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The Sublime, Ugliness and Contemporary Art

A Kantian Perspective

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, to explain the distinction between Kant's notions of the sublime and ugliness, and to answer an important question that has been left unnoticed in contemporary studies, namely why it is the case that even though both sublime and ugliness are contrapurposive for the power of judgment, occasioning the feeling of displeasure, yet that after all we should feel pleasure in the former, while not in the latter. Second, to apply my interpretation of the sublime and ugliness to contemporary art, and to resolve certain issues that have been raised in accounting for the possibility of artistic sublimity. I argue that an experience of a genuine artistic sublimity is an uncommon occurrence. I propose that the value of contemporary art can be best explained by referring to Kant's notion of ugliness and his theory of aesthetic ideas.

The Sublime, Ugliness and Contemporary Art: A Kantian Perspective[1]

I

It is without a doubt characteristic for contemporary art scene that it can no longer be described as beautiful. Many writers have thus turned to Kant's notion of the *sublime* in order to explain the aesthetic value of contemporary works of art.[2] *Prima facie*, this is not surprising considering how Kant explains the sublime, namely, as an experience of displeasure caused by the perceptual and imaginative incomprehensibility of the object, yet which we overcome by turning to the ideas of reason (such as ideas of freedom, morality, humanity etc.). Such an explanation of the sublime presumably fits well with the distinctive character of contemporary art, namely, being one of initial displeasure due to the discomforting perceptual features of the art work, yet also one of indirect pleasure derived from the value of ideas communicated by an art work. Examples that have been described as sublime include Damien Hirst's terrifying and unsettling sculpture of a dead tiger shark in a vitrine preserved in formaldehyde, entitled *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), or Jenny Saville's disturbing photograph depicting the artist's obese naked body squeezed onto glass in *Closed Contact A* (2002).[3]

However, the application of Kant's notion of sublime to contemporary artistic production faces two main problems, which must be resolved before the subsumption of contemporary art under the aesthetic of the Kantian sublime can be legitimized.

First, the connection between Kantian sublime and the aesthetic value of contemporary art depends on the assumption that Kant's theory of the sublime allows for the possibility of artistic sublimity, which however is not as straightforward as one might think. There is in fact a major disagreement among Kant's scholars regarding the possibility of the sublime in art. This disagreement is mainly due to different interpretations of Kant's theory of the sublime. Those

[1]This paper was presented at the Institute of Philosophy, the Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on 14 April, 2015. (the editor)

[2] Paul Crowther: "The Postmodern Sublime: Installation and Assemblage Art", in Paul Crowther (ed.): *The Contemporary Sublime: Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*. London: St. Martins Pr, 1995, pp. 9–17.

[3] For a more detailed explanation of the connection between the sublime and Damien Hirst's art see: "Damien Hirst and the Sensibility of Shock", in Paul Crowther (ed): *The Contemporary Sublime: Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*. London: St. Martins Pr, 1995, pp. 55–67.

who argue that no sublimity in art can be encountered emphasize the perceptual criteria of the sublime, namely, that sublime can be occasioned only by objects that are overwhelming in size and power, producing thereby a feeling of phenomenal insignificance in us. Since art works do not have such properties - they have defined limits and we do not find them threatening in any way, they do not have the capacity to produce the sublime.[4] On the other hand, those who argue for the possibility of artistic sublimity interpret the sublime primarily as a mental activity, which does not necessarily require the presence of external objects (i.e. objects of great size and power). This view depends on Kant's claim that: "true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of one who judges, not in the object of nature" (5:256, p. 139).[5] Presumably, this implies that ideas of reason, especially moral ideas are sufficient to incite the sublime. Since ideas of reason can be expressed through an art work (as suggested by Kant in his theory of art and aesthetic ideas), thus art works can elicit sublime.[6]

The second problem refers to the relation between the sublime and ugliness, both depending on the feeling of displeasure. Considering that many examples of art works that have been described as sublime have also been judged by some as ugly or even disgusting, it is reasonable to ask the question as to how we can distinguish between the sublime and the ugly. In fact, the similarity between the sublime and ugliness is suggested by Kant in §23, where he writes that even though a judgment of the sublime is similar to a judgment of the beautiful in that it is a disinterested judgment, which pleases independently of determinate concepts and with a universal validity, a judgment of the sublime is also similar to a judgment of ugliness in that it depends on the feeling of displeasure, because it

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[4] Paul Crowther: *The Kantian Sublime: from Morality to Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.1989, pp. 152–174; Paul Guyer: *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 264; Emily Brady: *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 119–146.

[5] References to Immanuel Kant are given in the text to the volume and page number of the standard German edition of his collected works: *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (KGS). References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the standard A and B pagination of the first and second editions. References are also given, after a comma, to the English translation of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000), which includes the "First Introduction" (KGS 20). In the case of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (KGS 7) I refer to Robert B. Louden's translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). In the case of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (KGS 2) I refer to Paul Guyer's translation, ed. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[6] Kirk Pillow: *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel,* Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2000 , pp. 67–116; R. Wicks: "Kant on Fine Art: Artistic Sublimity Shaped by Beauty", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 189-193., 1996, pp.189–193; Robert Clewis: *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 117–125; K. Bjørn Myska: *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett*. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2002, pp. 253–262.

…appear[s] in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination (5:245, p. 129).

Indeed, if we take a closer look at Kant's notion of the sublime and ugliness we notice that both involve an element of perceptual and imaginative struggle. In the case of the sublime this struggle is caused by the perception of objects of great size and powers that occasion the idea of limitlessness in us, such as shapeless mountain masses, massive glaciers, dark and raging sea, erupting volcanos, devastating hurricanes, etc. Kant explains that imagination's ability to comprehend the sensible manifold is limited, thus it happens in the direct perception of such vast and powerful objects that imagination fails to successfully comprehend the sensible manifold and present it as a unified whole. This failure of the imagination produces the feeling of displeasure.

But also experience of ugliness involves an element of frustration in grasping rich yet, chaotic and disintegrated structure of the object. Consider for example certain kind of animals that we usually judge as ugly, such as the monstrous looking and repulsive *angler fish,* with its exceptionally large mouth, long, sharp teeth and a shiny lure coming out of its head. Or, for example, the utterly disturbing appearance of an animal called naked mole rat, with its large front teeth, sealed lips behind the teeth and pink, wrinkled, almost completely hairless skin. We judge such animals ugly because we find arrangement of their features discomforting and offensive to our perception, as if composed from incongruent elements. The displeasure at seeing such animals is accompanied with the feeling of incorrectness due to a combination of features that ought not to be combined in such a way. The perceptual features of an ugly object are too obtrusive and chaotic which makes it difficult for our cognitive abilities to process and to find a resolution for it.

To use Kant's terminology, both sublime and ugly objects appear to be *subjectively contrapurposive* for the power of judgment (i.e. they fail to agree with the need of the power of judgment to find harmony and order in the world), thereby producing the feeling of displeasure. But what is distinctive for the sublime, in comparison to ugliness, is that such contrapurposiveness reveals a subjective purposive relationship between imagination and *reason,* which results in the feeling of pleasure.

Kant's explanation of the sublime raises the question as to why is it the case that even though both sublime and ugly objects are disordered and ill-adapted to our cognitive abilities, producing thereby the feeling of displeasure, yet that such displeasure in the sublime evokes the faculty of reason, resulting in a positive aesthetic response, while in ugliness no such appeal to reason occurs and judgment ends in a feeling of displeasure alone?

Unfortunately, Kant does not offer an answer to this question. The same can be said about the contemporary discussions, which are primarily concerned with clarifying the distinction between the sublime and beauty, and little attention is given to Kant's notion of the sublime in contrast to ugliness. This is not surprising considering that ugliness in Kant's aesthetics is itself considered a problematic aesthetic notion, if at all epistemologically possible, and therefore no separate discussion on clarifying the distinction between the sublimity and ugliness seems to be required.[7]

This indeed is the view of Herman Parret who argues that ugliness is something that comes over and above the sublime "as radically unconceivable and ungraspable by our

[7] Among Kant's scholar there is a major disagreement as to whether judgments of ugliness can be accommodated into the Kantian aesthetic picture. There are two main objections to the idea that pure judgments of ugliness are possible. The first objection was made by David Shier ("Why Kant Finds Nothing Ugly", British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 38, no. 4, 1998, pp. 412–418.), who claimed that accommodation of the state of mind required for judgments of ugliness is inconsistent with Kant's argument for the universal validity of judgments of taste. In short, Shier argues that, according to Kant's argument, the state of mind on which judgments of taste depend can be nothing else but the free harmony of cognitive powers. But free harmony produces pleasure. But this means that that the universal state of mind of judgments of taste can only be the state of mind that produces pleasure. Consequently, judgments of taste are judgments of the beautiful alone. The second objection was made by Paul Guyer ("Kant on the Purity of the Ugly," in Paul Guyer (ed.): *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. pp. 145-147), who claimed that the state of mind required for judgments of ugliness is inconsistent with Kant's epistemological theory. His argument is based on the premise that according to Kant's theory a conceptual harmony between imagination and understanding is required not only for cognition, but in order to have an experience of the object in the first place. The possibility of a state mind of sheer disharmony, required for judgments of ugliness, is therefore epistemologically precluded. In response to these problems, numerous different solutions have been proposed in order to accommodate pure judgments of ugliness into Kant's aesthetics. See: C. Wenzel: "Kant Finds Nothing Ugly?" *British Journal of Aesthetics,* vol. 39, no. 4, 1999, pp. 416-42); Hud Hudson: "The Significance of an Analytic of the Ugly in Kant's Deduction of Pure Judgments of Taste", in Ralf Meerbote (ed.), *Kant's Aesthetics*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991, pp. 87–103; Sean McConnell: "How Kant Might Explain Ugliness", *British Journal of Aesthetics,* vol. 48, no. 2, 2008, pp. 205–228.; Alex Cohen: "Kant on the Possibility of Ugliness", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2013, pp. 199–209); Mojca Kuplen: "Kant and the Problem of Pure Judgments of Ugliness," *Kant Studies Online*, 2013, pp. 102-143.

representational faculties and our imagination."[8] An exception to such views is an account given by Theodore Gracyk.[9] According to his position both sublime and ugliness are aesthetic responses to formless objects (i.e. objects that we are unable to perceive as a unified whole), yet that displeasure of formlessness in the sublime, but not in the ugly is eventually resolved by the appeal to the ideas of reason, resulting in the feeling of pleasure: "judgments of sublimity are a method of compensating for formlessness (…) cases where no such compensation occurs are simply judged as cases of ugliness".[10] Gracyk's explanation of ugliness as being part of the sublime experience is not satisfactory, since it fails to give a clear explanation as to why in particular the contrapurposiveness of the sublime resorts to reason while no such invocation of reason occurs in judgments of ugliness. Furthermore, it follows from his account that sublimity appears to consist of a temporal sequence of two separate feelings, displeasure of ugliness and pleasure of reason, while Kant presented the feeling of the sublime as a rather single and complex feeling, identified with the feeling of respect.

Even though Kant does not offer a clear distinction between ugliness and sublimity, his analysis of the notion of the sublime in comparison to beauty nevertheless indicates that he considered sublimity to be a theoretically and phenomenologically different aesthetic concept than ugliness. This is the thesis that I will argue for in the rest of this paper. By examining Kant's notion of the sublime in contrast to ugliness, I will address the main issues that have been raised regarding the possibility of the sublime in art. I argue against the view of contemporary art being one of the sublime in the Kantian sense, and instead propose that the distinctive aesthetic value of contemporary art can be better explained by employing Kant's notion of ugliness in connection with his theory of aesthetic ideas.

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[8] Herman Parret: "On the Beautiful and the Ugly", *Trans/Form/Ação*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2011, p. 30.

[9] Theodore Gracyk: "Sublimity, Ugliness, and Formlessness in Kant's aesthetic theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* vol. 45, no. 1, 1986, pp. 49–66.

[10] Ibid. p.52.

II

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant puts forward a view that a beautiful object exhibits subjective purposiveness. In short, an object is subjectively purposive if it occasions in us the state of mind of free harmony between imagination and understanding, the two faculties of the mind that are responsible for our ordinary ability to cognize object. While the imagination synthesizes the sensible manifold, the understanding on the other hand, unifies the manifold under the concept of the object. Kant explains this procedure of bringing sensible manifold to concepts (i.e. to attain the harmony between the imagination and understanding) with his notion of the power of judgment, defined as the: "faculty for the subsumption of the particular under the general" (20:201, p. 8). Both ordinary cognition and perception of a beautiful object satisfy the need of the power of judgment to attain the harmony between cognitive powers, the difference being that in the latter case no concept is applied to the sensible manifold (i.e. free harmony) and thus the judgment results in a feeling of pleasure alone.

On the other hand, Kant also distinguishes a state of mind of *free disharmony* between imagination and understanding. For example, he writes:

> For in the power of judgment understanding and imagination are considered in relation to each other, and (…) one can also consider this relation of two faculties of cognition merely subjectively, insofar as one helps or hinders the other in the very same representation and thereby affects the state of mind (20:223, p. 25).

We come across to the same idea in his *Anthropology*, where he states:

> The judging of an object through taste is a judgment about the harmony or discord of freedom, in the play of the power of imagination and the lawfulness of the understanding (*Anthropo.* 7:241, p. 137).

When cognitive powers are in a disharmony (i.e. conflict between the sensible manifold apprehended by the imagination and the unifying principle of the understanding) then the object is found contrapurposive for the power of judgment. In other words, the object fails to agree with the need of the power of judgment to find harmony in the world. The dissatisfaction of this need produces the feeling of displeasure. Even though Kant does not explicitly say so, there is reason to assume that such a disharmonious state of mind is one that grounds judgments of ugliness. After all, when he defines *common sense* as the subjective principle of taste and as a universally communicable aesthetic feeling, the feeling is not merely that of pleasure, but also that of displeasure: “They must thus have a subjective principle, which determines what pleases or displeases only through feeling and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity” (5:238, p. 122).

While in the case of beauty, mutual correspondence of cognitive powers prolong the process of their play, and accordingly, it prolongs aesthetic attention (when we are delighted by an object, we want to remain in this state of mind), in the case of ugliness, the mutual hindrance or frustration between the cognitive powers obstructs their free play, thereby causing us to withdraw attention or to turn away from an ugly object. We do not like to look (seeing a picture of a naked mole rat makes me cover my eyes) or hear (discomforting sounds makes me cover my ears) displeasing objects: “displeasure is that representation that contains the ground for determining the state of the representations to their own opposite (hindering or getting rid of them)” (5:220, p. 105).

But, according to Kant also sublime objects exhibit subjective contrapurposiveness (5:245, p. 129). This is so because of the distinctive character of sublime objects, namely being one of exhibiting certain kind of greatness, either in *size* or in *power*. When the object is overwhelming in size, then the experience is called *mathematically sublime.* For example, the enormous structure of the pyramids in Egypt or the immense Himalayan Mountain massif are typical mathematically sublime objects since they are too vast and difficult for us to perceive them all at once. But when the object is overwhelming in physical power, thereby occasioning in us the feeling of danger, then the experience is called *dynamically sublime*. Erupting volcanos, devastating hurricanes, extreme ocean storms are typical dynamically sublime objects because their physical power is too great for us to resist. One can notice that what both types of sublime objects have in common is the ability to endanger, in one way or another, the phenomenal side of our being. Objects overwhelming in size endanger our sensible cognition (the object is too vast for our imagination to comprehend it) and objects overwhelming in physical power threaten our physical existence. In both case the perceptual and imaginative failure evokes in us the idea of limitlessness of the object (the limitlessness of size in the mathematical sublime and limitlessness of the destructive and devastating power of nature in the dynamical sublime).

This idea of limitlessness of the object is evoked in us due to the limited capacity of our imagination. Namely, according to Kant's theory of the threefold synthesis, ordinary cognition is performed by the means of two faculties, the imagination and the understanding. The power of imagination performs two kinds of acts: (i) the apprehension or gathering together the manifold of intuition, and (ii) the reproduction or keeping in mind the apprehended sense impressions. While apprehension can go on infinitely, the comprehension or synthesis of reproduction, on the other hand, is limited.[11] Thus, it happens in the perception of a particularly vast object that:

> …comprehension becomes ever more difficult the further apprehension advances, and soon reaches its maximum, namely the aesthetically greatest basic measure for the estimation of magnitude. For when apprehension has gone so far that the partial representations of the intuition of the senses that were apprehended first already begin to fade in the imagination as the latter proceeds on to the apprehension of further ones, then it loses on one side as much as it gains on the other, and there is in the comprehension a greatest point beyond which it cannot go (5:252, p. 135).

In other words, the sheer size (or power) of the object, say of the impressive Himalayan mountains, prevents the imagination from successfully reproducing or keeping in mind the succession of apprehended sense impressions (we cannot comprehend in one intuition all the parts and details of the vast mountain) and therefore imagination fails to present the sensible manifold as a coherent and unified whole. It is suggested accordingly that it is only certain kinds of objects, that is, objects that exceed the imagination's capacity for comprehension (such as objects of great size and power), that can occasion the experience of the sublime: "the sublime […] is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it" (5:244, p. 128).

Kant writes, that perceiving an object as formless or limitless refers to an *aesthetic* estimation of the size (or power) of the object, rather than to a *logical or conceptual* estimation. That is, the object appears to be formless "in mere intuition (measured by eye)" (5:251, p. 134). In other words, the *Himalayan Mountains* appear limitless merely in a direct perception, as its size strikes our eyes, but not in a logical estimation of its size, since we can always measure it by choosing an appropriate unit. The same can be said for objects that are typical examples of

[11] I take it that acts of apprehension and comprehension are identical to acts of the synthesis of apprehension and synthesis of reproduction that Kant distinguishes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This identification has also been suggested by Kirk Pillow: *Sublime understanding: Aesthetic reflection in Kant and Hegel*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, p. 74.

formlessness such as the starry sky. Even though it is perceptually impossible to comprehend the size of the starry sky, a logical calculation of its size is nevertheless possible. Similar is the case of the dynamically sublime objects. We can always measure the power of natural objects, say, the magnitude of an earthquake on the Richter scale, or the strength of the hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane scale. Thus nothing, as Kant concludes: "can be given in nature, however great it may be judged to be by us, which could not, considered in another relation, be diminished down to the infinitely small" (5:250, p. 134).

In a logical estimation of the size (or the power) of the object the imagination and understanding stand in a harmonious relation. The imagination successfully synthesizes the sensible manifold as determined by the numerical concepts of the understanding. However, in aesthetic estimation of the size (or power) of the object (i.e. in direct perception) we have no numerical concepts of the understanding on which to rely on. Nonetheless, there is still a demand for the imagination to synthesize the sensible manifold and present it as a unified whole. This demand is given to the imagination by the *faculty of reason*:

> the mind hears in itself the voice of reason, which requires totality for all given magnitudes, even for those that can never be entirely apprehended although they are (in the sensible representation) judged as entirely given, hence comprehension in one intuition, and it demands a presentation for all members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and does not exempt from this requirement even the infinite (space and past time), but rather makes it unavoidable for us to think of it (in the judgment of common reason) as given entirely (in its totality) (5:254, p. 138).

But because imagination's ability to comprehend the sensible manifold is limited (it can comprehend only a limited degree of apprehend elements), it happens in the perception of vast and powerful objects that imagination fails to successfully comprehend the sensible manifold and present it as a unified whole. Thus, the failure of the imagination to synthesize the sensible manifold in one intuition is a failure of satisfying the faculty of reason. It is the disharmony between imagination and reason that produces the displeasure felt in the sublime.

On the other hand, the fact that imagination fails to satisfy the task given to it by reason (i.e. to sensibly present the rational idea of the infinite size and power) indicates the existence of the supersensible faculty of the mind (i.e. the faculty of reason): "But even to be able to think the given infinite without contradiction requires a faculty in the human mind that is itself supersensible" (5:254, p. 138). The awareness of the existence of such a supersensible faculty of the mind produces in us the feeling of intense pleasure:

> What is excessive for the imagination (to which it is driven in the apprehension of the intuition) is as it were an abyss, in which it fears to lose itself, yet for reason's idea of the supersensible to produce such an effort of the imagination is not excessive but lawful, hence it is precisely as attractive as it was repulsive for mere sensibility (5:258, p. 141-142).

Kant identifies the concurring experience of displeasure and pleasure in the sublime with the feeling of respect: "The feeling of the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea that is a law for us is respect" (5:257, p. 140). The sublime is a feeling of inadequacy of our physical and sensible nature, yet at the same time a recognition of the value of reason and our ability to think beyond the sensibly given. In the mathematically sublime, we value the theoretical part of our reason, the idea of the absolute unity "which has that very infinity under itself as a unit against which everything in nature is small" (5:261, p. 145). In the dynamically sublime we value the practical part of our reason, the elevating idea of our moral freedom and the ability "to soar above certain obstacles of sensibility by means of moral principles" (5: 271, p. 153). The sight of an erupting volcano arouses in us the feeling of terror and fear due to our inability to control the physical force of nature. The feeling of fear leads us to the negative feeling value realization that as physical beings we are imperfect, helpless and subjected to merciless forces of nature. But it is this realization that also awakens in us the idea of a moral supremacy over nature, namely, that in spite of our physical vulnerability we stand morally firm against the greatest power of nature. Our ability to think of ourselves as morally independent of nature and thereby able to surpass our fears of mortality, sickness, and other negative aspects tied to our physical nature, produces in us a feeling of respect for ourselves as rational and moral beings.

One can see that in contrast to beauty and ugliness, sublimity is not attributed to the object itself, but rather to the power of our mind.[12] The feeling of the sublime is the feeling of the

[12] The fact that sublimity is attributed to subjects rather than objects does not exclude the importance of the object for the sublime, as it has been suggested by some of Kant's commentators. For example Robert Clewis: ("A Case for Kantian Artistic Sublimity: A Response to Abaci", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2010, pp. 167–68) argues that what occasion the experience of the sublime is the rational ideas. However, if it is

recognition of the supremacy of our reason over our sensible nature and accordingly it is a feeling of respect

> …for our own vocation, which we show to an object in nature through a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the object instead of for the idea of humanity in our subject), which as it were makes intuitable the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty over the greatest faculty of sensibility (5:257, p. 141).

That is, the feeling of pleasure in the sublime reveals the purposiveness of the *subject* for the faculty of theoretical and practical reason and its supersensible ideas of infinity and freedom respectively. This contrasts with the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful object, which reveals the purposiveness of the *object* for our cognitive abilities (of imagination and understanding). The distinction between the two ways that purposiveness can be exhibited is mentioned by Kant in the following:

> The susceptibility to a pleasure from reflection on the form of things (of nature as well as art), however, indicates not only a purposiveness of objects in relation to the reflecting power of judgment, in accordance with the concept of nature, in the subject, but also, conversely, one of the subject, due to the concept of freedom, with regard to the objects, concerning their form or even their lack of form (5:192, p. 78).

While beauty reveals the objects purposiveness for our cognitive abilities, the sublime, on the other hand, reveals the purposiveness of the subject for the faculty of reason. However, it is not merely the subjective purposiveness of the judging subject that the sublime reveals. Recall that the awareness of the idea of the supersensible is necessitated by the imagination's inability to satisfy the task of the faculty of reason, that is, to present the rational idea of infinity (infinite size and power). As Kant explains, we feel frustrated in our inability to comprehend the size (or

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merely rational ideas that invoke the sublime, then it is difficult to explain the source of the feeling of displeasure in the sublime. The object is required for the experience of perceptual and imaginative failure based on which the ideas of reason are revealed. The essential role of the object for the sublime is also emphasized by Katerina Deligiorgi ("The Pleasure of Contra-purposiveness: Kant, the Sublime, and Being Human", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* vol. 72, no. 1, 2014, pp. 25–35.)

power) of the given object, precisely because we have an idea of a totality for 'all given magnitudes.' Since this idea cannot be empirically encountered (otherwise we would be able to perceptually grasp it), this indicates that we must have a supersensible faculty of the mind from which the idea of infinity arises. Accordingly, it is the disagreement between the imagination and faculty of reason that reveals the presence of reason and which brings with it the feeling of pleasure:

> The feeling of the sublime is thus a feeling of displeasure from the inadequacy of the imagination (…) and a pleasure that is thereby aroused at the same time from the correspondence of this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest sensible faculty in comparison with ideas of reason (5:257, p. 141).

The faculty of reason is present in the feeling of displeasure (in fact, it is precisely because of its presence that imagination reveals itself as inadequate); it is merely that this displeasure reveals its existence: "imagination and reason produce subjective purposiveness through their conflict" (5:258, p. 142). The very act of disagreement between imagination and reason is an act of their agreement. Thus, the sublime does not merely reveal the purposiveness of the judging subject, but also his contrapurposiveness.

One can see that the feeling of displeasure and pleasure in the sublime are intrinsically connected. They have the same source and one cannot separate them. The feeling of the sublime is not an independent feeling of pain and positive pleasure, but rather pleasure is present in displeasure. That is, the same contrapurposiveness that gives rise to displeasure also gives rise to the feeling of pleasure. Kant explains the feeling of the sublime as a "vibration, i.e., to a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object (5:258, p. 141-142), that is, as an alternation from the feeling of lost on one hand and the feeling of gain on the other. Experience of the sublime is an experience of a negative pleasure (5:245, p. 129).

On the other hand, displeasure of ugliness is the result of disharmony between the imagination and the faculty of understanding. In this relation, there is no failure of the imagination, rather it is the case that sensible manifold successfully apprehended by the imagination conflicts with the understanding and its need to introduce order and unity in our experience of the world. Thus, in judgments of ugliness it is the form (combination of sensible manifold) of the object that is contrapurposive for the power of judgment. After all, Kant writes that the subject of a judgment of taste is the form of the object. But if it is the form of the object that causes contrapurposiveness, then this implies that imagination must have been able to successfully comprehend the form of an ugly object and it is the form itself, that is, the comprehended sensible manifold that disagrees with the understanding. What we perceive as displeasing is the relationship between the imagination and understanding as generated by the particular form of the object. In other words, ugliness is the result of the failure of the object to accord with our cognitive abilities. This is clearly evident in our experience of ugliness. When we find an object ugly, we tend to ascribe the cause of the feeling of displeasure not to our inability to comprehend the object, but rather to the object itself and its failure to accord with us and our aesthetic sense. We react to such an object by turning away from it.

But the subject of the sublime reflection is a "formless and nonpurposive object" (5:280, p. 161). Sublime objects are too great in size (or the power) for the imagination to comprehended all the parts of the object into a unified whole. Hence, there is no determinate form to be judged as purposive. As Derrida nicely puts it, the sublime "cannot inhabit any sensible form."[13] And if the sublime cannot inhabit any sensible form, then *a fortiori* the sublime cannot reveal anything about the object itself. The feeling of displeasure in the sublime resides in the subject's inadequacy to grasp the sensible manifold and in his realizations that as a phenomenal being he is limited. Such an explanation is hinted by Kant in the following passage:

> For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground outside ourselves, but for the sublime merely one in ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into the representation of the former (5:246, p. 130).

The sublime does not reveal anything about phenomenal nature but rather it forces us to resort to ourselves, to the noumenal side of our nature. The sublime reveals something about the judging subject, namely that as a phenomenal being he is insignificant in comparison to nature, yet that he also possess a faculty of the mind that is independent of nature and according to which the nature itself is considered as embarrassingly small. The sublime compels us to look for the purposiveness in the same place from which its contrapurposiveness is derived, that is, in us, rather than from outside us, as ugliness does. Because ugliness is not experienced as the indicator of our own cognitive limitations, there is also no need to resort to the faculty of reason in order to

[13] Jacques Derrida: *The Truth in Painting*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 131

compensate for feelings of inadequacy by appealing to the idea of our rational and moral supremacy.

To conclude, ugliness and sublime are theoretically and phenomenologically distinct aesthetic categories. The cause of the displeasure in the sublime and ugliness is different. It is the awareness of the inadequacy of our sensible cognition that we experience as displeasing in the sublime, while displeasure of ugliness is the result of the inadequacy of the object to agree with our cognitive faculties. While disharmony in ugliness reveals *contrapurposiveness of the object*, disharmony in the sublime reveals *contrapurposiveness of the subject*, which on the other hand reveals the value of reason and our ability to think beyond the sensibly given.

Furthermore, both ugliness and the sublime have their own phenomenological feeling tonalities. An object can be more or less ugly, depending on the degree of disharmony between the imagination and understanding. For example, the *African Marabou Stork* is less displeasing than the *Angler fish*, since the perceptual features in the latter seem more chaotically invasive and obtrusive than in the former. Likewise, an object can be more or less sublime depending on the object's size or physical power. That is, the feeling of respect for our own supersensible faculty of reason is much greater when encountering the immenseness of the *Grand Canyon* in Arizona than its less famous and smaller cousin of the *Black Canyon* in Nevada. Even though Kant does not write about the degrees of sublimity, this idea is implied in the following passage:

> that which, without any rationalizing, merely in apprehension, excites in us the feeling of the sublime, may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination, but is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that (5:245, p. 129).

The greater the object's size or its physical power, the more difficult it is for our imagination to aesthetically comprehend the object and accordingly the more sublime our experience of the object is.

Also both ugliness and the sublime have their own opposites. While opposite of ugliness is the beautiful, the paradigmatic negative aesthetic concept that stands in opposition to the sublime is the *ridiculousness.*[14] As Kant writes, "Nothing is so opposed to the beautiful as the

[14] This has also been noted, but not further developed by Christian Strub: "Das Häßliche und die „Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft". Überlegungen zu einer systematischen Lücke", *Kant-Studien* 80 (1–4): 1989, p. 423.

disgusting, just as nothing sinks more deeply beneath the sublime than the ridiculous" (*Beob.* 2:233, p. 40). Kant does not write about the concept of ridiculousness in the third *Critique*, but I believe that his explanation of sublimity can give us some insight into the nature of the ridiculousness. In short, my view is that the experience of the ridiculous, as well as the sublime, resides in the subject's recognition of its own division between two extremes, that is, between the finite, phenomenal and sensuous side, and the infinite, noumenal and rational side of our being. The difference is that in the experience of the sublime, it is the rational side, that is, the reason, that dominates, the recognition of which is experienced through a feeling of respect and awe. In the experience of the ridiculous, however, it is the finite, the sensuous and the smallness of a human character that dominate and which result in the underwhelming feeling of insignificance and nonsense. In both cases, an appeal to the faculty of reason is made. While the sublime agrees with the faculty of reason, the ridiculous on the other hand rejects and contradicts it. The sublime celebrates the victory of the noumena and of the infinite, while the ridiculous mourns its fall. What we find displeasing in the ridiculousness is the recognition of the abandonment of the noumenal subjectivity that the faculty of reason imposes on us in our reflection on the world. In light of such imposition, the sensuous and the phenomenal necessary look insignificant and disappointing. However, precisely for the same reason that the ridiculous displeases us, it also threatens us, because the abandonment of reason anticipates the end of the purpose and meaning in life. It is this latter moment, the recognition of purposelessness inherent in the abandonment of reason that in the end prevails and evokes laughter. The laughter inherent in the ridiculous, I believe, is a defense mechanism against the thread of purposelessness that the loss of reason invokes.

III

As pointed out in the preceding discussion, an object is judged sublime if it evokes the idea of the supersensible in us (idea of infinity in the case of the mathematical sublimity and idea of moral freedom in the case of the dynamical sublimity), yet that this idea can only be awakened in us by the means of the failure of the imagination and the accompanying feeling of displeasure. The question is whether art works can satisfy this criterion of the sublime. That is, is there a possibility of the artistic sublime?

Before proceeding with answering this question it is, however, necessary to refine the distinction between *artistic sublimity* and *artistic representation of sublimity*. This distinction is implicit in Kant's statement that: "A beauty of nature is a beautiful thing; the beauty of art is a beautiful representation of a thing" (5:311, p. 189). In other words, an art work can present beautiful subject matter, without itself being beautiful. Only if the artistic representation is itself beautiful, can we say that we have genuine artistic beauty. Similar is the case of artistic sublimity. It is only when the artistic representation (of a sublime or non-sublime) thing is itself sublime, can we say that we have genuine artistic sublimity. Artistic sublimity is not the result of the sublimity of the subject matter, but rather of the artistic representation itself (i.e. of the structure and organization of the subject matter).[15]

While there are many artworks, in particular typical for romanticism of 19th century, depicting sublime objects, they are not example of genuine artistic sublimity. For example, Albert Bierstadt's painting entitled *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (1866) depicts a stormy sky above the mountain range, a scenery that we would ordinarily find sublime. In this case, the painting merely imitates a naturally sublime object, the subject matter of the work, but without itself (as an artistic representation) being sublime. One might argue that even though the art work itself is not sublime, the subject matter can nevertheless provoke the experience of the sublime, for example through imagining ourselves being amidst of that sublime scenery and "perceiving it as if it were natural".[16] Thus, an art work can after all occasion the experience of the sublime. I think, however, that it is unlikely that we can experience perceptual and imaginative failure merely by imagining of looking at a naturally sublime object. Rather what I believe it happens in such case is that we recognize the sublimity of the scenery depicted in the painting (we recognize it because we have experienced sublime feelings when we actually were amidst of a similar scenery), but without the accompanying feeling of the sublimity. That is, the sublimity of the scenery lingers in the painting, yet the feeling of the sublime is suspended.[17]

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[15] A similar distinction is noted by Uygar Abaci: "Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 2008, pp. 246–247.

[16] Robert Clewis: "A Case for Kantian Artistic Sublimity: A Response to Abaci", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2010, p. 169.

[17] See Abaci who also argues against the possibility of such works of art occasioning the feeling of the sublime: Uygar Abaci: "Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 2008, p. 247.

Many writers consider works created by artists such as Mark Rothko, Barnet Newman, Yves Klein and Frank Stella as exemplary instances of genuine artistic sublimity.[18] This is because their art works do not merely imitate the sublime, but rather they themselves “present or evoke the sublime”.[19] Presumably, such works of art present the sublime by intentionally using specific combination of colors, texture, shapes and lights in order to create the impression of formlessness and limitlessness in the viewer, thereby disrupting our perceptual and imaginative resources and pushing us to the world of ideas. For example, Yves Klein’s painting *La Vague* (1957) exhibits a unique color of blue that triggers its association with the limitlessness of the sea and thereby produces a sense of infinite space. Another example is Anish Kapoor’s 150 meters long installation. The overwhelming vastness of this piece, which allows the viewer to experience the weight of the material, and the giant blood-red rings that is reminiscent of an open mouth swallowing its surroundings, evokes a feeling of fear and terror, thereby inducing the experience the sublime.

If artistic sublimity is possible then it must be looked for in cases such as this, where the artistic representation itself, rather than the subject matter, is perceptually challenging for the viewer. The question is whether artistic representation itself can occasion genuine experience of the sublime?

There is reason to doubt that this can be the case. My reasoning is the following. According to Kant, the feeling of sublime is evoked by the mere apprehension of the size or the power of the object. Yet, art works are objects that are intentionally produced for a certain purpose and in judging the value of an art work this purpose must be taken into account (what it ought to be). Even more, as Kant claims, not only that art works and artifacts cannot be judged without taking into account the concept of a purpose, but that they cannot even be *perceived* independently of the concept of a purpose:

> …the fact that they are regarded as a work of art is already enough to require one to admit that one relates their shape to some sort of intention and to a determinate purpose. Hence there is also no immediate satisfaction at all in their intuition (5:236, p.120).

[18] Uygar Abaci: ibid. pp. 246-2 47; Robert Clewis: “A Case for Kantian Artistic Sublimity: A Response to Abaci”, p. 169.
[19] Robert Clewis: ibid. p. 169.

In other words, one's perception of the size (or the power) of an art work is immediately related to the concept of a purpose. But if this is the case, then it follows that one cannot perceive the object as a mere magnitude.[20] But if the object cannot be perceived as a mere magnitude, then it can also not give rise to the idea of limitlessness, hence it cannot lead to the experience of the supersensible and of the sublime. Recall, Kant claims that we judge an object as sublime in an aesthetic estimation of the magnitude (that is, in a direct perception). But in the case of art works and artifacts, the perception of the magnitude is mediated by the concept of a purpose; thus not in a direct perception. As we approach such works of art we immediately conceive them in light of the concept of the purpose, and this means considering their magnitude in light of the artist's intentions. Rather than being overwhelmed by the size or the power of an art work, we appreciate the creative force that produced it and its beauty (or ugliness).[21]

The idea that intentionally produced objects cannot occasion the experience of the sublime is additionally supported by the distinction Kant makes between the aesthetic experience of the disorder that devastations of nature leave behind, and the disorder that is produced by the human will, such as the disorder that the devastations of war leave behind. While Kant describes the experience of the former as sublime (5:261, p. 144), the latter he calls ugly (5:312, p. 190). Since one cannot perceptually distinguish the disorder of nature from the disorder of war, then

[20] Robert Clewis (*The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2009, p. 120) argues that even though art works are made with a certain purpose, this purpose can be abstracted from the mere form of the object and thus we are able to reflect on the mere magnitude of the object. However, as I pointed out this possibility is precluded by Kant's claim that the concept of the purpose not merely determines our judgments of the work, but also our perception of it. Accordingly, we cannot perceive the form of the object independently as to how this form is conceptualized. There is thus no possibility that one can abstract the concept of a purpose and have the perception of the mere magnitude of the object.

[21] A similar argument against artistic sublimity has been given by Uygar Abaci: "Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 2008, pp. 246–247. He argues that if one must take into account the concept of the purpose in judging the value of an art work and if judgments of the sublime are aesthetic judgments (i.e. product of the free play of faculties), then it follows that art works cannot give an experience of pure sublimity. At best, they can leave open the possibility of impure judgments of the artistic sublime. According to my position, however, the restriction of the concept of the purpose precludes even the possibility of impure judgments of the sublime. If there is no perceptual and imaginative failure, then one cannot have an experience of both pure and impure sublimity.

their distinct aesthetic value must be due to the fact that one carries with it the concept of a purpose, while the other does not.

On the other hand, there are some art works that express rational ideas without the preceding experience of a perceptual failure. According to some writers, such works of art deserve to be called sublime. As Robert Clewis, one of the proponents of such a view writes:

> The ideas of reason, especially moral ideas, incite the experience of the sublime. We can become explicitly aware of these ideas in response to art. Artworks can express moral ideas and move us to reflect imaginatively on these ideas.[22]

The object does not need to strictly speaking cause perceptual failure to be able to express rational ideas; rather it is sufficient that it merely serves as a "stimulus for the mental movement".[23]

It is true that an object does not need to cause perceptual failure in order to express rational ideas. In his explanation of the beautiful art, Kant alludes to this idea when he writes that "The poet ventures to make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc." (5:314, p. 192). He gives an example of Jupiter's eagle with the lightning in its claws expressing the rational idea of a heavenly being. However, there is a substantive difference between the *expression of rational ideas* and *being aware of such rational components in ourselves*. That is, an object can express rational ideas, such as an idea of the king of heaven, but without necessarily eliciting in us the awareness of such heavenly component in ourselves. It is the latter, not the former that makes an experience sublime. Consider for example how Kant describes the experience of the supersensible in the following two passages:

> …elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level, and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature (5:261, p.144–145).

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[22] Robert Clewis: "A Case for Kantian Artistic Sublimity: A Response to Abaci", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2010, p 167.

[23] Robert Clewis: ibid, p. 168.

> …sublimity is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us (5:264, p. 147).

The sublime is an awareness of our rational and moral superiority over the physical and sensible nature within and outside us. A work of art might indeed express such an idea, but such communication does not necessarily result in eliciting the awareness of such superiority in us. Consider for example a movie *Caffe De Flore*, by Jean Marc Vallee (2012) which tells two different love stories taking place in a different time and place. One is a story of a young single mother with a disabled son taking place in 1960 in Paris, and the other is a story of a recently divorced man in a present day Montreal. The two stories are connected together through the idea of reincarnation and the existence of past lives. The movie is a beautiful and touching expression of a rational idea of the immortality of the soul, which is thought-provoking, but which does not necessarily making us aware of any immortal component in ourselves.

To conclude, in order to experience the sublime, one must first experience the feeling of displeasure due to the perceptual and imaginative failure, because only this failure can reveal the presence of our rational faculty of the mind and its supersensible ideas. An art work can express these ideas, that is, it can sensibly present how these ideas might look like, but it cannot betray their existence.

IV

The sublime is intimately connected with the faculty of reason and its ideas (freedom, god, immortality), and as such is particularly suggestive for the expression of ideas that celebrate the rational and moral side of our being, such as the life-affirming ideas of compassions, peace, virtue, gentleness, courage, altruism, etc. Yet, what is distinctive for contemporary art works, especially of the kind that goes by the name ‘abject’ art is, that they express (and aim to express) ideas that are opposite to rational ideas, namely, ideas of mortality, transience of life, inescapabilty of death, absurdity, alienation, dehumanization, destruction etc., all of them emphasizing the tragic confinement of our sensible and physical being. Thus, the concept of the sublime cannot be applied to such works of art. But if such works of art cannot be subsumed under the notion of aesthetic of the sublime, then how can the concurrence of displeasure and pleasure, distinctive for such works of art, be explained? I argue that this phenomenon can be explained by referring to Kant's notion of ugliness and his theory of aesthetic ideas.

In short, Kant explains an aesthetic idea as a sensible representation of two kinds of indeterminate concepts. On one hand, invisible beings, hell, eternity, god, freedom, mortality, etc., are *rational ideas (ideas of reason)*. What is distinctive for them is that they can be thought, but not empirically encountered. For example, while one can think of the idea of heaven or hell, one cannot sensibly intuit such ideas. On the other hand, love, fame, envy, death, etc. are abstract and emotion concepts which can be experienced, yet they cannot be directly represented. For example, one can experience an emotion of jealousy, but one does not know how this emotion itself looks like. In other words, one does not have a determinate schema for such an idea (in comparison to the schema of, say, a table).

What is distinctive for both kinds of concepts is that their sensible representation, that is, an aesthetic idea, cannot be governed by any determinate rules. And this means that an aesthetic idea is a representation of imagination in its free play: "the aesthetic idea can be called an inexponible representation of the imagination (in its free play)" (5:343, p.218). In other words, an aesthetic idea exhibits free harmony between imagination and understanding (i.e. beauty).

Because aesthetic ideas are sensible representations of concepts that cannot be directly represented (there is no image of the idea of hell or of a heavenly being), they can be merely symbolic or metaphorical representations. Kant calls such metaphorical representations *aesthetic attributes* and describes them as:

> …forms which do not constitute the presentation of a given concept itself, but, as supplementary representations of the imagination, express only the implications connected with it and its affinity with others (5:315, p. 193).

Kant gives an example of an image of a Jupiter's eagle with the lightning in its claws being an aesthetic attribute of the idea of the king of heaven. The image of a Jupiter's eagle is not a logical attribute of the king of heaven, that is, it is not part of the concept of the king of heaven. When we think of the idea of king of heaven, we do not have in mind an image of an eagle. Rather, the image of a Jupiter's eagle only expresses certain associations connected with the idea we have of the king of heaven (in terms of representing power, strength, freedom, being above the material world, etc.). It is the collection of such aesthetic attributes (set of associations or thoughts) that constitute an aesthetic idea.

Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas shows that an object can be beautiful (i.e. occasion free harmony between cognitive powers) not merely by its perceptual features alone, but by the combination thoughts and ideas as well (i.e. aesthetic attributes). But if an art work can be aesthetically valuable because of the aesthetic idea it communicates to the audience, then this suggests that one and the same object can have both perceptual beauty (or ugliness) and beauty (or ugliness) of an aesthetic idea. Recall that an aesthetic idea is a combination of aesthetic attributes (i.e. set of associations between different concepts) and as such is not identical with the perceptual form of an art work. While perceptual form, say of an image of an Jupiter's eagle is constituted by the image of an eagle, particular patches of colours, shadows and lines, an aesthetic idea, on the other hand, is constituted by set of associations or thoughts that are prompted by the perceptual form. Aesthetic ideas, as Kant writes, are "inner intuition of the imagination" (5:343, p. 219) that are provoked by the visual image of an art work.

The distinction between perceptual beauty (and ugliness) and beauty (or ugliness) of an aesthetic idea can explain how it is possible that we find an art work aesthetically displeasing, yet aesthetically valuable at the same time. Namely, what we find displeasing in such an art work is its perceptual form, but what we find pleasing is the aesthetic idea that the work communicates. So while displeasure of perceptual form of an art work causes us to withdraw our attention from the work, the pleasure of aesthetic idea nevertheless holds our attention. We appreciate the communication of aesthetic ideas, because they give us an intimation of the world of ideas and state of affairs that lie beyond sensory experience. An aesthetic idea gives us an opportunity to intuit and apprehend that which cannot ever be fully presented by sensory experience alone. For instance, while the idea of a heavenly being does not have an empirical intuition (no image of a heavenly being), it can be nevertheless sensibly presented through the depiction of a Jupiter's eagle. By connecting the idea of a heavenly being with the image of a Jupiter's eagle we might gain a different perspective on this idea, for example, what the idea of a heavenly being might look like, which can consequently contribute to a richer understanding of this idea. Such a view is implied in Kant's claim that concepts without intuition are empty (A51/B75). He refers to empirical concepts which need to be connected to empirical intuition in order to make sense of experience. Without empirical intuition, empirical concepts are mere words, without any substantive meaning. But the same can be said about indeterminate concepts, such as the concept of a heavenly being. Only by connecting indeterminate concepts with sensible intuition (by the means of aesthetic attributes) can we truly say that we understand what indeterminate concepts mean.

The value of an art work in spite of the feeling of displeasure it occasions is nicely illustrated by Jenny Saville's photograph entitled *Closed Contact* (1995). The photograph presents the viewer with a discomforting image of the artist's obese naked body squeezed onto glass. The artist distorts the body to the extreme by pushing around the excess of flesh almost to the point of being unrecognizable. The flesh of the body is reduced to a mere volume, designating that what is excessive, undesirable and invasive for our perception, thereby elevating the feeling of displeasure almost to the point of the disgust. Nonetheless, even though the artistic representation of the body is itself disordered and displeasing, it can still be expressive and thoughtful. The distorted image of a female body might symbolically represent the destruction of the female body as invented by the patriarchal discourses of Western society. The expression of this idea is stimulating, thought-provoking and for this reason aesthetically significant, even though it is perceived with displeasure.

There is an appealing side to ugliness, because it allows for the imagination to be highly effective and expressive of ideas that cannot be represented otherwise. Its constitutive element is disorder and as such it is particularly suggestive for the expression of ideas that celebrate such disorder. It is related to ideas of alienation, estrangement, dehumanization, destruction, degeneration, disconcertion, absurdity, and with emotions evoking terror, horror, anxiety and fear, and which dominate the contemporary artistic production. The association of ugliness with such ideas and feelings can be explained by referring to Kant's notion of the reflective power of judgment and the *a priori* principle of purposiveness. Kant discusses this principle mainly in relation to its use in empirical concept acquisition, but in addition, he suggests that there is a connection between this principle and judgments of taste. For example, in one of many passages supporting this connection, he writes:

> The self-sufficient beauty of nature reveals to us a technique of nature, which makes it possible to represent it as a system in accordance with laws the principle of which we do not encounter anywhere in our entire faculty of understanding, namely that of a purposiveness with respect to the use of the power of judgment in regard to appearances (5:246, p. 129–30).

The idea seems to be that judgments of taste depend on the principle of purposiveness of nature, which represents nature as a system in which all phenomena are related to each other and therefore amenable to our cognitive abilities. This principle is necessary for cognition (empirical concept acquisition) but also for finding an object beautiful (or ugly). I do not want to go into any details of legitimizing the connection between the principle of purposiveness and judgments of taste, which has already been pointed out by several of Kant's scholars. Here I just want to point out how this connection can explain the association of ugliness with certain ideas.[24]

In short, Kant claims that the principle of purposiveness amounts to a certain way of seeing the world, that is, for preferring one way of organizing sensible manifold, to another. This preference for organizing sensible manifold in a certain way, more particularly, in a way that represents nature as a system, is reflected in our cognition, but also occasionally in the feeling of pleasure in finding an object beautiful. For example, in preferring certain combinations (such as the spiral structure of petals in a rose) and disliking others (such as the disorganized aftermath of a storm or tornado). The principle is an idea about how the world is supposed to be, how we expect it to be, so that it allows our understanding to cognize it, and it is an idea that holds only for us, as cognitive beings. The principle determines us, and our need to see the world in a specific way:

> this transcendental concept of a purposiveness of nature (…) represents the unique way in which we must proceed in reflection on the objects of nature with the aim of a thoroughly interconnected experience, consequently it is a subjective principle (maxim) of the power of judgment (5:184, p. 71).

According to this explanation, the feeling of pleasure is a result of the confirmation or satisfaction of the principle of purposiveness. We appreciate forms that are in accordance with the principle of purposiveness, and that reassures us that the world is indeed such as we expect it to be, namely, amenable to our cognitive abilities. Accordingly, the experience of aesthetic pleasure (beauty) is a sign of the familiarity with the world, of feeling at home in the world. This

[24] Hannah Ginsborg: "Reflective Judgment and Taste", *Nous,* vol. 24, no. 1, 1990. On the Bicentenary of Immanuel Kant's Critique of Judgment, pp 66-68; Patricia Matthews: *The Significance of Beauty: Kant on Feeling,* Principle of Purposiveness and the Missing Point of (Aesthetic) Judgments", *Kantian Review,* vol. 10, no. 1, 2005 pp. 1–32. ; Mojca Kuplen: "Kant and the Problem of Pure Judgments of Ugliness," *Kant Studies Online*, 2013: pp. 124–134.

explains why we experience beauty associated with positive feeling value ideas, such as innocence, joyfulness, virtue, hope, optimism, etc.

On the other hand, feeling of displeasure is a result of the dissatisfaction of our expectation that the world is amenable to our cognitive abilities. The inability to know the world occasions the state of estrangement between us, our mental structure, and the world. James Phillips (2011, p. 395) nicely puts this idea by saying: "The displeasure of ugliness is the displeasure of the thought that the world might not want us to know it."[25] When our expectations of order and our need of organizing the world in a specific way are violated, we do not merely experience displeasure, but also a sense of loss of control over the organization of experience, and this can occasion feelings of fear, anxiety, horror and a sense of estrangement, powerlessness, absurdity, mortality, disorientation etc. Ugliness can be a valuable experience, because it is the unique way through which these ideas and emotions themselves, for which there is no adequate sense intuition, can be sensibly represented.

To conclude, in spite of the feeling of displeasure it produces, artistic ugliness can be a valuable experience because it is a unique way through which certain ideas, concepts and emotions, for which we do not have a full empirical counterpart, can be expressed. Ugliness brings forth negative aesthetic ideas, which are uncomfortable, yet are part of our experience of the world and ourselves and therefore worthwhile attending to. Even though perceived with displeasure, ugliness affords an unfamiliar and unexpected perspective on the phenomenal world and an intimation of the world of ideas.

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[25] James Phillips: "Placing Ugliness in Kant's Third *Critique:* A Reply to Paul Guyer", *Kant-Studien,* vol. 102, no. 3, 2011, p. 395.