

Kant's "Formalism"? – Distinguishing between Aesthetic Judgment and an Overall Response to Art in the *Critique of Judgment*

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In art historical discourse, Kant and Greenberg are often held responsible for "formalism."¹ Here "form" or "formal qualities" are taken to mean line, shape, and colour and the relationships among them, while "formalism" is cursorily reduced to an approach that "emphasizes the autonomy or primacy of formal qualities"² and is then conflated with "Modernism." Even the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* entry on "formalism" identifies Kant's influence: "An important philosophical source" for the thesis that "all artworks are to be primarily valued *for* their formal properties...can be found in the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant."³

The identification of Kant as a formalist may in fact be thanks to Greenberg's references to him. Noting that Greenberg's "later work is repeatedly criticized for its contrasting formalism," Mark Cheetham has observed: "Ironically, the standard reading of Greenberg as a blinkered Kantian has significantly influenced this reading of Kant himself."⁴ In the opening paragraph of his essay "Modernist Painting" Greenberg famously stated: "Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist."⁵ Greenberg's interest in medium specificity may well be an application of Kant's autocritique to artistic media (such as painting) and this application may have led to an essentializing emphasis on a medium's intrinsic formal qualities ("the flat surface, the shape of the support, [and] the properties of the pigment").⁶ But such an application of Kant's critical approach is not indicative of Kant's views on aesthetic judgment and art as expressed in his 1790 *Critique of Judgment*.

In order to consider to what degree Kant promotes "formalism," it is thus pertinent to compare art historical, art critical, and aesthetical meanings of "formalism," for which Kant is supposedly an important source, with a close reading of Kant's third *Critique*. First, it should be noted that by "form" Kant may not have meant perceptual qualities such as line, shape, and colour. In *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics*, Rodolphe Gasché examines Kant's use of the term in the first *Critique* and posits that for Kant "form" means "having the form of an object": "the mere form found in wild objects of nature concerns the faculties involved in securing a representation. [...] Mere form [...] is the form that the cognitive powers achieve in the face of wild objects." It is

the pre-objective and pre-predicative condition under which empirical manifolds of intuition can be gathered into figures of objectivity, in the absence of determined concepts. The eventual attribution of form to a formless manifold of nature, or of intuition, is pleasurable because by this feat of the mind, the possibility of objectification and predication is potentially secured.⁷

This explanation certainly is more befitting unspoiled nature than a framed painting isolated on a well-lit wall. However, Henry E. Allison's helpful discussion of form pertains, if not exactly to Gasché's "attribution of form to a *formless manifold*," at least to "some kind of diversity for the imagination to unify." For the harmony or free play of the faculties to occur, there must be "an arrangement or ordering of sensible content, that is,

an organized manifold of some sort”—such as that provided by design and composition in art—“and not an isolated sensation.” Allison concludes that “such an arrangement of sensible data, as contrasted with the data themselves, certainly counts as ‘form’ in Kant’s sense. [...] What is required is merely some kind of diversity for the imagination to unify in its apprehension and present for reflection.”⁸ Moreover, Gasché is not concerned with the nature-bias that results from his own reading. Against a recent surge of interest in the “Analytic of the Sublime” as it pertains to art, Gasché wishes to assert that Kant is predominantly concerned with aesthetic judgments of nature. Compelling, if “unorthodox,”⁹ Gasché’s work would seem to answer the question of whether or not Kant was a “formalist”: how could he be a “formalist” in the cursory sense described above (one who emphasizes the autonomy or primacy of formal qualities) if he meant something quite different by the term “form”? Tied as it is to nature as opposed to art, however, Gasché’s interpretation of “form” as “attribution of form to a formless manifold” does not engage with accusations of cursory-sense “formalism” on their own ground.

To this end, and before delving into the third *Critique*, it is important to develop further the cursory sense of formalism by distinguishing between different contexts in which the term is used. As a methodology for art history, “formalism” is an approach that views close formal analysis as essential to, not antithetical to, accessing a work’s meaning or historical significance. “Having recently been called a ‘crypto-formalist,’ a ‘new kind of Greenberg, one with hindsight,’ and a ‘nihilistic formalist,’” Yve-Alain Bois defends his formalism as follows:

Dotting the i’s in observing the way in which Pollock’s paint bleeds might look trivial — but in the end it might reveal as much, if not more, about the history, context, ideological constraints, and so on, of postwar American painting than any analysis of its market and institutions. [. . .] [I]t is certainly *because* I am interested in the historical signification of works of art (what I would call their conditions of possibility — what makes any work of art possible at any given time) that I confer a pre-eminent importance on close formal analyses in my own work.¹⁰

As a tool for art criticism, “formalism” establishes that for which an artwork is to be valued (its form) and might also dictate what constitutes the best works (those that emphasize form). Further, with “formalism” as a tool, the art critic’s task of evaluating might approach the art historian’s task of situating and locating significance. David Summers outlines a typical reaction to formalist criticism:

A formalist critic explicitly or implicitly asserts not only that “formal” art is better, but also that only such art is historically authentic and fashions a narrative to show that this is so. In the case of criticism as opposed to history, historicism provides a means by which a thin line may be selected from the vast production of artists of all kinds and defended as in some sense necessary, thus at least providing an absolute criterion for the selection of works of art, a criterion at least incidentally necessary to the optimal functioning of the art market.¹¹

In the particular case of a critic like Greenberg, however, Cheetham observes:

It is not so much that he forgot the historical factors that inspired both the avant-garde and his own defenses of it, though a selective reading of his essays can easily give this impression. Rather, and this is where his theory is most open to

criticism, he continued to believe in the *same* threats defined early on as kitsch, and thus also in the same separatist solution to it, which was to be realized through formalist “purity.”¹²

Not only was Kant neither an art historian nor an art critic; his influence on these first two areas is little explored.¹³ As Cheetham describes it: “Kant’s name is virtually unmentioned in the historiography of art history: it is ‘dropped’ in the sense of omitted. Kant is noted in art criticism and by artists but rarely discussed in any depth: his name is ‘dropped’ mostly for the authority it carries.”¹⁴ It is a third context for “formalism” that bears the most relevance to Kant: “formalism” as an explanation for aesthetic experience. This can be the basis for “formalism” as a tool for art criticism. But whereas the latter identifies the source of an artwork’s value (its form) and promotes artworks on the basis of that value, “formalism” as an explanation for aesthetic experience merely claims that when we come upon a natural object or scene or a work of art and experience it to be aesthetically, that is perceptually, pleasing or “beautiful,” this is owing to the formal qualities of the object. “Formalism” as an explanation for aesthetic experience does not delimit what can count as the value, significance, function, or valid response to works of art; it identifies formal qualities as the locus of our aesthetic experiences.

This paper argues that Kant is only a formalist in this third sense, in explaining what prompts an aesthetic experience, and acknowledges that Kant identifies and demands other qualities when it comes to how art operates. “Formalist” may seem to describe aptly Kant’s views on judgments of *beauty*, “which,” Kant says, “should properly concern merely form”¹⁵: “in a pure judgment of taste, the satisfaction in the object is combined with the mere judging of its form.”¹⁶ However, Kant’s brief, seemingly discontinuous discussion of responses to *art* disrupts such a reductive description. I highlight the distinction between the aesthetic power of judgment and an overall response to an art object in an effort to resolve some of the queries and apparent contradictions raised by Kant’s third *Critique*. I examine Kant’s discussion of “concepts” in relation to judgments of beauty, the episodic character of the sections on art, and take issue with Paul Guyer’s development of, if not the conclusions derived from, his interpretation of Kant’s conception of art. Finally, I briefly explore Kant’s conception of aesthetic ideas as well as his distinction between free and adherent beauty to show that labelling Kant as a formalist in the strict, art critical sense is unwarranted.

A salient feature of Kant’s third *Critique* that has prompted the use of the label “formalist” in the art critical sense is his insistence that judgments of beauty do not involve concepts. What about meaning, reference, or social or political context, the anti-formalist might exclaim. Indeed, what about conceptual art? First, Kant debar concepts not from responses to or the content of *art* but from judgments of *beauty*. He makes this claim in order to preserve the universality of aesthetic judgments. Yet, we may wonder whether there is such a thing as a pure judgment of taste bereft of concepts. Does viewing a flower not involve the concepts “flower” and “purple,” for example? Why must the mere concept of a “sonata” be excluded from our aesthetic judgment? It would seem that to look at an abstract painting and ask “What is it supposed to be?” or “Is there anything going on here or is it just a bunch of shapes?” is to arrive at the Kantian aesthetic.

Kant’s formulation of this precept is the most rigorous at the beginning and end of the Second Moment. At the beginning he writes: “The beautiful is that which, without concepts, is represented as the object of a *universal* satisfaction.” At the end, he writes: “That is **beautiful** which pleases universally without a concept.”¹⁷ Kant here seems to have generalized his claim to “without concepts” perhaps for the sake of brevity for these introductory and concluding statements. As we shall see, references to concepts elsewhere in the text are more specifically qualified.

Kant writes that “the satisfaction in beauty [...] is one that *presupposes no* concept,” and is “*not to be derived from* concepts,” and that “the [pleasure in] taste [...] is to be combined immediately with the mere judging, *prior to any* concept.”¹⁸ He often refers to aesthetic judgment as *not grounded on* concepts.

Such a judgment is an aesthetic judgment on the purposiveness of the object, which is not grounded on any available concept of the object, and does not furnish one.¹⁹

[T]hrough the judgment of taste (on the beautiful) one ascribes the satisfaction in an object **to everyone**, yet without grounding it on a concept (for then it would be the good).²⁰

The judgment is also called aesthetic precisely because its determining ground is not a concept but the feeling (of inner sense) of that unison in the play of the powers of the mind, insofar as it can only be sensed.²¹

[A] subjective purposiveness [...] is not supposed to be grounded in any concept of the thing, because it is a judgment of taste.²²

[T]he judgment of taste, however, is not grounded on concepts at all.²³

He also contends that aesthetic judgment does *not* occur *in accordance with* concepts:

The aesthetic power of judgment is thus a special faculty for judging things in accordance with a rule but not in accordance with concepts.²⁴

If one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost.²⁵

That is **beautiful** which pleases in the mere judging (thus not by means of the sensation of sense in accordance with a concept of the understanding).²⁶

[T]he beautiful must not be judged in accordance with concepts, but rather in accordance with the purposive disposition of the imagination for its correspondence with the faculty of concepts in general.²⁷

Even less stringent are his statements qualified by the adjective “determinate,” implying that indeterminate concepts may be involved:

Flowers, free designs, lines aimlessly intertwined in each other under the name of foliage, signify nothing, do not depend on any determinate concept, and yet please.²⁸

The powers of cognition that are set into play by this representation are hereby in a free play, since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition.²⁹

The subjective universal communicability of the kind of representation in a judgment of taste, since it is supposed to occur without presupposing a determinate concept, can be nothing other than the state of mind in the free play of the imagination and the understanding.³⁰

[B]oth [the beautiful and the sublime] presuppose [. . .] a judgment of reflection: consequently satisfaction does not depend on a sensation, like that in the agreeable, nor on a determinate concept, like the satisfaction in the good; but it is nevertheless still related to concepts, although it is indeterminate which.³¹

[T]he beautiful seems to be taken as the presentation of an indeterminate concept of the understanding, but the sublime as that of a similar concept of reason.³²

[T]he aesthetic power of judgment in judging the beautiful relates the imagination in its free play to the **understanding**, in order to agree with its **concepts** in general (without determination of them).³³

Also, according to Kant's so-called resolution of the antinomy of taste, the judgment of taste is not based on *determinate* concepts, "for otherwise," he writes, "it would be possible to dispute about it (decide by means of proofs)." Yet, it is based on *indeterminate* concepts "for otherwise, despite its variety, it would not even be possible to argue about it (to lay claim to the necessary assent of others to this judgment)."³⁴ Roger Scruton concludes: "In the free play of imagination, concepts are either wholly indeterminate, or if determinate not applied."³⁵ Beginning with indeterminate concepts, Scruton contends that viewing marks or shapes as a pattern does not involve a determinate concept but is merely an experienced order, and thus an indeterminate idea.³⁶ Turning to mimetic art and to concepts that are determinate but not applied, Scruton describes viewing a portrait: "Here the concept 'face' enters the imaginative synthesis, but it is not applied to the object. I do not judge that this, before me, is a face, but only that I have imaginative permission, as it were, so to see it."³⁷ Kant suggests that we may need to "abstract from" the concept of an object's end: "A judgment of taste in regard to an object with a determinate internal end would thus be pure only if the person making the judgment either had no concept of this end or abstracted from it in his judgment."³⁸

At this point, we should recall that, according to Kant, the judgment of beauty occurs as a result of the pleasure or displeasure experienced in the *subject*.

What is merely subjective in the representation of an object, i.e., what constitutes its relation to the subject, not to the object, is its aesthetic property.³⁹

[B]eauty is nothing by itself, without relation to the feeling of the subject.⁴⁰

[T]he predicate of beauty is not connected with the concept of the **object**.⁴¹

[The] determining ground [of aesthetic judgment] is the feeling of the subject and not a concept of an object.⁴²

[T]he subjective aspect in a representation **which cannot become an element of cognition at all** is the **pleasure** or **displeasure** connected with it; for through this [pleasure or displeasure] I cognize nothing in the object of the representation, although it can well be the effect of some cognition or other."⁴³

This last statement reminds us that, with the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant is concerned with the judgment of beauty and not with our overall assessment of or response to an object. "Some cognition or other" might be involved, but not when it comes to experiencing pleasure or displeasure, which is the basis for the judgment of beauty. Kant states that "there is no transition from concepts to the feeling of pleasure or

displeasure.”⁴⁴ Judgments of taste “go beyond the concept and even the intuition of the object, and add to that as a predicate something that is not even cognition at all, namely the feeling of pleasure (or displeasure).”⁴⁵ Thus, 1) it is only the judgment of beauty from which concepts are debarred. And, 2) they are only debarred for Kant if they are determinate (in the case of nonpurposive natural objects and nonrepresentational patterns), if they are determinate *and applied* (in the case of mimetic art), if they are presupposed by, if they are that from which one derives, if they are prior to, if they ground, or if they occur in accordance with the judgment of beauty.

The following is a passage from the latter part of the “Analytic of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment,” where Kant actually discusses fine art:

But if the object is given as a product of art, and is as such supposed to be declared to be beautiful, then, since art always presupposes an end in the cause (and its causality), a concept must first be the ground of what the thing is supposed to be, and, since the agreement of the manifold in a thing with its inner determination as an end is the perfection of the thing, *in the judging of the beauty of art* the perfection of the thing will also have to be taken into account, which is not even a question in the judging of a natural beauty (as such).⁴⁶

This passage would lead one to think that, when it comes to an art object, one *cannot* judge even its beauty (let alone its meaning or significance) based on “the mere form.” This apparent contradiction arises because of the term “beauty” in the phrase “*in the judging of the beauty of art*” and could be a problem of translation. In English, we refer to “*schöne Kunst*” as “fine art” and not “beautiful art.” While the German, as well as the French “*beaux arts*,” contains a double meaning—“beautiful,” as well as good or fine *qua* art—the English “fine art” does not retain the former meaning. Thus, if, on the one hand, we are referring to judging whether or not an object is beautiful and, on the other, to judging its fineness as “fine art,” the fact that different criteria are involved is no longer an issue. Support for this view is the way in which Kant begins the passage: “But if the object is given as a product of art, and is as such supposed to be declared to be beautiful”—in other words, if the object is to be called “fine art”—there are different criteria. Referring to the example of the purpose of representational art, Guyer points out: “even if art not only is representational but has the purpose of representing, it still does not follow that our pleasure in its beauty is dependent upon consideration of this purpose. To find something beautiful is quite different from finding it accurate, illustrative, or informative.”⁴⁷ No matter how many nonaesthetic premises one has, one cannot reach an aesthetic conclusion: that an object is or is not beautiful. The aesthetic is another realm of value.

Of Kant’s statement “in the judging of the beauty of art the perfection of the thing will also have to be taken into account,” Guyer contends that it “asserts more directly that any judgment of the merit of art must consider its intentionality and its qualitative perfection.”⁴⁸ It seems unnecessary to move from “the judging of the beauty of art” in Kant’s terms (or perhaps the judging of the fineness of fine art) to “any judgment of the merit of art,” especially if the prompting of an aesthetic experience is recognized as a merit of art. Because of Guyer’s addition of “any,” he then concludes: “This would imply that a work of art could never be the object of a pure judgment of formal finality.” However, Kant goes on to state: “the pleasing form which one gives to it is only the vehicle of communication and a manner, as it were, of presentation, in regard to which one still remains to a certain extent free, even if one is otherwise bound to a determinate end.”⁴⁹ Interestingly, with art, for Kant, “one still remains to a certain extent free” in regard to form and thus can experience pleasure resulting in an aesthetic

judgment of beauty; but, form is now “only the vehicle of communication and a manner of presentation.” Thus, once Kant uses form to arrive at universality, he can go on to expand his conception of art.

Kant's discussion of art has been described as episodic. Allison notes: “Apart from the treatment of aesthetic and teleological judgment in a single work, perhaps the strangest feature of the *Critique of Judgment* [...] is the fact that it is only near the very end of the portion dealing with aesthetic judgment (§43 to be exact) that Kant turns to the topic of fine art.”⁵⁰ Allison asserts that the “episodic character” of the sections on art make them “difficult to integrate into the overall argument of the work.”⁵¹ John H. Zammito goes even further. He contends: “this exposition has every aspect of a fresh beginning. It presumes nothing of the previous analysis. It defines each of its concepts as it proceeds, and it develops rigorously along the lines it itself sets up. While it is clearly related to the prior ‘Analytic of the Beautiful,’ especially to §§15-17, it stands autonomously.”⁵² As an explanation, Zammito proposes that beginning with the less complex topic of natural beauty allowed Kant to “more easily isolate the essential elements of a ‘pure’ judgment of taste.”⁵³ Allison points out that the “episodic character” of these sections is not surprising because “Kant's fundamental concern is with the nature of aesthetic *judgment*, not artistic production.”⁵⁴ While Kant's discussion of art is significant, its significance, on Allison's view, is “extrinsic to the theory of taste itself.”⁵⁵ Allison agrees with Gadamer's statement that “‘the concept of taste loses its significance if the phenomenon of art steps into the foreground.’”⁵⁶ In contrast, by locating epistemological questions in Kant's aesthetics, Gasché contends that the analytics of the beautiful and the sublime can now be regarded as forming a whole.⁵⁷ However, Kant's conception of the aesthetic power of judgment and his conception of art are still related yet distinct topics.

I concur with Guyer that, for Kant, the overall assessment of a work of art is not restricted to perceptual form but is “essentially complex, not reductionist.”⁵⁸ However, I do not agree with Guyer's approach in arguing for this in “Kant's Conception of Fine Art” (1994), added as the last chapter of the second edition of *Kant and the Claims of Taste*.⁵⁹ Rather than using phrases like “On Kant's real theory,” “In spite of the suggestion at §45 [...],” “In spite of the misleading suggestion of Kant's discussion of free and dependent beauty”⁶⁰ etc., and thereby championing the “episodic” 40s over §§14 and 16, one need simply differentiate the topics of these sections: the earlier ones are concerned with judgments of beauty while the later ones are concerned with the overall assessment of or response to fine art.

Identifying the apparently “formalist” tendencies he will go on to refute, Guyer writes of a “misleading suggestion that Kant makes about fine art, the suggestion that *our response to fine art* is properly confined to purely formal aspects of the perceivable properties of works of art.”⁶¹ Yet, he cites a statement from Kant which begins with “[i]n the estimation of a free beauty”—not with “in the *response to fine art*.” Guyer also refers to “our response to works of fine art” before citing what he calls a “notorious” passage from Kant: Kant writes “in all plastic arts [...] it is the *design* that is essential, in which it is [...] what pleases solely through its form that constitutes the basis for all disposition to taste.”⁶² Note, however, that Kant's statement pertains to form as the “basis for all disposition to taste” and not for “our response to works of fine art,” as Guyer's introductory statement indicates.

Again, Guyer writes, “Kant seems explicitly to exclude conceptual content as well as perceptual matter from the proper object of our response in the case of fine art by excluding it from the ‘estimate of a free beauty (according to mere form)’ in which alone ‘the judgment of taste is pure.’”⁶³ Thus, Guyer seems to be suggesting that Kant's exclusion of content and matter from the judgment of taste necessarily excludes them

from our overall response to fine art. However, since our judgment of the beauty of fine art is one facet of our overall response to fine art, it does not follow that excluding content and matter from the former would constitute the exclusion of them from the latter.

Guyer goes on to assert that “Kant classifies [...] ‘designs *à la grecque*, foliage for frameworks or on wallpapers,’ and ‘fantasias’ or ‘all music without texts’ as paradigmatic works of fine art precisely because they ‘signify nothing, represent nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties.’”⁶⁴ However, Kant does not classify these formalistic examples as paradigmatic works of art because they are free beauties. He classifies them as free beauties. A perusal of the first page of this section will show that Kant does not even use the term “art” in this context, let alone claim that such examples are paradigmatic works of art. He is here concerned with the nature of judgments of beauty and not with the multi-faceted topic of our overall response to art.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between §14 and 16 and the 40s, Guyer brings “pleasure” into the experience of content. Guyer writes: “the peculiar content of a work of artistic genius is responsible for its pleasure in the same entirely aesthetic way as its form: it is the nature of this content itself to produce a free play of the cognitive faculties, in which concepts are manifest but never sensed as constraining or determinative.”⁶⁵ He also claims that we do not have to “abstract from [art’s] content in order to enjoy [an aesthetic] response.”⁶⁶ However, in Kant’s view, the form-pleasure and content-pleasure would have to be distinct. The pleasure for which the content is responsible does not result in a judgment of taste, whereas pleasure derived from perceptual forms does result in such a judgment. It should be noted, however, that Guyer is more receptive to the distinction between aesthetic judgment and overall response in the earlier portion of his book. When addressing Kant’s troublesome statement that one must be indifferent to the existence of an object of aesthetic attention, Guyer asserts: “It must be kept in mind that in Kant’s usage ‘aesthetic’ is not synonymous with ‘artistic,’ but connotes only the subjective pleasure we take in objects. Thus limitations on aesthetic judgment are not necessarily limitations on our judgments about art.”⁶⁷ Guyer fails to explicitly apply this fact to his later chapter.

An important component of Kant’s conception of art that should further satisfy anti-formalists eager to assert a primacy of meaning and signification is Kant’s notion of “aesthetic ideas”:

[B]y an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., **concept**, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.⁶⁸

In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language.⁶⁹

The free play that occurs with aesthetic judgment thus also occurs when contemplating aesthetic ideas. In a more recent text, Guyer considers the free play involved with aesthetic ideas in relation to Kant’s famous statement regarding purposiveness without purpose: that a work of art must be intentional but must not seem intentional.⁷⁰ Guyer writes, “the artist [...] must still create a work that is both an expression of his own freedom of imagination and understanding and also leaves room for the free play of the

imagination and understanding in his audience. This means that each member of the audience must be able to contribute something of his own to the reception of a work of artistic genius."⁷¹ Kant's conception of art is thus a far cry from the detached, art critical "formalism" with which he is sometimes charged. Yet, he can concomitantly hold that the form of a work is what stimulates our judgment of beauty. It is thus apparent why Guyer has described Kant's conception of art as "essentially complex, not reductionist."⁷²

It seems as though all interpretations of Kant's third *Critique* involve some anomaly that cannot be accounted for. The anomaly here is what Guyer calls "another of the notorious mysteries of the third *Critique*": "Beauty," Kant writes, "(whether it be beauty of nature or of art) can in general be called the **expression** of aesthetic ideas."⁷³ Unless "beauty" here means "fineness" (but, then, why the inclusion of "nature"?), this statement contradicts Kant's earlier comments as well as disrupts my distinction that the judgment of *beauty* involves merely form while it is the overall response to a work of art that involves, for one thing, aesthetic ideas. One way of attempting to reconcile this statement with Kant's earlier statements about beauty involving merely form is through Kant's view that the form is the "vehicle of communication," is that through which aesthetic ideas are expressed. Regarding pictorial arts, Kant writes that they "make shapes in space into expressions of ideas."⁷⁴ Another way is that form seems to be of primary importance for Kant with respect to beauty:

Yet in all beautiful art what is essential consists in the form, which is purposive for observation and judging, where the pleasure is at the same time culture and disposes the spirit to ideas, hence makes it receptive to several sorts of pleasure and entertainment.⁷⁵

Now since it is in regard to the first of these [imagination] that an art deserves to be called **inspired**, but only in regard to the second [the power of judgment] that it deserves to be called a **beautiful** art, the latter, at least as an indispensable condition (*conditio sin qua non*), is thus the primary thing to which one must look in the judging of art as beautiful art. To be rich and original in ideas is not as necessary for the sake of beauty as is the suitability of the imagination in its freedom to the lawfulness of the understanding.⁷⁶

But this is not to say that, in the overall assessment of a work, the expression of aesthetic ideas are not significant. Kant "gives the palm" to painting over other pictorial arts of which it is the basis "partly because it can penetrate much further into the region of ideas."⁷⁷

Lastly, Kant's distinction between free and adherent or dependent beauty raises questions about Kant's views on the status of fine art. Kant writes:

There are two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) or merely adherent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The first supposes no concept of what the object ought to be; the second does presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance with it.⁷⁸

When this statement from §16 is considered in relation to §45—"In a product of art one must be aware that it is art"—and to §48—"if the object is given as a product of art [...] a concept must first be the ground of what the thing is supposed to be, and [...] the perfection of the thing will also have to be taken into account"⁷⁹—a question arises. In §16 Kant tells us that if an object presupposes a concept it is an adherent beauty. In the 40s Kant tells us that all art presupposes a concept. Therefore, all works of art must be adherent beauties. Allison asks, "Does [this] commit him to the view that foliage on

borders is somehow aesthetically superior to the works of Michelangelo or Shakespeare?"⁸⁰ Another problem that arises is that, at the opening of §16, Kant distinguishes free and adherent as two types of beauty, while at the end of the section he distinguishes them as two ways of judging beauty. Also, how can "adherent beauty" be termed "beauty" at all if it presupposes a concept?⁸¹

Allison rejects Donald W. Crawford's view that the two are types of judgments of beauty. On this view, since Kant tells us that abstraction is employed by "the botanist, who recognizes in [a flower] the reproductive organ of the plant, [yet] pays no attention to this natural end if he judges the flower by means of taste,"⁸² this ability should also apply to the judgment of art objects. Therefore, a judgment is free if one abstracts from the object's purpose and it is adherent if the purpose "enters into one's evaluation."⁸³ Allison rejects this because "it ignores the fact that the 'abstraction' called for is from the very conditions under which something can be judged as a work of art."⁸⁴ Thus, the purpose must somehow be retained. Yet, if an object's purpose entered one's evaluation of it, this would not be an aesthetic judgment (and thus not a type of beauty at all). Instead, then, Allison argues that while the overall assessment of an art object is "no longer *purely* a judgment of taste" when its purpose is taken into account, "this does not undermine the *purity* of the taste component itself."⁸⁵ This explains why they are both called "beauties." Pure aesthetic judgment is involved with both free and adherent beauty. The adjective "free" or "adherent" describes whether or not a purpose is involved in the overall assessment of or response to the object.⁸⁶ In fact, Kant clearly states that adherent beauty involves "consider[ing] beauty in the object only as an adherent property."⁸⁷ Therefore, it is not a question of the quality of the beauty. It is a question of whether its beauty is one aspect among many (adherent beauty) or whether one can easily "pay no attention to" any other aspects such that the beauty of the object is more likely to become one's sole concern (free beauty).

When the aesthetic power of judgment is viewed as a distinct component of an overall response to an art object, the controversial notion of "without concepts" is ascribed only to the former and is thus less far-reaching. Also, when understood in the context of the short, episodic section on art, notions of purpose and the expression of aesthetic ideas are not contradictory to previous notions. In addition to being referenced by Greenberg, perhaps another reason why Kant is often cursorily labelled as a "formalist" is because readers may tend to restrict their study to the "Analytic of the Beautiful." A notable parallel to Kant's reception, then, is found in Rosalind Krauss's 1972 polemical rebuttal to those who identify Greenberg with "formalism" — here construed as "contentless good design." Krauss writes: "'Formalism' had become a peculiar stick for attacking other people, and to wield it against the 'modernist' critics simply meant that the person who did it was either too hostile or too lazy to read what they wrote."⁸⁸

Notes

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² Robert Williams, "Formalism," *Grove Art Online*, Oxford University Press, 17 May 2007 <http://www.groveart.com>.

- ³ Lucian Krukowski, "Formalism: Conceptual and Historical Overview," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 213.
- ⁴ Mark A. Cheetham, *Kant, Art, and Art History: Moments of Discipline* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 92.
- ⁵ Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993 [1960]) 85.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ⁷ Rodolphe Gasché, *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) 8, 87.
- ⁸ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 135-36.
- ⁹ Ewan Porter, rev. of *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics*, by Rodolphe Gasché, *Philosophy in Review* 25.3 (June 2005): 167.
- ¹⁰ Yve-Alain Bois, "Whose Formalism?," *Art Bulletin* 78.1 (Mar. 1996): 9, 12.
- ¹¹ David Summers, "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 138.
- ¹² Cheetham 93.
- ¹³ John H. Zammito, Salim Kemal, and Alison argue in brief that Kant is not a formalist in the art critical sense. See John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 289-91; Salim Kemal, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) 150-51; Allison 288-89.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 223 Akademie edition, vol. 5; §13; p. 108 Guyer/Matthews. [Hereafter abbreviated as: Ak. 223, §13, GM 108; quotations are from Guyer/Matthews].
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 289, §38, GM 170.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 211, §6, GM 96; Ak. 219, §9, GM 104. This edition uses boldface to better reproduce the look of Kant's original editions.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 230, §16, GM 115; Ak. 281, §31, GM 162; Ak. 289, §37, GM 169. My italics.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 190, Introduction, GM 76.

- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 214, §8, GM 99.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 228, §15, GM 113.
- ²² *Ibid.*, Ak. 280, §31, GM 161.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 282, §32, GM 163.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 194, Introduction, GM 80.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 215, §8, GM 101.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 267, §29, GM 150.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 344, §57 Remark I, GM 219.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 207, §4, GM 93.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 217, §9, GM 102.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 217, §9, GM 103.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 244, §23, GM 128.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 256, §26, GM 139.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 238, §57, GM 215.
- ³⁵ Roger Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 105.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Kant Ak. 231, §16, GM 115.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 188, Introduction, GM 75.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 218, §9, GM 103.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 215, §8, GM 100.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, Ak. 231, §17, GM 116.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 189, Introduction, GM 75.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 211, §6, GM 97.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 288, §36, GM 169.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 311, §48, GM 190. My italics.

- ⁴⁷ Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1979]) 218.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.
- ⁴⁹ Kant Ak. 313, §48, GM 191.
- ⁵⁰ Allison 271.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 271.
- ⁵² Zammito 130.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 131.
- ⁵⁴ Allison 271.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.
- ⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 56. qtd. in Allison, 389 note 6.
- ⁵⁷ Gasché 9.
- ⁵⁸ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 351. This chapter was originally published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (52.3 [Summer 1994]: 275-85) and was added as the final chapter to the second (1997) edition of *Kant and the Claims of Taste*.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 351-66.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 353, 356, 357-8.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 352. My italics.
- ⁶² Kant Ak. 225, §14, qtd. in Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 352.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 353.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 353.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 358.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.
- ⁶⁸ Kant Ak. 314, §49, GM 192.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 316, §49, GM 194.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 306, §46, GM 185-86.
- ⁷¹ Guyer, "Exemplary Originality: *Genius, Universality, and Individuality*," in *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Paisely Livingston (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 129.

- ⁷² Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 351.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 361; Kant Ak. 320, §51, GM 197.
- ⁷⁴ Kant Ak. 322, §51, GM 199.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 326, §52, GM 203.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 319, §50, GM 197.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 330, §53, GM 207.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 229, §16, GM 114.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 306, §45, GM 185; Ak. 311, §48, GM 190.
- ⁸⁰ Allison 140.
- ⁸¹ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 218.
- ⁸² Kant Ak. 229, §16, GM 114.
- ⁸³ Allison 297.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.
- ⁸⁷ Kant Ak. 231, §16, GM 116.
- ⁸⁸ Rosalind Krauss, "A View of Modernism," *Artforum* 11.1 (Sept. 1972): 49.