional beauty for utilitarian non-artworks. In other words, it considers the extent to which the successful realization of the object's aesthetic features meshes with its satisfying its primary, practical function.

Of course, the theory of aesthetic judgment I have presented does not compel us to see the franchise for the concept of art as encompassing items with non-aesthetic practical functions. Nevertheless, the position I have defended is pertinent to the debate about the extension of "art", because it undermines two ideas that might motivate a person to defend the hegemony

[23] *What Is Art For?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

of the eighteenth-century Western notion of art—namely, that only non-utilitarian items can be aesthetically judged and valued for their own sake and that aesthetic judgments of utilitarian objects can be made only if we ignore the primary, practical functions that are their raisons d'être. The fact (if it is one) that fine art is valued for its own sake, rather than solely in terms of any practical usefulness it may have, does not dictate that the current Western notion monopolizes the entire concept.

The view I have developed allows for the following perspective: All art is functional, and considering its primary function is relevant to its aesthetic evaluation, though more is always involved in arriving at a comprehensive, overall artistic evaluation. The principal function can be the self-regarding one of being for a certain kind of contemplation, as is the case with much high Western art, but it might also be practical. Art might be made to ward off evil, to teach moral lessons, to guide the way to spiritual enlightenment, to be entertaining, and so forth. Aesthetic evaluations of the functional beauty of all kinds of artworks (with all kinds of primary functions) judge them for their own sakes, where this means we are concerned not only with whether their primary function is fulfilled but more importantly with the contribution made by the successful realization of their aesthetic properties to their functional efficacy.

In conclusion

I have rejected the post-Kantian theory that aesthetic judgments of both nature and art are judgments of free beauty. I have also argued that the typical analysis of judgments of dependent beauty, even when enriched with

appropriate qualifications, does not accommodate a central kind of aesthetic judgment; namely, ones concerned with the role of their subject's aesthetic features in securing its primary function, even if that function is utilitarian. While a prevalent, twentieth-century view tends to characterize art as without a function, I have suggested that all art, along with other products of human design and craft, has utility. High Western art has the function of being contemplated for the sake of its aesthetic and other art-relevant properties. Other kinds of art often have more practical primary functions. Nevertheless, I have tried to capture and retain the germ of truth that makes the idea of art for its own sake appealing. Aesthetic judgments of functional beauty take as their objects items appropriately identified in terms of the primary purposes that make them what they are. And those judgments do not merely consider if those functions are satisfied but also take account of the manner in which aesthetic properties of the item in question shape how it addresses and achieves this function. This analysis clarifies the relation between aesthetic judgments and the functionality of the items so evaluated. It also shows how art might have primary functions that are practical and not self-regarding, and thereby lends plausibility to the idea that art is found beyond the confines of the world of high, Western art.[24]

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