Arthur C. Danto

The abuse of beauty

It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident any more, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.

– Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1969

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It is the mark of the contemporary period in the history of art that no constraints govern the way works of visual art should look. An artwork can look like anything, and be made of anything – anything is possible.

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For example, shortly after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen proclaimed it "the greatest work of art ever." Since his language conveyed extreme admiration, he was instantly disgraced in the minds of most. That such a claim could be made at all underscores the total openness of the contemporary concept of art, however monstrous the consequences of conceiving art in that way.

The philosophical history of art culminates in the recognition that there is no merit in asking any longer whether this or that can be art, for the answer will always be yes, noting that limits external to the definition of art – moral considerations above all – always remain. The definition of art must accordingly be consistent with an absolute pluralism as far as works of art are concerned. I am almost certain that Adorno's cultural despair derived from this perception, though not even that paradigmatically pessimistic thinker, whose thought was darkened by the Holocaust, would have been able to imagine a statement like Stockhausen's, let alone the horror that occasioned it.

The publication of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* in 1969 coincided with the end of a decade of remarkably intense inquiry,

conducted by artists as well as philosophers, though largely in independence of one another. Indeed, an essay with which the decade properly began – Clement Greenberg's 1960 "Modernist Painting" – remarked upon a parallel between modernist art and a certain form of philosophical practice. Comparing contemporary art with a form of self-criticism exemplified in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Greenberg called Kant the first modernist. Self-criticism in the arts, as understood by Greenberg, consisted in purifying the relevant medium of the art form. Thus three-dimensionality was extrinsic to painting, which was essentially flat, in Greenberg's view. Accordingly, he believed painting should be purged of illusionism of any kind, and depth given over by right to sculpture.

Greenberg's agenda was one of art defining itself from within, and there can be no question that this quasi-Kantian endeavor was pursued, often with a certain puritanical fervor, by a number of artists bent on making art in its conceptually purified condition. This was particularly the case with the so-called minimalists. But in truth, philosophy and avant-garde art shared a great many attitudes in the 1960s.

One aim of pop, for example, was to ironize the distinction between high and vernacular art – between the heroized painting of the previous generation of artists, the Abstract Expressionists, and the popular imagery of the comic strip and commercial advertisements – the 'High and Low' of a controversial exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1992. But comparably, it was an effort of analytical philosophy to overcome the pretensions of what we might call 'high' philosophy – the cosmo-tragical visions of the Existentialists or of the towering titans of metaphysics who loomed behind them – by criticizing its language against either the standards of ordinary discourse – where we know whereof we speak – or of a scientific discourse governed by strict considerations of verifiability and confirmability. It is difficult to resist the impulse to see a cultural equivalence between the canonization of ordinary language cultivated by the Oxford School of Linguistic phenomenology and the studied aesthetic of everyday objects in Warhol's Factory or Claes Oldenberg's 1962 Store on East Second Street in Manhattan, where one could buy painted effigies of gym shoes, automobile tires, and women's underpants.

How much of any of this fell within the horizons of official aesthetics is historically problematic, but some philosophers certainly grasped that the definition of art was at issue as never before. In 1965, the British philosopher Richard Wollheim published an important essay on "Minimal Art." Though Wollheim was subsequently credited with coining the term 'minimalism,' he admits to having known nothing of the works that finally became so designated. His concern in his essay, rather, was whether there are minimal criteria for something being designated art. His paradigms were monochrome painting, which was generally regarded as a mere philosophical joke until perhaps 1915, and the ready-mades that Marcel Duchamp put forward as art at about that same time.

In addressing this concern, Wollheim followed the official philosophical model according to which having a concept requires criteria for picking out its instances. It was a Wittgensteinian commonplace that instances can be culled out successfully without benefit of definitions, as in the case of games. In fact there can be no criteria for distinguishing a ready-made metal grooming comb by Duchamp from an indiscernible met-

al grooming comb that was not a ready-made, nor a monochrome white painting from a panel all over which white paint had been slathered – so the question of definition became urgent after all.

Indeed, with the advent of conceptual art at the end of the 1960s, the material object was no longer required – nor did it necessarily have to be made by the artist. "I've stopped making objects," the artist Douglas Huebner said in a 1969 interview. "And I'm not trying to take anything away from the world. Nor am I trying to restructure the world. I'm not trying to tell the world anything, really. I'm not trying to tell the world that it could be better by being this or that. I'm just, you know, touching the world by doing these things, and leaving it pretty much the way it is." Leaving the world as we found it, we had been told by Wittgenstein, is the way it is with philosophy, too.

What follows from this history of conceptual erasure – and the concomitant pluralism I began by remarking – is not that art is indefinable, but that the conditions necessary for something to be art will have to be fairly abstract to fit all imaginable cases, and in particular that very little remains of 'our concept of art' that the framer of a real definition can rely on. In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981) I came up with two conditions, condensed as "x is an art work if it embodies a meaning." The chief merit of this definition lay in its weakness.

Missing from my proto-definition, as from all the philosophical definitions of art put forth during the 1960s that I can recall, was any reference to beauty, which would surely have been among the first conditions to have been advanced by a conceptual analyst at the turn of the twentieth century. Beauty had disappeared not only from the advanced art of the 1960s, but from the advanced philosophy of art of that decade as well. Nor could it be part of the definition of art if anything can be an artwork, since it is certainly not true that anything is beautiful.

Not long after the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation was established in 1925, the founders saw as its immediate beneficiaries "Men and women devoted to pushing forward the boundaries of knowledge and to the creation of beauty." Art in that era was tacitly defined in terms of creating beauty, and that creation was in turn put on equal footing with efforts at expanding the boundaries of knowledge.

Forty years later, reference to the creation of beauty was omitted from the enabling language for the National Endowment for the Arts, presumably because beauty had largely disappeared from the artistic agenda in 1965. But beauty still played a role in the thinking of the era's politicians, many of whom dismissed modern art as depraved and destructive. Congressman George A. Dondero of Michigan wrote that "Modern art is communistic because it is distorted and ugly, because it does not glorify our beautiful country, our cheerful and smiling people, and our material progress. Art which does not beautify our country in plain simple terms that everyone can understand breeds dissatisfaction. It is therefore opposed to our government and those who create and promote it are our enemies."

The newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst "equated any form of artistic radicalism with communism, and assumed that the work produced in a non-traditional manner was a disguised means of communist propaganda." This is but one instance, as we shall see, of the politicization of beauty.

In the early 1990s, the art critic Dave

Hickey was asked what he thought the central issue of the decade would be. "Snatched from my reverie, I said 'Beauty,' and then, more firmly, 'The issue of the nineties will be *beauty.*'" This was greeted, he recalls, with a "total uncomprehending silence. . . . I had wandered into this *dead zone*, this silent abyss."

Let me begin to put this silence into a certain perspective by considering the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, who had become notorious in 1989 when his exhibition *The Perfect Moment* was cancelled by the Corcoran Museum of Art in an ill-advised preemptive move against the danger that funding for the National Endowment for the Arts might be voted down if our legislators saw what the fund was supporting. The fear was based on the charged sexual content of his signature images – though it was central to his achievement that his work was self-consciously beautiful as well. It was this, rather than its content, that alienated the photographic avant-garde against him.

When I was writing my book on Mapplethorpe, I asked an artist who was at the time experimenting with pinhole cameras what he thought of him. He dismissed Mapplethorpe as a *pompier* – an artist so concerned with elegance as to have lost touch with the limits of his medium. The imperatives of modernism, as defined by Greenberg, tended to make the simple grainy snapshot the paradigm of photographic purity. And the charge against Mapplethorpe was that his work was too beautiful to qualify for critical endorsement. Gerhard Richter recalls, "One writer claimed that if I painted sex and violence, it would have been okay, but one isn't allowed to paint anything beautiful."

"The changed fashion of the time," if I may appropriate Kant's mournful language regarding the fate of Metaphysics, "brings beauty only scorn; a matron outcast and forsaken."

The twentieth century did not begin with such disdain for the concept of beauty. In a letter to Thomas Monro in 1927, George Santayana wrote of his generation that "We were not very much later than Ruskin, Pater, Swinburne, and Matthew Arnold. Our atmosphere was that of poets and persons touched with religious enthusiasm or religious sadness. Beauty (which mustn't be mentioned now) was then a living presence, or an aching absence, day and night." It was precisely its beauty that justified the esteem in which art was held in Santayana's time. Here, for example, are some thoughts that are almost unintelligible today, from the early writing of Santayana's contemporary G. E. Moore: "I cannot see but what that which is meant by beautiful is simply and solely that which is an end in itself. The object of art would then be that to which the objects of Morals are means, and the only thing to which they are means. The only reason for having virtues would be to produce works of art."

In his early text *Art, Morals, and Religion*, Moore wrote, "Religion is merely a subdivision of art," which he explicated this way: "Every valuable purpose which religion serves is also served by Art; and Art perhaps serves more if we are to say that its range of good objects and emotions is wider." There can be no doubt that Moore believed that art can take religion's purposes over because of the beauty it essentially possesses.

Now I would like to offer a historical speculation. It is that the immense esteem in which art continues to be held today is an inheritance of this exalted view of beauty. It is widely and some-

times cynically said that art has replaced religion in contemporary consciousness. My speculation is that these Edwardian attitudes have survived the abjuration of beauty itself. I will go even further to suggest that if there is a place for beauty in art today, it is connected with these survivals, which are deeply embedded in human consciousness.

Beauty's place is not in the definition or – to use the somewhat discredited idiom – the essence of art, from which the avant-garde has rightly removed it. That removal, however, was not merely the result of a conceptual but, as I shall argue, a political determination. And it is the residue of aesthetic politics that lingers on in the negativity we find in attitudes toward beauty in art today. The idea of beauty, the poet Bill Berkson wrote me recently, is a "mangled sodden thing."

But the *fact* of beauty is quite another matter.

In a passage near the beginning of Proust's *Within a Budding Grove*, Marcel (the Narrator), traveling by train to Balbec, sees a peasant girl approaching the station in the early morning, offering coffee and milk. "I felt on seeing her that desire to live which is reborn in us whenever we become conscious anew of beauty and of happiness."

I believe Proust's psychology profound in connecting the consciousness of beauty with happiness – providing we are not conflicted because of a negativity that had yet to inflect the idea of beauty in the generation of Proust, Moore, and Santayana.

I would like to press this further. It was the moral weight that was assigned to beauty that helps us understand why the first generation of the twentieth-century avant-garde found it so urgent to dislodge beauty from its mistaken place in the philosophy of art. It occupied that place in virtue of a conceptual error. Once we are in a position to perceive that mistake, we should be able to redeem beauty for artistic use once again.

But conceptual analysis by itself, without the reinforcement of a kind of Foucauldian archeology, is insufficiently powerful to help us in this task. Had it not, for example, been for the artistic avant-garde in the twentieth century, philosophers almost certainly would continue to teach that the connection between art and beauty is conceptually tight.

In the latter sections of *Principia Ethica*, first published in 1903, Moore wrote, "By far the most valuable things we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may roughly be described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects." Moore thought the point "so obvious that it runs the risk of seeming to be a platitude." No one, Moore claims, "has ever doubted that personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art or Nature, are good in themselves." Nor, he continues, "does it appear probable that any one will think that anything else has *nearly* so great a value as the things which are included under these two heads."

Moore's confident appeals seem almost shockingly parochial, but I'll suppose they were commonplace in his world. What would not have been commonplace, however, is what he next goes on to claim, namely that "this is the ultimate and fundamental truth of Moral Philosophy," and that these two values "form the rational ultimate end of human action and the sole criterion of social progress." People might come to accept these as truths, but they appear, Moore said, to be "truths which have been generally overlooked."

I think Moore must have been correct that if truths, these were generally overlooked, since they were perceived as having the force of revelation by the Bloomsbury circle, whose entire philosophy of art and of life were derived from Moore's teaching. "A great new freedom seemed about to come," according to Vanessa Bell. Love and friendship, on the one hand, and what Moore speaks of "as the proper appreciation of a beautiful object" were to suffice, without the need for religion, in satisfying the main moral needs of modern human beings.

With the exception of Hume and Hegel, the classical aestheticians drew no crucial distinction between art and nature in regard to the appreciation of beauty, and it must be borne in mind that that indifference was but rarely contested in philosophical aesthetics nor in artistic practice itself when Moore composed *Principia Ethica*. If anything, I think, Moore supposed the appreciation of natural beauty superior to the appreciation of artistic beauty, largely because "We do think that the emotional contemplation of a natural scene, supposing its qualities equally beautiful, is in some way a better state of things than that of a painted landscape; we would think that the world would be improved if we could substitute for the best works of representative art *real* objects equally beautiful."

Moore believed that so far as the pictorial arts are concerned, a beautiful painting is a painting of a beautiful subject. And this I think gave a certain importance to the museum of fine arts as a site in which to experience beauty in those years. In Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* (1905), his character Adam Verver, a man of immense wealth living abroad, has conceived the idea of building a "museum of museums" for American City, where he amassed his fortune. His aim in this is to "release the people of his native state from the bondage of ugliness." There would be no way – or no easy way – to transform Detroit or Pittsburgh into the Catskills or the Grand Canyon. But artistic beauty was portable, so if the aesthetically deprived citizenry of American City could be put in the presence of "treasures sifted to positive sanctity," it would benefit immensely from the contemplation of beautiful objects, which Moore endorsed as the highest moral good.

The problem was that modernist painting, in the period James's novel was first published, was beginning to veer, somewhat starkly, away from the mimetic model. In 1910 and 1912, modernist painter and critic Roger Fry organized two notorious postimpressionist exhibitions at the Grafton Gallery in London. As it happens, the Bloomsbury circle, and Moore himself, praised the objective beauty of the unprecedented works on display in these exhibitions. But a great many professional art critics disagreed. The artistic representations so deviated from the motifs they transcribed that many viewers saw no way of dealing with them. "One gentleman," wrote Fry, "is so put to it to account for his own inability to understand these pictures that he is driven to the conclusion that it is a colossal hoax on the part of the organizers of the exhibition and myself in particular."

Attempting to explain the incapacity of such gentlemen to appreciate objective beauty, Fry blamed ignorance and unfamiliarity:

> Almost without exception, they tacitly assume that the aim of art is imitative representation, yet none of them has tried to show any reason for such a curious proposition. A great deal has been said about

> these artists searching for the ugly instead of consoling us with beauty. They forget that every new work of creative design is ugly until it becomes beautiful; that we usually apply the word beautiful to those works of art in which familiarity has enabled us to grasp the unity easily, and that we find ugly those works in which we still perceive beauty only by an effort.

The perception of these artworks as ugly was, in effect, the projection onto them of a mental confusion that a course in aesthetic education will remove. Postimpressionist painters, Fry goes on to say, affirm "the paramount importance of design, which necessarily places the imitative side of art in a secondary place." This is the basis of Fry's formalism.

But Fry himself made a mistake even more profound than those critics who supposed it was the aim of painting to imitate nature. His mistake was supposing it was the aim of painting to be beautiful.

I give Fry great credit for recognizing that something needed to be explained in order that those who scoffed might perceive the beauty of postimpressionist painting, but I draw special attention to the a priori view that the painting in question really *was* beautiful, if only viewers knew how to look at it.

Since Fry, it has become a commonplace that the history of modernism is the history of acceptance. This story is told over and over by docents and lecturers in art appreciation. In this view, the history of art always has a happy ending. Manet's *Olympia*, vilified in 1865, became a world treasure two generations later: in *The Guermantes Way*, Proust writes of the way "the unbridgeable gulf between what they considered a masterpiece by Ingres and what they supposed must forever remain a 'horror' (Manet's *Olympia*, for example) shrank until the two canvases seemed like twins."

How does this happen? Fry believed that it happens through critical explanation. People have to be brought to understand the work, and the way in which it is actually beautiful. That, more than the actual explanations Fry gave, is his great achievement. For it makes clear that artistic beauty often requires explanation if it is to be appreciated, something that Hume understood completely. "In many orders of beauty, particularly those of the finer arts," Hume writes in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, "it is requisite to employ much reasoning in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection." Hume is eager to point out that "moral beauty partakes much of this latter species."

With qualification, I accept Fry's point, as well as the spirit of Hume's marvelous observation. What I want to deny, however, is that the history of appreciation always culminates in the appreciation of *beauty*. That, as I see it, is the assumption of Edwardian aesthetics, which the kind of art selected for the Grafton Gallery exhibitions ought to have called into question. The Edwardians, for example, were entirely right to begin to appreciate African art. They were even right in thinking that, on formal grounds, it could be seen as beautiful. The Victorians had thought that 'primitive peoples' were, in making art, trying to make beautiful objects, only they did not know exactly how – hence their 'primitivity.' The Edwardians thought themselves advanced because formalism enabled them to see what Fry called "Negro sculpture" as beautiful. But they were wrong in thinking that they had learned through formalism to see the beauty that was the point of African art.

That was never its point, nor was beauty the point of most of the world's great art. It is very rarely the point of art today.

Having lived through the *Sensation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999, with its crude exploitation of what might shock or offend, I can sympathize with Fry. The critics, pretty much to a person, condemned the art, and were certain they were being put upon. But some of us were ready to see it as a First Amendment rather than aesthetic matter, and in this we were perhaps more right than someone would have been who hoped that through argument they would see the beauty it was in some measure the object of the art to injure.

This is not to say that beauty does not have a role to play in the art of our own day. But in order to find out what that role might be, we shall have to free ourselves from the Edwardian axiom that all good art is categorically beautiful, if only we have learned to recognize how. We will have to find ways of justifying art other than those with which my narrative of the decline of beauty began. It is an achievement of the conceptual history of art in the twentieth century that we have a much more complex idea of artistic appreciation than the early modernists – or modernism in general, down to its formulation in the writing of Clement Greenberg as late as the 1960s.

2

Near the opening of *Une Saison en Enfer* – allegedly an allegorical account of his tumultuous relationship with the poet Verlaine – Rimbaud writes: "One evening, I sat Beauty on my knees; and I found her bitter, and I abused her."

The 'bitterness of beauty' became epidemic in the avant-garde art of the following century, but it was a rare thought in 1873, when Rimbaud published this poem. In Fantin-Latour's group portrait of the previous year, *Un Coin de Table*, Rimbaud is shown seated with Verlaine and a number of other bohemians in a group called *Les Villains Bonhommes – The Bad Eggs* – of whom Verlaine and Rimbaud were, one might say, the 'baddest.' The portrait of Rimbaud – the only portrait of him we possess – is of a singularly beautiful, almost angelic looking youth, shown in a pensive state. He was eighteen, and a rakehell, and the disparity between his character and his appearance, as in Dorian Grey, is a familiar failure of fit that has come to give beauty a bad name. His badness extends even to his aesthetic preferences, which he catalogs in the *Delires* section of his poem: "Idiotic pictures, shop signs, stage sets, backcloths for street-entertainers, billboards, vernacular images, old fashioned stories, church Latin, badly spelt pornography, romance novels for elderly ladies, fairy tales, little books for children, old operas, silly refrains, naïve rhythms." What Rimbaud would not have known was that his inventory was to become the substance of an alternative aesthetic a century later.

Though I have no wish to lose myself in interpreting Rimbaud's poem, it can, perhaps must, be read as a tribute to the power of beauty, the disparities notwithstanding. Having abused Beauty in the third line, it is as if the poet were sentenced to madness – a season in hell – in penalty. He explicitly titles the section of the poem in which he declares his anti-aesthetic preferences as *Ravings*. That section ends with what feels like Rimbaud coming to his senses, though it can be read as heavy irony: "All that's behind me now. Today I know how to bow down before beauty."

It is as if Rimbaud intuited a thought I can hardly suppose he could have read in

Kant's *Critique of Judgment* – that "the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good." Kant's thought is not entirely easy to follow, but he clearly wants to say that finding something beautiful is more than simply taking pleasure in experiencing it. The beautiful "gives pleasure with a claim for the agreement of everyone else." For this reason, "the mind is made conscious of a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere sensibility of pleasure received through sense, and the worth of others is estimated in accordance with a like maxim of their judgment." And Kant goes on to claim that "the subjective principle in judging the beautiful is represented as *universal*, i.e., valid for every man." The abuse of beauty in this view is the symbolic enactment of an offense against morality and hence, in effect, against humanity. "I had armed myself against justice," Rimbaud says just after confessing his crime.

It is not clear, even if it would have been possible for him to have imagined it, that the abuse of beauty would be regarded by Kant as ipso facto a moral evil, since beauty only *symbolizes* morality, and between moral and aesthetic judgments there is only the kind of analogy, to use his example, that may hold between a commonwealth and a living body. So aesthetic imperatives are moral imperatives only symbolically. Kant recognizes that not everyone will agree, case by case, on questions of beauty, but the analogy requires the belief that they ought to, whatever the force of the ought. There was an Enlightenment tendency to believe that the same moral principles – the golden rule for example – were to be found in every society, so universality must have seemed coextensive with humanity. Would there have been a parallel view in regard to beauty?

Kant interestingly handled moral and aesthetic differences in systematically parallel ways. He learned about the South Seas from reading Captain Cook's voyages, and clearly he was struck by the otherness of the societies Cook describes. The question comes up for him whether those other lives are ones *we* would morally be able to live. In the schedule of cases in which he attempts to illustrate the working of the categorical imperative, he considers a talented individual in comfortable circumstances who "prefers indulgence in pleasure to troubling himself with broadening and improving his fortunate natural gifts." It would be entirely consistent with the laws of nature that everyone should live like "the inhabitants of the South Seas," so by one formulation of the categorical imperative, it would be permissible that a man "should let his talents rust and resolve to dedicate his life only to idleness, indulgence, and propagation." But *we* "cannot possibly will that this should become a universal law of nature," for "as a rational being, one necessarily wills that all one's faculties should be developed inasmuch as they are given to one for all sorts of possible purposes."

The implication is that the South Sea islanders are not quite rational, but even so ought to live in conformity with the Protestant ethic, and that is what we must teach them as moral missionaries. Kant was in no sense a moral relativist. What relativists regard as differences in culture Kant regarded as but differences in development, on the model of the differences between children and adults.

Kant similarly contests South Sea aesthetics, as he understands them. Presumably based on an anthropological illustration he must have seen, Kant was aware that there are parts of the world in which men are covered with a kind of spiral tattoo: "We could adorn a figure

with all kinds of spirals and light but regular lines, as the New Zealanders do with their tattooing, if only it were not the figure of a human being," he writes. In this same section of the *Third Critique*, he says, "We could add much to a building, which would immediately please the eye if only it were not to be a church."

These are imperatives of taste, and it is striking that Kant considers the tattoo as merely a form of ornamentation, like gilded statuary on a church, rather than a set of marks that may have nothing to do with beautification, but serve rather to connect the tattooed person with some larger scheme of the world. The tattoo may conduce to admiration of its bearer – but not for aesthetic reasons so much as for whatever it is in a person the tattoo signified – military prowess, say, or cosmic rank. Similarly with the brass neck coils affected by the Paduang women of Burma. And something of the same sort may be true of ornament in the German baroque church Kant evidently finds offensive to taste – as if the passions of northern European iconoclasm were merely expressions of aesthetic revulsion. So it is with reference to cognitive rather than aesthetic judgments that both ought to be assessed.

I would hesitate to say that all cases of so-called beautification can be deflected in this way, but the possibility suggests that a universal beauty may be entirely consistent with cultural differences, our mistake consisting in regarding certain things as aesthetic when they have some quite different and more cognitive function. The aesthetic diversity of the world's art is consistent with beauty as such being everywhere the same, if one cared to defend that thesis.

If, on the other hand, tattooing in the South Seas really is beautiful "in the eye of the South Sea Islander," Kant must feel himself entitled to the view that they are wrong. They just don't know what beauty is, which he would have defined in terms of what we may as well term the Protestant aesthetic.

Even Hegel, the first major philosopher actually to have gone out of his way to look at paintings and listen to music – and, as we shall see, an extraordinary art critic – had a difficult time with other traditions. "The Chinese," he writes in the *Philosophy of History*, "have as a general characteristic, a remarkable skill in imitation, which is exercised not merely in daily life but in art. They have not yet succeeded in representing the beautiful as beautiful; for in their painting, perspective and shadow are wanting." (Manet, who pushed shadows to the side, as we find them in photographs, inevitably flattened his figures, which explains in some measure the outcry against his work.) The implication is that the Chinese have either no idea of beauty or a wrong one. But Chinese culture had a very different idea of visual truth than Hegel had, and hence a different view of the aims of representation. No one could count their art as ugly, which is the operative thought in Fry's dictum that things will be perceived as ugly until they are perceived as beautiful. It was Hegel who required aesthetic education, fixated as he was on the Renaissance paradigm of mimesis.

But Fry understood, as a modernist, that the ligature between beauty and mimetic representation had been irreversibly loosened in his time. He knew that one could not argue his critical audiences into agreeing that Cézanne or Picasso shows the world as we really see it. He had instead to argue that this is not relevant, and that the emphasis must be not on vision but on design – to use the terms of his famous title. *Then* we can see the beauty of African and Chinese art, having surrendered the mis-

leading mimetic criteria so compelling to Hegel.

Loosening the beauty-mimesis ligature made it possible for Fry to become a great formalist art critic, but because he continued to see the ligature between art and beauty as a necessary connection, so that of necessity art is always beautiful, it failed to occur to him, as a theorist, that whole artistic traditions have existed in which beauty was never the point at all.

Beauty was not the rainbow that awaited us as the reward of sustained looking. It was never the case that the only proper way to address art was that of aesthetic contemplation. To put it another way, it never occurred to Fry, anymore than it had occurred to Ruskin, that the beauty that was incontestably present in, for example, the great cathedrals may have been a means rather than an end.

The point was not to stand in front of the church and gape at its ornamentation, but to enter the church, the beauty being the bait, as it so often is in entering into sexual relationships.

Fry's one contemporary who appears to have understood this was Marcel Duchamp. "Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder!" His argument, remarkably overlooked by aesthetic theory, is quite historical: "Before, painting had other functions, it could be philosophical, religious, moral. Our whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat."

In 1905, ruminating on the somewhat farcical contest between Whistler and Ruskin, Proust wrote (in a letter to Marie Nordlinger) that while Whistler had been right that there is a distinction between art and morality, on another plane Ruskin was right that "all great art is morality." In 1903, as we have seen, Moore seriously argued that the consciousness of beauty was among the supreme moral goods. We are safe, I think, in speaking of an atmosphere at the beginning of the twentieth century in which Rimbaud's image of abusing beauty could still have been seen as an abuse of morality.

I can think of no more vivid a gesture of abusing beauty by abusing great art than Duchamp's 1919 work in which he drew a moustache on a postcard of Mona Lisa, and scribbled a mild obscenity beneath that paradigm of great art.

That work, like everything by Duchamp, is a field of fiercely competing interpretations, but I want to use it as a historical signpost of a deep change in attitude that calls for a historical explanation. I want to focus on an art-historical episode in the course of which, greatly to the benefit of the philosophical understanding of art, a logical gap was definitively opened between art and beauty.

It was a gap that remained invisible to the denizens of Bloomsbury, who remained, for all their modernist ideals, late Edwardians. It was invisible to them because they had the idea, expressed in Fry's dictum, that works of art are perceived as ugly until they are perceived as beautiful. It was a gap that remained invisible until the great conceptual efforts of the 1960s to define art. That gap is the contribution in my view of what I shall term *the intractable avant-garde*.

I want, in setting the scene for my historical explanation, briefly to return to Moore's philosophy – in particular to the connection between the two supreme goods he holds up for examination. Moore sees a clear connection between goodness and beauty: "It appears

probable that the beautiful should be *defined* as that of which the admiring contemplation is good in itself." The two values, Moore claims, are so related to one another "that whatever is beautiful is also good." He goes further: "To say that a thing is beautiful is to say, not indeed that it is itself good, but that it is a necessary element in something which is: to prove that something is truly beautiful is to prove that a whole, to which it bears a particular relation as a part, is truly good." So Moore sees some near entailments between art and beauty, and between beauty and goodness. And beauty indeed was the principle on which Bloomsbury friendship was based: It consisted almost entirely of those who assigned to beauty the highest moral priority.

The Bloomsburys saw themselves as the true vessels of civilization. And they perhaps supposed it the mark of a civilization that it create individuals of the sort they exemplified. In this, I think, they were not so far from Kant, in light of his concluding proposition that beauty is the symbol of morality, even if connected, in his view, by way of a kind of analogy. There is in aesthetic judgment an entailed disinterestedness as well as a universality, which in Kant's philosophy was *sine qua non* for moral conduct. The person who values aesthetic experience has a moral fineness in that she or he is *ennobled* through the disinterestedness. Remember, further, that Kant defined the Enlightenment as mankind's coming of age – a cultural stage he would have believed the South Sea Islanders have not and perhaps for a long time will not have attained.

And now the question was: how is it that those nations defined by civilized high-mindedness should have made the most savage and protracted war that history up to that point had known?

It was with this question that the concept of beauty became abruptly politicized by avant-garde artists around 1915, which fell midway in the period of the ready-mades in Duchamp's career.

The 'abuse of beauty' became a device for dissociating the artists from the society they held in contempt. Rimbaud became an artistic and moral hero – the poet everyone wanted to be.

"I believe in the genius of Rimbaud," the young Andre Breton wrote Tristan Tzara, the author of the dada manifesto of 1918. It is dada to which I primarily refer in the project of disconnecting beauty from art as an expression of moral revulsion against a society for whom beauty was a cherished value and which cherished art itself because of beauty.

Here is a recollective account by Max Ernst:

> To us, Dada was above all a moral reaction. Our rage aimed at total subversion. A horrible futile war had robbed us of five years of our existence. We had experienced the collapse into ridicule and shame of everything represented to us as just, true, and beautiful. My works of that period were not meant to attract, but to make people scream.

Ernst knew the war – he had been an artilleryman – and his art was aggressive, as his perception of the war-makers as hateful required it to be.

In some measure this was true of German dada in general. The First International Dada exhibition in Berlin had signs declaring that art was dead – "Der Kunst ist Tot" – adding "Long life to the maschinen Kunst Tatlins." Its members were not out to vilify German values; they were bent on destroying them by forcing upon German consciousness an art it could not swallow. Its means were a kind of aggressive foolishness.

The original spirit of dada was a kind of exaggerated play in the shadow of the war, a way of demonstrating its contempt for the clashing patriotisms by infantile actions: the term itself was infantile for 'rocking horse,' and the Zurich dadaists registered their protests through buffoonery against what Hans Arp called "the puerile mania for authoritarianism which could use art itself for the stultification of mankind":

> While the thunder of guns sounded in the distance, we pasted, we recited, we versified, we sang with all our soul. We searched for an elementary art that would, we thought, save mankind from the furious folly of these times. We aspired to a new order.

Dada art was vehemently ephemeral – posters, book jackets, calligrams, pamphlets, recitations – as we would expect from a movement made of poets as well as artists. These ephemera, in their very ephemerality, were what Tzara celebrated as "means of combat."

Dada refuses to be found beautiful, even today, after the passage of time – and that is its great philosophical significance. Dada exemplifies the intractable avant-garde, since its works are misperceived if perceived as beautiful. That is not its point or ambition.

The narrative of aesthetic redemption assures us that sooner or later we will see all art as beautiful, however ugly it appeared at first. *Try to see this as beautiful!* becomes a sort of imperative for those who look at art that does not appear beautiful at first at all.

Someone told me that she found beauty in the maggots infesting the severed and seemingly putrescent head of a cow, set in a vitrine by the Young British Artist Damien Hirst. It gives me a certain wicked pleasure to imagine Hirst's frustration if hers were the received view.

He intended that his work be found disgusting, which was the one aesthetically unredeemable quality acknowledged by Kant in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. Disgust was noticed by Kant as a mode of ugliness resistant to the kind of pleasure that even the most displeasing things – "the Furies, diseases, the devastations of war" – are capable of causing when represented as beautiful by works of art. "That which excites *disgust* [*Ekel*]," Kant writes, "cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction." Since the purpose of art is taken to be the production of pleasure, only the most perverse of artists would undertake to represent the disgusting, which cannot "in accordance with nature" produce pleasure in normal viewers.

There are, to be sure, those who derive a perverted pleasure in experiencing what the normal viewer finds disgusting: who have, one might say, 'special tastes.' Artists interested in representing the disgusting would not have this special audience in view. Their aim is precisely to cause through their art sensations that, in Kant's phrase, "we strive against with all our might."

The psychobiology of disgust is as yet not well understood, but the early writers on it followed Darwin in thinking of it as a product of evolution concerned "basically with the rejection of food." Evidence for the centrality of food "includes the facial expression, which focuses on oral expulsion and closing of the nares, and the physiological concomitants of nausea and gagging." Recent research has widened the scope of "disgust elicitors," somewhat weakening the connection with survival – and it is with items in this augmented schedule that disgust has become an artistic opportunity for those eager to hold beauty at bay. Kant would have no recourse but to regard this as the perversion of art. It

would be of no value to the artists in question if a taste for the disgusting were to be normalized. It is essential to their aims that the disgusting remain disgusting, not that audiences learn to take pleasure in it, or find it somehow beautiful.

I have seen a sculpture from Nuremberg from the late Gothic era of a figure known as "The Prince of the World," which looks comely and strong from the front but is displayed in a state of wormy decay from behind; the body is shown the way it would look decomposing in the grave. Such sights explain why we actually bury the dead. There can be no question of what is the intended function of showing bodily decay with the skill of a Nuremberg stone carver – it is not to give the viewer pleasure: it is, rather, to disgust the viewer, and in so doing, to act as a *vanitas*, reminding us through presentation that the flesh is corrupt, and its pleasures a distraction from our higher aspirations – namely to achieve everlasting blessedness and avoid eternal punishment. To show the human body as disgusting is certainly to violate good taste, but Christian artists were prepared to pay this price for what Christianity regards as our highest moral purpose.

Kant did of course have a concept of the sublime, which I suppose has to transcend morality, because of the close parallels he insisted upon between moral and aesthetic judgments, without so much as asking whether and in what degree the production of beauty itself serves or can serve some higher moral ends. It is quite as if beauty were its own end, justifying the practice of art through its existence alone.

Kant never asks what the purpose of the disgusting might be in a work of art, or why the dereliction of beauty might be a moral means. In a precritical text, Kant does make plain that the disgusting is the antonym of the beautiful. So the disgusting is in any case not conceptually connected with the sublime. The antonym of the sublime, he deliciously observes, is the silly, which suggests that the effect of dada was less the abuse of beauty than the rejection of the sublime.

But just possibly the disgusting, as logically connected with beauty, can also have the connection with morality that beauty does.

In the early 1990s, curators recognized a genre of contemporary art they designated 'abject art.' "The abject," writes the art historian Joseph Koerner, "is a novelty neither in the history of art nor in the attempts to write that history." Koerner cites, among other sources, a characteristically profound insight of Hegel: "The novelty of Christian and Romantic art consisted of taking the abject as its privileged object. Specifically, the tortured and crucified Christ, that ugliest of creatures in whom divine beauty became, through human evil, basest abjection."

Rudolph Wittkower begins his great text on art and architecture in Italy after the Council of Trent by recording the decision of that council to display the wounds and agonies of the martyred, in order, through this display of affect, to elicit the sympathy of viewers and through that to strengthen threatened faith. "Even Christ must be shown 'afflicted, bleeding, spat upon, with his skin torn, wounded, deformed, pale and unsightly' if the subject calls for it." The tendency in the Renaissance to beautify the crucified Christ was in effect a move to classicize Christianity by returning the tortured body to a kind of athletic grace, denying the basic message of Christian teaching that salvation is attained through abject suffering.

The aestheticism of the eighteenth century was a corollary of the rationalism of natural religion. It was Kant's stunning achievement to situate aesthetics in the critical architectonic as a form of judgment two small steps away from pure reason.

In view of the vast human suffering that was one salient aspect of the twentieth century, it is astonishing how dispassionate, how rational, how distancing, how abstract so much of twentieth-century art really was. How innocent dada was! In its refusal to gratify the aesthetic sensibilities of those responsible for World War I, dada gave the world babbling in place of beauty, silliness instead of sublimity. If it injured beauty, it was through a kind of punitive clownishness.

What abject art, so pathetic in its incapacity finally to do much to deflect or diminish the degradations of the body that the politics of our times has used as its means, has done is to seize upon the emblems of degradation as a way of crying out in the name of humanity. "For many in contemporary culture," Hal Foster writes, "truth resides in the traumatic or abject subject, in the diseased or damaged body. Thus body is the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary witnessings against power."

My aim is not to judge the success or failure of artistic abjection, but rather to emphasize that it is intended to resist the prediction that art is ugly until seen as beautiful. It is a misperception of art to see it as always and necessarily concerned with the creation and appreciation of beauty. With dada, a deep conceptual shift took place. This perhaps justifies the claim that I have often made that in the twentieth century, the artists were carrying forward the philosophy of art in a way that could not have been achieved by philosophers themselves, whose intuitions were colored by the Edwardian views we find in Moore and Bloomsbury.

I regard the discovery that something can be good art without being beautiful one of the great conceptual clarifications of twentieth-century philosophy of art, though it was made exclusively by artists, and it would have been seen as commonplace before the Enlightenment gave beauty the primacy it has continued to enjoy. That clarification managed to push reference to beauty out of any proposed definition of art, even if the new situation dawned very slowly in artistic consciousness.

When a philosopher of art such as Nelson Goodman sets aesthetics aside in order to talk about representation and meaning, this is not done with the expectation that we will return to the concept of beauty with an enhanced understanding. It is done, rather, with the awareness that beauty belongs neither to the essence nor the definition of art.

3

On principles of Renaissance theory, paintings were windows on the world – pure, apparently transparent openings through which one saw the world as if from outside. So a picture drew its beauty from the world, ideally having none of its own to contribute to what one saw, as it were, through it. (This of course overlooks the contribution of the frame in shaping the way the world presents itself to the eye in a painting.)

The stereotypical painter crooks the index finger against the thumb, framing the world until it resolves into a picture – until it looks the way she wants her picture to look – like Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*, or, we imagine, any of the Bloomsbury painters scouting the south of France for what the traditional art schools designated *motifs*.

Kant was famously a stay-at-home, but he lived in an era of aesthetic tourism. The well-to-do went abroad to see the sights: the Alps, the Bay of Naples, as well, of course, as the Piazza San Marco, the Pantheon, the Leaning Tower, the Acropolis. A pictorial industry grew up to provide souvenirs – objective memories – of what one took in. This I take to be the background of Kant's somewhat surprising remark, at §45 of the *Critique of Judgment*, that "Nature is beautiful because it looks like art," when one would have expected the opposite assertion instead. Kant seems to be saying that the world is beautiful when it looks the way painters represent it. When one thinks an artist represented a scene because it was beautiful in the first place, one understands rightly the Renaissance idea that what one sees pictured on a canvas or a panel is a transparent view of a scene's beauty.

This cannot, however, have been the whole story, not even for Kant, who recognized that art was capable of representing as beautiful "things which may be in nature ugly or displeasing. The Furies, diseases, the devastations of war, etc. may even be regarded as calamitous, be described as very beautiful, as they are represented in a picture."

So the picture in Kant's understanding must contribute to the beauty, since these motifs have none. It is here that Kant makes his parenthetical observation on disgust as the "one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction, and consequently *artificial beauty*."

I emphasize 'artificial beauty.' It is what we would call 'beautification' – aesthetic sophism, making the worse appear better, which involves cosmetics, fashion, interior decoration, and the like, where we are not dealing with natural but with enhanced beauty. In the eighteenth century, in France especially, a close parallel was drawn between painting pictures and painting faces, so that, in his portrait of *Madame Pompadour at her Vanity*, which shows the great lady with her rouge-brush before a mirror, Boucher is virtually saluting a fellow artist. With the made-up face, Kant's follow-up thought would be exact – "we are conscious of it as art while yet it looks like nature."

Beautification has tended to incur a certain puritanical condemnation: it traffics in causing the kind of false beliefs that constitute the cognitive basis for the great cosmetic fortunes of the modern world. The French term for 'to make up' is *farder*, or 'to color,' which explains in part why there was a traditional mistrust of colors – why Descartes went so far as to say we really did not need our eyes to know what the world was like, since the blind can feel the outlines and know the shapes of things. Ruskin appears to have had beautification – or artifice – in mind when, in support of the British Pre-Raphaelites, he condemns pretty much the entire history of painting from the time of Raphael down.

In the first of two letters to *The Times* in 1851, Ruskin wrote that his young protégés

> desire to represent, irrespective of any conventional rules of picture making; and they have chosen their unfortunate though not inaccurate name because all artists did this before Raphael's time, and after Raphael's time did *not* do this, but sought to paint fair pictures rather than represent stern facts, of which the consequence has been that from Raphael's time to this day historical art has been in acknowledged decadence.

It did not incidentally matter that the reality was only imagined – 'made up' by the artist in the other sense of the ex-

pression – so long as it was not falsified in the interests of beautification.

I cannot help but feel that the aura of falsification helps to explain some of the suspicions aroused when beauty plays a role in contemporary art. Consider again the case of Mapplethorpe. He tried to achieve the excitement of pornographic images in *artistic*, that is, beautiful photographs. Freud observed that "the genitals themselves, the sight of which is always exciting, are hardly ever regarded as beautiful." Yet at their most successful, we can barely stand to look at some of Mapplethorpe's pictures from which, because of the beauty with which he infused them, we cannot tear our eyes away. They paralyze the will, as in the case cited by Socrates of a man who "feasts his eyes" on the sight of corpses.

To take a less complex case, Sabastao Salgado's photographs of suffering humanity are beautiful – and hence, his critics would say, falsified – because suffering of that order, being grim, ought not to be seen as beautiful. Salgado pretties through photographic artifice what ought to be shown in its true colors. If there is to be art, it should not be beautiful, since the world does not deserve beauty. Artistic truth must accordingly be as sad as human life itself, and art leached of beauty serves in its own way as a mirror of what human beings have done. Art, subtracted of the stigma of beauty, serves as what the world has coming to it. Beautifiers are, so to speak, collaborationists.

Most of the world's art is not beautiful at all, nor was the production of beauty part of its purpose. One of the most marvelous pieces of art criticism I know was written by Fry himself about Mantegna's Simone Madonna in Berlin: "The wizened face, the creased and crumpled flesh of a new born babe ... all the penalty, the humiliation, almost the squalor attendant upon being 'made flesh' are marked." As enfleshed, God must begin as helplessly as we all begin – hungry, wet, soiled, confused, colicky, crying, dribbling, babbling, drooling, and totally dependent. All that is implicit in Mantegna's picture, and it is inconsistent with seeing the painting as beautiful. The message transcends beauty and ugliness. It is morally rather than visually true.

I want one further example, which comes from Hegel, a great art critic, writing about a masterpiece by the artist the Pre-Raphaelites were to despise: "It is a familiar and frequently repeated reproach against Raphael's *Transfiguration* that it falls apart into two actions entirely devoid of any connection with one another," Hegel writes.

> And in fact this is true if this picture is considered externally: above on the hill we see the transfiguration, below is the scene with the child possessed of an unclean spirit. But if we look at the *spirit* of the composition, a supreme connection is not to be missed. For, on the one hand, Christ's visible transfiguration is precisely his elevation above the earth, and his departure from his disciples, and this must be made visible too as a separation and a departure; on the other hand, the sublimity of Christ is here especially transfigured in an actual simple case, namely in the fact that the Disciples could not help the child without the help of the Lord. Thus here the double action is motivated throughout and the connection is displayed within and without in the fact that one disciple expressly points to Christ who has departed from them and thereby he hints at the true destiny of the Son of God to be at the same time on earth, so that the saying will be true: Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

To say design is as weak as beauty would be an inappropriate response to this tremendous work. The design inheres in the meaning Raphael intends to convey, *l'effet* of the event he has undertaken to depict visually, when the meaning of the event itself – the transfiguration – is not entirely visual. Ruskin would be right about Raphael: 'externally' it lacks visual truth, but internally it conveys truth of a profounder kind.

One sees from this passage the remarkable difference between a thinker like Hegel, who was deeply engaged by great art, and Kant, who was not, and for whom experiencing art was of a piece with experiencing natural beauty, like that of flowers or sunsets or lovely women. And this is finally what is missing in Moore's way of thinking about art as well. He thought of artistic beauty on the model of natural beauty, as we can see from his belief that something beautiful exists much more compellingly in reality than in pictures.

David Hume takes up the relationship between natural and artistic beauty almost as an aside, in order to point out an analogy between two views of moral truths, namely "whether they be derived from Reason or Sentiment." Sentimentalists claim that "To virtue it belongs to be *amiable*, and vice *odious*." The latter term evokes a distant echo to disgust, a moral revulsion that verges on physical recoil. By symmetry, the former evokes a kind of natural attraction: we are drawn to what we perceive as good for us in others. Hume allows that there is a kind of beauty of which the latter may be true: "Some species of beauty, especially the natural kinds, on their first appearance command our affection and approbation; and where they fail of this effect, it is impossible for any reasoning to redress their influence, or adapt them better to our taste and sentiment." It is in regard to this sort of beauty that one might say there is no disputing taste. But Hume, as a man of letters, had a vivid sense of the transformative power of critical reasoning:

> In many orders of beauty, particularly those of the finer arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection. There are just grounds to conclude that moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind.

This kind of reasoning is, I think, illustrated in Fry on Mantegna, or Hegel on Raphael. And I believe it is Hegel, more than any other thinker, who draws the distinction most sharply. He is the first in particular to distinguish, perhaps too sharply, between aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Aesthetics, he observes, is "the science of sensation or feeling," and concerns art "when works of art are treated with regard to the feelings they were supposed to produce, as, for instance, the feeling of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, and so on." This is a great advance over Kant, who more or less confines the relevant repertoire of effects to pleasure and pain, making an important exception for sublimity. Hegel insists artistic beauty is 'higher' than the beauty of nature, and he writes with a marvelous thunder that "The beauty of art is beauty *born of the spirit and born again*." What I am eager to stress is that art is, for Hegel, an *intellectual* product, and that its beauty too must express the thought the art embodies.

All this said, Hegel cannot have thought of art as other than beautiful, and indeed he saw this as art's limita-

tion, thinking as he does of beauty in terms of a sensation, or what Hume calls a 'sentiment.'

Hegel writes that "the beauty of art presents itself to *sense*, feeling, intuition, imagination; it has a different sphere than thought, and the apprehension of its activity and its products demands an organ other than scientific thinking." That is why art has come to an end, to invoke his celebrated thesis. We have risen above the sphere of sense in the respect that philosophy, or *Wissenschafft*, is an exercise of pure understanding and analysis. So "the conditions of our present time are not favorable to art." The end of art thus has nothing to do with the decline of art but rather with the ascent of reason.

There remains the question of whether there is an important difference between natural and artistic beauty, just so far as perceiving the object itself is concerned. Let's allow that in the appreciation of natural beauty, the object which is the vehicle of beauty – which has beauty among it properties – is not connected with a thought that explains its existence, whereas with a work of art the beautiful is explained by the thought that it is necessary to grasp in order to appreciate the beauty. Is the appreciation of beauty different between the two cases?

I want to present a pair of examples – one of natural, one of artistic beauty – in which we can see Hume's way of dealing with the distinction at work. I have selected the examples because they raise some striking psychological issues that bear on the moral grounds evoked in treating beauty as shallow and false to the reality of the world. They bear on what I take the prophet Isaiah to have meant in envisioning a world in which those who suffer are given beauty in place of ashes. I intend the examples, in brief, to help remove the stigma from beauty, to restore to beauty some of what gave it the moral weight it had in Edwardian aesthetics.

The first, somewhat overdetermined example comes from Proust. In a section called "The Intermitancies of the Heart," in the fourth volume of *In Search of Lost Time,* the Narrator has returned to the seaside resort of Balbec. On his first stay, he was accompanied by his beloved grandmother, who has since died. The section of the book in which he describes his grandmother's death is curiously clinical and detached, which is somewhat inconsistent with what we would expect, given their earlier bond. We feel we have learned something through this about the character of Marcel, who seems a much colder person than we would have believed him to be. This impression proves to be false; the moment he returns to his room at the Grand Hotel, he is overwhelmed with a sense of loss and bereavement, and descends into an acute depression as his grandmother's irrevocable absence floods his consciousness completely.

Marcel now sits gazing at his grandmother's photograph, which tortures him. He realizes how self-centered he had been when he had been the object of his grandmother's totally dedicated love – how he had failed, for example, to notice how ill she had been on that first sojourn to Balbec. This mood lasts until he goes for a walk one day in the direction of a high road, along which he and his grandmother used to be driven in the carriage of Mme. de Villeparisis. The road was muddy, which made him think of his grandmother and how she used to return covered with mud when she went walking whatever the weather. The sun is out, and he sees a "dazzling spectacle" – a stand of apple trees in blossom:

> The disposition of the apple trees, as far as the eye could reach, were in full bloom, unbelievably luxuriant, their feet in the mire beneath their ball-dresses, heedless of spoiling the most marvelous pink satin that was ever seen, which glittered in the sunlight; the distant horizon of the sea gave the trees the background of a Japanese print; if I raised my head to gaze at the sky through the flowers, which made its serene blue appear almost violent, they seemed to draw apart to reveal the immensity of their paradise. Beneath that azure a faint but cold breeze set the blushing bouquets. [It was] as though it had been an amateur of exotic art and colors that had artificially created this living beauty. But it moved one to tears because, to whatever lengths it went in its effects of refined artifice, one felt that it was natural, that these apple trees were there in the heart of the country.

The example is overdetermined because only someone like Marcel would have seen this glorious sight as he did. He is like his counterpart, Swann, in seeing everything through the metaphors of art. Someone who had never seen Hiroshige or an Ascension of the Virgin, or in whose life there were no ballgowns or pink satin, could hardly have experienced the apple trees quite as he did.

Still, it was a piece of natural beauty, which might have taken the breath away from anyone fortunate enough to have seen it. Marcel tells us that from this moment, his grief for his grandmother began to diminish; metaphorically, one might say, she had entered paradise. He was given beauty for ashes. The beauty, one might truly say, helped heal him.

The apple trees at Balbec might be on anyone's short list for Moore's world of beauty. A world with such sights in it would be better, Moore is confident in arguing, than a world of ashes. That would be as obvious as the fact that his two hands exist, to invoke one of Moore's most famous arguments. You cannot argue anyone into accepting that if they are uncertain of it – for what could be more certain than that? If they doubt that, their doubt is irremediable.

This I think is Hume's point about natural beauty. You can't argue anyone into feeling it. Natural beauty was at the core of Marcel's experience – even if there was an aura of metaphors drawn from his experience of art, which enters into his descriptions.

My second example is of a relatively contemporary work, Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial of 1982, which I select because it is widely regarded as possessing great beauty, both by those in the art world and by quite ordinary persons for whom it has become one of the most widely admired sights in Washington, D.C.

The Memorial is simplicity itself. It consists of two symmetrical triangular wings that bend away from one another at a mild angle – 125 degrees – from a shared vertical base to gently enfold those who approach it. It is a very reduced form of the Bernini colonnades enclosing St. Peter's Square in Rome, buts performs a similar role. Maya Lin was an undergraduate at Yale when she presented the idea, and was told by her instructor that the angle between the two wings "Had to mean something." The two walls are of polished black granite, and inscribed with the names of every American soldier killed in the Vietnam War – about 58,000 in all – listed chronologically by date of death.

The commission of Lin's scheme for the memorial almost had the quality of a fairy tale: it took the twenty-one-year-old all of six weeks to complete the winning model, selected unanimously from 1,421 entries in blind review. This, after Lin's peers had criticized the work as

'visual poetry' – it is, after all, a kind of book – and had expressed their uncertainty of its architectural merit. Meanwhile, Lin was young, female, of Asian descent, and had lost no loved ones in the conflict: she failed all the tacit tests the designer of such a memorial was supposed to meet.

When the organizer of the competition, Jan Scruggs, first saw the work he was profoundly disillusioned. "A big bat. A weird-looking thing that could have been from Mars. Maybe a third grader had entered the competition. All the fund's work had gone into making a huge bat for veterans. Maybe it symbolized a boomerang," Scruggs thought. "It's weird and I wish I knew what the hell it is." It is amazing that it was not voted down. Everyone wondered how the general public would react, but one person told Scruggs that "You would be surprised how sophisticated the general public really is." That of course turned out to be true.

The beauty of the work is almost instantly felt, and then perhaps best explained in terms of the emotional response of visitors, many of whom come to see the name of someone they loved and to do a rubbing of it to carry home. They see themselves reflected in the same wall that carries the name of the dead, as if there were a community of the living and the dead, though death itself is forever. Possibly there is an analogy to a natural phenomenon – such as the surface of a very still body of water in which the sky is reflected, as in Monet's immense paintings of water lilies that make visible the way clouds and flowers seem to occupy the same space. Whatever the proper explanation of the felt beauty of the wall, it is understood with reference to the 'thought.' It is part of the meaning of the work. In Proust's orchard, the thought is his. In the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the thought belongs to the work and explains the beauty. In natural beauty, the beauty is external to the thought; in art the beauty is internal to the work.

The idea of internal beauty, of beauty as integral to the meaning of a work, originally came to me in thinking of Robert Motherwell's *Elegy for the Spanish Republic*. People have sometimes read its black forms as icons for the penis and testicles of a bull, and, thus, the work as elegizing the loss of virility. But I see them as human and architectural elements in a landscape of devastation: shawled women and broken pillars, against early daylight, as with the Christ figure in Piero's *Resurrection*. Motherwell achieved a representation that transcends the history it interprets, personal experience, and memory, as will Lin's work in a relatively short period of time.

What impressed me was the way the very idea of elegy is connected with the idea of beauty – that its being an elegy meant it was intended to be beautiful, and that the beauty was intended to be healing, the way the music at a funeral is, or the flowers, or – this is not to my taste – even the beautification of the departed for the occasion of a 'viewing.' I mean in any case that Motherwell's *Elegies* do not just happen to be beautiful. Their being beautiful is part of their meaning, and integral to their impact.

"My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky" – Wordsworth's sentiment expresses a species of beauty and aesthetic surprise we have all experienced. But my concern in the preceding paragraphs has been mainly to make plain the relationship between beauty and thought, and between the kinds of thoughts that go into the experience of external as against internal beauty – how

in the first instance the thoughts are personal and in the second objectively resident in the work.

My concern in this essay as a whole, on the other hand, has been to show the connection between beauty and art: beauty is connected with art when its presence is part of the meaning of the work.

The Taj Mahal is beautiful, but I am not certain I want to say that about the Cathedral of Cologne, or about *The Last Judgment* of Michelangelo or the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* – and certainly not of the Simone Madonna, *Woman with a Hat*, Raphael's *Transfiguration*. The cases of beauty I have considered go some distance toward supporting Hegel's view that art and philosophy are differently connected and in different ways with "the deepest interests of mankind and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit." Because these interests are connected with the way we are made, they might help us begin the detoxification of beauty in contemporary art and philosophy, always recognizing that both have shown that it is not part of the definition of art.

Beauty is one mode among many through which thoughts are presented in art to human sensibility – disgust, horror, sublimity, and sexuality are still others. These modes explain the relevance of art to human existence, and room for them all must be found in an adequate definition of art.