Beauty and critical art: is beauty at odds with critical–political engagement?

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Abstract

Traditionally, beauty is understood as an ability of some objects (artworks included) to occasion in viewers a distinctive type of unmediated/pure pleasure—aesthetic pleasure. According to this common understanding of beauty, political–critical art does not seem to raise in viewers the feeling of aesthetic pleasure. Many contemporary critical artists and politically engaged artists deliberately produce an art as unappealing to the senses as possible (their attitude could be called, following Arthur Danto, kalliphobia—“beauty phobia”). Critical art is a type of art which usually does not strike us with beauty at first sight because this “political art” usually deals with issues of social injustice and political struggles, rendering contemplation and aesthetic pure pleasure unachievable. Yet, even if beauty, in critical art’s case, seems to be a difficult, demanding, and not an immediately recognisable one (mostly because of its unappealing, unsettling look), this does not mean that it lacks or is at odds with critical engagement (as some critical artists and theorists have argued). The argument of this paper is that not every beautiful thing looks good at first sight. By the same token, not everything that looks beautiful is in fact beautiful. Drawing on Immanuel Kant’s neglected pulchritude adhaerens (dependent beauty), I argue that political–critical art is characterised by a dependent type of beauty (beauty a thing has as a thing of a certain kind and with a certain function) as opposed to free beauty (as something we like it freely on its own account, independent of what it is and what it does). Political–critical art can claim a dependent beauty (an impure, “difficult” and not straightforward pleasurable type of beauty) without being compelled to submit itself, at the same time, to the free beauty.

Keywords: dependent beauty; beauty phobia; political beauty; critical beauty; “odd beauty”

In an open letter addressed to critics writing on political art, Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert posit that “art about politics is not necessarily political art.”1 In other words, “political art” is not art which merely has politics as the subject matter but art which aims to change the very way we see...
the world, “including what we understand to be politics itself.” Politically engaged art usually discloses social injustices and takes a critical approach to hegemony. Many contemporary political artists deliberately produce an art as unappealing to the senses as possible because they attempt to raise awareness about social injustices and other troubles. In doing this, they hope to distance their art both from the mainstream art world and from the art market. Therefore, the question is: to what extent is the category of “beauty” (as commonly understood) still valid and workable for political—critical art? But to answer this question, we have to clarify first what is meant by “beauty.” We often fail to make clear what we mean by “beauty,” even if we use this word quite frequently, in all kinds of occasions, related to art or not. When we appreciate that something has beauty, we implicitly accept that X is a source of positive aesthetic value or positive aesthetic appreciation. In the history of philosophical aesthetics, there are many theories and definitions of beauty. Despite differences, most of these theories connect the experience of the beautiful with a certain type of pleasure and enjoyment. Starting with “the aesthetic era” in the 18th century, beauty is taken to be a propensity in some objects to awake in viewers a distinctive type of unmediated pleasure—aesthetic pleasure. This ability to occasion pleasure is the only purpose (function) of beauty. Starting with the 18th century (“the aesthetic era”), many aestheticians rejected the link between beauty and utility/functionality in art appreciation. Beauty and function are seen as mutually exclusive. A beautiful object is that object which has no use or function. These aestheticians seem to endorse Augustine’s view, the male nipple has pure beauty because it serves no function. It is beautiful because it is functionless.

By the same token, beauty in art is thought to have no function; it has to be contemplated and valued for its own sake only. Theophile Gautier (the first theoretist of art for art’s sake doctrine) used to claim that “nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting (...) The most useful place in a house is the latrine.” This dismissal of the connection between function and beauty had been almost unconceivable in the pre-aesthetic era. As Jonathan L. Friedman posits, “listening to music for pleasure was an unknown concept in the ancient world.” Music has been used in certain contexts (e.g. religious, public rituals, or festivities) to perform certain functions. Outside these occasions, little attention has been given to listening to music merely for pleasure or beauty.

Starting with the aesthetic era, a powerful view developed in post-Enlightenment Western Culture: only fine art qualifies as aesthetic arts (have aesthetic value). Fine arts are those non-functional arts appreciated for their own sake (arts meant just to be beautiful and to occasion aesthetic pleasure). These arts are not made to serve art-extrinsic functions, as functional arts are (e.g. religious art serves the function of glorifying God; architecture serves the primary function of offering shelter; political art serves a critical function; textile arts serve to construct practical and decorative objects and so on). Functional arts are not regarded in traditional aesthetics as properly aesthetic precisely because they serve a practical, art-extrinsic function. In short, “uselessness” started to become central to the modern concept of art and beauty.

Yet, as this paper attempts to argue, political—critical art does not try to conform to a paradigmatic concept of beauty because this art habitually displays complex beauties, “odd beauties” and unsettling beauties which do not occasion an immediate feeling of pleasure and, even if, in some cases they trigger an immediate pleasure, this does not mean that pleasure invalidates critical engagement. Bernard Bosanquet distinguishes two classes of things that are beautiful: easy beauties (which are pleasant to almost everyone: things that occasion straightforward pleasure) and difficult beauties (which require from the viewer some effort and meditation). Critical—political art is usually a tense, disobedient, edgy art and its beauty is not immediately perceivable. More often than not it fits Bosanquet’s “difficult beauty” category because it is not the type of beauty which one just notices. On the contrary, the beautiful in critical art is rendered by ethical and cognitive concerns. What we know about an event or object and our worldview and moral values always determine our perception about what is beautiful, why it is beautiful, and what is not beautiful. In this sense, we could claim that critical art’s beauty is a “difficult” one and not easily identifiable because we arrive at it after a process of deliberation.
Beauty should not be restricted to an immediate type of pleasure, if we want to account for its social and political relevance. Nevertheless, beauty can work politically and critically if we consider it not only as a specific kind of aesthetic pleasure. But, in order to act critically and politically, beauty needs in the first place to be re-visited and re-evaluated. The crux of the matter, as I will argue in what follows, is to disentangle what we take beauty to be.

BEAUTY’S AVOIDANCE IN CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL–POLITICAL ART PRACTICE

Since the end of the 1960s—and with Duchamp earlier—we have witnessed a turn away from beauty in contemporary art and theory. Under the influential strands of Conceptualist’s rethinking of aesthetics, Marxist’s critiques of aesthetics and Postmodern art theory and criticism, beauty was avoided on the grounds of a series of political complaints against it. Beauty’s avoidance and critique surfaced from a range of perspectives: from feminist “interrogations of ‘woman as sign’ in representations of female beauty (Griselda Pollock) to the analysis of beauty as skewed by late capitalism (Frederic Jameson) and the questioning of beauty in terms of the critical values of the avant-garde (John Roberts).”

The movement of conceptual art (1968–1990) emphasised the idea (concept) of the piece of art over its aesthetic value. Thus, Conceptualism should be also understood as a critique against the commodity status of art. This critique had a momentous effect on the attitude towards beauty: to produce and pursue beauty became equated with superficial and bourgeois values. Critical Pakistani artist Rasheed Araeen also contests beauty on the grounds that beauty has been colonised by the West and imposed on the East. The conceptual artists (from Marcel Duchamp to Robert Smithson) turn against beauty in their attempt to produce an art about ideas, politics, and the sublime. By the same token, at the theoretical level, the philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard draws on the concept of the sublime (as opposite of the beautiful) to describe his position vis a vis of what political art should occasion in attendants. The history of the replacement of beauty by the sublime in contemporary political art and theory is also documented by Hal Foster and Wendy Steiner and analysed by Elaine Scarry.

In this section I attempt to show, against the common view held by some contemporary political artists, cultural activists and art theorists that beauty is not at odds with critical engagement. I respond to those contemporary political artists’ and theorists’ claim that beauty is at odds with the struggle for social justice. Their distrust is a direct consequence of the way in which beauty has been conceived in the traditional aesthetic theory of art.

At the same time, I want to stress that putting beauty back on the agenda (as several contemporary theorists have done starting with the 90s) is not enough for beauty’s rehabilitation, unless we re-appreciate the significance of what is considered beautiful; namely the relationship between beauty and function and the understanding of beauty.

There is a theoretical tendency which places the concern with beauty in art in a totally different dimension than the concern for social justice. As already mentioned, political art is art with critical function (or purpose); art which typically does not look pleasant at sight. Beauty is then for many contemporary artists a discredited aesthetic category. For artists like Marcel Duchamp, Jean Dubuffet, Barnett Newman, and many others who advocated the sublime over beautiful, political art does not need to be beautiful to be good, relevant, effective, and significant. Moreover, beauty has to be deliberately avoided in contemporary political art because beauty does not help the art piece to fulfil its critical point but, on the contrary, it may occasion the wrong kind of experience in spectators (turning them into distanced, disinterested, and passive attendants).

Yet, even if art is not and should not be necessarily beautiful, this does not mean that beauty (when it is present in art) damages somehow the art piece’s impact and significance, as some theorists are inclined to suggest. In trying to deal with the issue of beauty in critical–political art and its impact for philosophical aesthetics, I have realised the predominance of two main conflicting theoretical attitudes:

1. one considers beauty to be useless (without purpose or function), powerless, just that “which is pleasant at sight”;

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2. the other treats beauty as quite the opposite (beauty is too powerful, a force which harms the object looked at and overwhelms our attention so much that we cannot take our eyes from it long enough to look at social injustices). Regarding political art's relation to beauty, it seems obvious that none of the above positions offer a justification for why and how beauty matters in critical art.

In the first case, beauty comes to mean “merely” beautiful. In other words, it occasions a certain kind of pleasure in beholders which does not help fulfilling effectively political art’s functions. It is too weak to count for political art’s purposes, it does not matter, it is not righteous, and it is a demoted aesthetic notion which can be anytime replaced by sublime (which is great, it moves the soul, it is righteous, and so on).

In the second case (“beauty is too powerful” strand), beauty is totally rejected. For example, Brecht and Adorno hold that beautiful things distract our attention from injustice, pain, moral crimes, and sufferance. Theodor Adorno famously declaimed the barbarism of “lyric” poetry after Auschwitz. These considerations did not remain without consequences and beauty tends to be avoided from political art. The argument runs like this: beauty is immoral because it preoccupies our attention, distracting it from wrong social arrangements. Arthur Danto explained his worries regarding the inappropriateness of beauty in contemporary art and the way in which beauty threatens to conceal injustice, sufferance, and other social diseases.

Besides these two categories of criticism analysed above, there are also other secondary critiques of beauty:

3. another suspicion of beauty (closely related to the “beauty is too powerful” claim) comes from feminist aesthetic theory: when we look at a beautiful object/person we actually damage the object or person by turning it into a mere object that we feel superior to (like in the case of the “male gaze” at female’s beauty);

4. Passmore further points out that beauty expresses the wrong social values (the bourgeois’ values) and Peter Benson accused beauty of being non-democratic (it is distributed unequally among people and those who can produce it or buy it are a valued minority, a favoured elite). All the above diatribes have contributed to the view that beauty has no place in political–critical art production and strategies. In other words, beauty is at odds with critical awareness and political engagement.

After noticing these contemporary theoretical critiques of beauty, one could argue that there is no way to reconcile beauty and political–critical art since each of them nullifies the other. It is the aim of this study to suggest the contrary. Beauty does not prevent one for standing up for justice. It is also true that all these worries regarding beauty’s negative impact are not necessarily chimerical. They are grounded on a certain, “official,” narrow conception of beauty which still lingers on in aesthetic theory of art—in which beauty is defined as being indissoluble united with surface and appearance, with immediate perception and disinterested pleasure, totally independent (“pure” beauty) from other values, attitudes, moral judgements, and so on. If we accept this paradigm, beauty will never matter for political art and, moreover, it will be deliberately avoided and rejected by political and critical artists (and they will be right to do so). Yet, I think we have significant reasons to consider that beauty matters for political art. The reservations and worries regarding beauty’s presence in critical art depend on what we take beauty to be.

Traditionally (following mainly but not exclusively Kantian aesthetics), beauty has been defined as the agency of disinterested pleasure. According to this main approach, art is necessarily associated with something meant to be beautiful, or at least with something that we attend just in order to enjoy ourselves, but not in order to get involved with or nervous with. I have argued that political art could be, and many times is beautiful, without striving to be beautiful in the first place. In other words, political art does not struggle to be beautiful (this is not its main purpose or function) but in spite of this, many times, it is beautiful. Perhaps many contemporary aestheticians and even political artists would discredit the idea on the simple ground that conceptually “beauty” has nothing to do with critical, social, or political art and, moreover, the very idea of avant-garde art
rejects “beauty.” Many contemporary voices maintain that being “too aesthetic” or “too beautiful” is a detrimental appreciation of political art. For instance, the artist Shirin Neshat expresses her critical stance both in form and content, and is politically engaged vis-à-vis both Islam and gender issues. Her art has been criticized for being “too aesthetic” and “too beautiful” to matter as political art.

As I have mentioned, in contemporary art practice there is a tendency which places the concern for social justice in a totally different sphere than the concern with beauty. Simply put, if a political message is at stake beauty should disappear since beauty blocks the forcefulness of the message and the impetus to take a stand. Arthur Danto pronounced his indictment of engaged art stating that there is always a danger in activist art: “I can understand how the activist should wish to avoid beauty; simply because beauty induces the wrong perspective on whatever it is the activist wants something to be done about.”

Some theorists explicitly state that both the sublime and the political or “real” are the enemies of beauty and today’s writing on beauty is deeply a-political: “it is mostly unwilling to contemplate the legitimacy of artistic practices that take a stand and bring together the aesthetic, the cognitive, and the critical, preferring instead to value artworks that operate independently of any practical interest.” I disagree with these claims. On the contrary, I would suggest that it is the very beauty of a political/critical art piece that makes its message powerful and empowering. The fact that so many times beauty is rejected from political art’s strategies and tactics is due to a huge misunderstanding and misconception going on around the concept of beauty (what beauty is taken to be and actually it is not).

Another powerful claim in contemporary critical theory is that political artists deliberately destroy or avoid beauty in their cultural production as a sort of artistic–political “statement” against the official aesthetic discourse of academia, art market, and so on. The main anti-beauty movement in contemporary art is based on the conviction that beauty has been one of the most important art’s institutional discourses, which is a sign of power and exclusion. We have reasons to accept this argument only if we endorse an understanding of “beauty” which emphasises immediate pleasantness, purity, and “disinterestedness” (in the sense of no interest allowed, no ulterior purpose) but, in the real world of art, beauty is none of these. Many theorists follow Gertrude Stein in holding strongly that “beauty” has to be avoided in contemporary political art because its traces would redirect viewer’s attention from social injustice. She once said that to call a work of art beautiful means that it is dead (because beautiful has come to mean “merely beautiful”) and this dictum seems still powerful and convincing for many. That is why “beauty” has never been a central aim of contemporary political art, which has tended to focus on meaning and politics rather than on formal values.

Arthur Danto has described this reaction against beauty as “kalliphobia” (beauty phobia) and repeatedly argued that “beauty is in exile” and, moreover, “the discovery that something can be good art without being beautiful was one of the greatest conceptual clarifications of the 20th century philosophy of art.” I have no doubts that this argument has its strength and importance especially because on its basis the very concept of “art” is enlarged considerably (making room for conceptual, ready-made, performance art in it) and non-perceptual works come into picture (since according to Danto “X is art if it embodies a meaning”). At the same time, I’m totally sympathetic with Danto’s great contribution to contemporary philosophy of art in what regards his arguments against the necessary link between art and beauty. Indeed, nowadays it is merely a “historical view” (belonging to the History of Aesthetics) that art is paradigmatically and essentially concerned with the creation of beautiful objects only.

Yet, on the other hand, there is one thing to realise that beauty is no longer a necessary quality of a work of art, and good art need not be mandatory beautiful (which Danto did), and there is a totally different thing to posit that “beauty had disappeared not only from art, but from advanced philosophy of art.” This is an overstatement. I do not know if beauty is a discredited philosophical notion, as Nehamas posited, but what seems without doubt is the fact that beauty has never been in exile. If we observe people’s reactions in front of various kinds of beautiful objects of everyday life, in front of natural beauties, mathematical proofs, and theorems; in front of the
beauty of a courageous act or sacrifice and, yes, in front of the most diverse art forms and productions, we can notice that on many other levels beauty has been/is present in our lives and we have never ceased to pursue it. I think we have no reason to question beauty or to give up pursuing it (as the postmodern, anti-aesthetic theory and art demands\textsuperscript{28}) basing our denial on a narrow aesthetic theory whose recommendations convert beauty into something which expresses the wrong social/political values. It is also beyond any doubt that beauty, as it is traditionally theorised, many times serves and expresses wrong social “values” (like racism, sexism, and so on) but it does not follow that beauty always does this and, as a consequence, political art should avoid it on purpose. Eagleton presented convincingly in his \textit{Ideological Aesthetics} artistic avant-garde’s choice to stay away from beauty: “The avant-garde’s response to the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic is quite unequivocal. Truth is a lie; morality stinks; beauty is shit . . . . Equally, of course, they are wrong. Truth, morality, and beauty are too important to be handed contemptuously over the political enemy.”\textsuperscript{29} As we can see, the problem is not with beauty but with what “beauty” is taken to be. I contend that all these critiques directed against the appropriateness of beauty in contemporary critical/political art are triggered by a misunderstanding of beauty in the sense that beauty is taken to be that which occasions merely sensuous pleasure (its source being identified in pleasant looking forms). It seems that contemporary political artists attempt to avoid just one kind of beauty, Kant’s type of “free beauty” (unmediated pleasure, useless beauty, and conceptless beauty). Curiously enough, Kant also talks about another beauty (dependent beauty), but this kind of beauty is less popular in both aesthetic theories of art and in common thinking about beauty.

**REVISITING KANTIAN THEORY OF DEPENDENT BEAUTY: POLITICAL ART AND DEPENDENT BEAUTY**

Let us first sketch Kant’s distinction between free beauty (\textit{pulchritudo vaga}) and dependent beauty (\textit{pulchritudo adhaerens}): free beauty is a beauty whose judgement is grounded in the subject’s aesthetic pleasure. This judgement is pure—a pure judgement of taste based on the subject’s aesthetic pleasure. Objects which are freely beautiful have no intrinsic meaning; “they represent nothing” (like in Kant’s example with the designs \textit{a la greque}, music without a theme or without words, flowers, birds).\textsuperscript{30} In this understanding, our taste for beautiful (the pleasure we take in beautiful songs without words) is a disinterested pleasure. A pure (free) judgement of beauty is based solely on the purposiveness of the form of an object. Free beauty is self-subsistent (we like it freely on its own account). In conclusion, free beauty is independent of concerns with (1) conceptual classification (the beauty a thing has as a thing of a certain kind) and (2) functionality (beauty a thing has as a thing with a certain function).

Dependent beauty (also called by Kant adherent, accessory beauty) is a beauty which gives us intellectual pleasure. Objects which are dependently beautiful are always about something, represent something, and have an intrinsic meaning of “what the thing has to be.” The dependent beauty of a thing is “the beauty that it has as a thing with certain function.”\textsuperscript{31} Nick Zangwill convincingly shows the importance of understanding Kantian dependent beauty in terms of function. He holds that something has a function only if it has a history, unlike the free beauty of a thing which is independent of its function and of its history (a thing has free beauty at a time just in virtue of how it is at that time).

Many of those who discuss Kant’s distinction between free and dependent beauty miss the crucial teleological dimension of the distinction. They think that dependent beauty is just a matter of subsuming a thing under a concept. But the crucial thing is subsuming something under a concept of its function.\textsuperscript{32}

In sum, dependent beauty touches upon aesthetic ideas rather than aesthetic perceivable forms. All representational art is in this Kantian picture dependently beautiful. It is not possible to judge artistic beauty non-dependently. All judgements of art are dependent at least in the minimal sense (judgements of are judgements in the light of the concept of art). Kant explicitly states in the paragraph 48 of the third Critique that all artistic beauty is dependent beauty. It seems that he felt the need to distinguish between the two beauties—but why? Perhaps, he realised that in some instances (in art’s case) cognition cannot be
eliminated from aesthetic experience. Eliminating it from the aesthetic experience of art simply means to miss art’s point. All art has a meaning and a purpose in a more direct or indirect way (and political art in the most obvious manner). In this case, we cannot view art as freely beautiful unless we deliberately disregard its concept and purposes.

In what follows, I argue that Kant’s “dependent beauty” can adequately account for beauty in political–critical art’s case (and in art in general). I claim that in political art’s case (and in art’s case more generally) we judge an object dependently beautiful without judging it freely (purely) beautiful. Before developing this argument, let me recall that the few contemporary discussions of beauty in conjunction with politics touch mainly upon Hegel’s aesthetics (since Kantian aesthetics is seen by many as too purist/formalist to do justice to beauty in critical art’s case). Referring to Hegel seems a legitimate choice since he was one of the first philosophers holding that works of artistic beauty display a fusion of sensuous data with the meaning intended by the artist (including a political meaning). Arthur Danto also takes Hegel’s aesthetics as the starting point of his contentions regarding what he calls “internal beauty.” There is an enigmatic phrase in Hegel’s writings on beauty, namely: “beauty of art is beauty born of spirit and born again,” which comes to be explained by Danto in his article “Beauty and Morality.” This “twice born” of artistic beauty may be understood as two intermingled instances: (1) beauty is internal to the concept of the work in artist’s mind and (2) beauty is then enacted in the work itself (so, first the idea and second the embodiment of the idea). In this manner, we could talk about “beauty in” (internal to the meaning, content, idea, or concept) rather than about “beauty of” (beauty that is not internal to the meaning). Nevertheless, Hegel’s insights into artistic beauty allow the political art theorist to deal with the issue of beauty within politically concerned and involved art, since it is obvious that beauty, as Hegel sees it, has to do more with something cognitive rather than merely sensational.

When we come to Kant’s aesthetics, we can straightforwardly observe how political art theorists usually reject the entire Kantian aesthetic project on the grounds that the aesthetic pleasure we take in capturing beauty and critical engagement are fundamentally irreconcilable. But is this so? Is this rejection of Kant’s aesthetics reasonable? I will show that Kant’s aesthetic understanding of “dependent beauty” is not at odds with critical–political art. Those theorists, who reject Kant’s aesthetics of beauty tout court, fail to keep in mind Kant’s dependent beauty or hold that dependent beauty is a subspecies of free beauty and that we cannot judge an object dependently beautiful without judging it freely beautiful in the first place.

It is generally acknowledged that the modern stream of aesthetic formalism directly derives from Kant’s aesthetics. This direct legacy seems a justifiable one since whatever else beauty is taken to be in Kant’s Third Critique, an invariant feature remains firm: beauty is always formal. What does this mean? It means that the aesthetic judgement of beauty must concern itself with form in the object (shape, arrangement of parts, and surface) and not with the content because the latter could be connected with interest (even a colour could be infected with interest and downgraded to the status of agreeable, according to classical formalism). However, the formalists (Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg, and Jerome Stolnitz among others more or less moderate formalists in the contemporary philosophy of art) seem to be more Kantian than Kant himself. They reject the relevance of cognitive and moral judgements in art appreciation and do not distinguish between beauty in art and natural beauty. Unlike them, Kant acknowledges this distinction between natural beauty and art’s beauty and reserves the “free beauty” (pure beauty) only for the aesthetic appreciation of beautiful things in nature (with several exceptions like the designs a la grecque and music without a theme or without words). He also introduces “dependent beauty” as a legitimate kind of beauty, which can be encountered in art only.

When he refers to free or pure beauty, he always points to natural, pure beauty and not to art [his well-known examples are: flowers (especially roses), birds (the parrot, the bird of paradise, and the humming bird), and a lot of crustaceans in the ocean. This does not mean that the whole Kantian philosophy of art is identical with his theory of beauty even if a consequence of this theory (which became popular later on) is that art had to be by definition beautiful or aesthetically pleasing.
Unlike the “Kantian” formalists, Kant distin-
guished between beauties of nature (pure beau-
ties) and beauties of art (adherent beauties), and
recognised that cognitive and moral judgements
can be relevant to artistic evaluations (to judging
beauty in art). Even political engaged artists
and theorists (e.g. Adrian Piper) would say that
what Kant’s aesthetic theory holds regarding the
status of art (excepting the part concerned with
“the pure judgment of beauty”) is in fact very
generous. From Kant’s acceptance of moral and
cognitive in the evaluation of art (but not of natural
beauty), “we can infer exactly nothing about what
sorts of objects get to be identified as art. We can
have Kantian-style aesthetic experiences of all
sorts of things, including agitprop political art,
without violating Kantian strictures.”

To some extent Adrian Piper is right: Kant
himself has pointed out that “all artistic beauty is
dependent beauty” (see section 48 in his
Critique of Aesthetic Judgment). Beauty is conceptless and
functionless for Kant only in nature. We do not
need any concept of what kind of thing is the
object meant to be. But with art is different. Kant
says that when we encounter beauty in art “then
we must first base it on a concept of what the thing
is [meant] to be, since art always presupposes a
purpose in the cause (and its causality).” This
shows that Kant’s aesthetics of art differs greatly
from his aesthetics of nature. The treatment of the
aesthetic in Kant’s philosophy of art is certainly
far from conclusive, but one thing is without
doubt:

it is epistemological as well as political
through and through. Several intellectuals
... have been able to claim the reverse and to
assert that the aesthetics of Kant is ‘free from
cognitive and ethical consequences’, but this
is their problem not Kant’s.

Political art could be theorised within a Kantian
philosophy of beauty, as a relevant example of
“dependent beauty” but not as free (pure) beauty.
To aesthetically judge a piece of political art, you
need unavoidably to take into consideration its
conceptual content: the ideas it embodies, its
aboutness (which actually makes it a dependent
beauty), and the teleological aspect of it (its
functions). In other words, political art is depend-
ently beautiful in the sense that a certain func-
tion of a thing and the way in which that function
is fulfilled makes us grasp that thing as beautiful.

Dependent beauty is not only a matter of sub-
suming a thing under a concept (as some interpret
Kant’s aesthetic theory) but it is closely connected
with the fulfilling properly a function in a certain
manner (just fulfilling the function would not be
sufficient). As Michel Joseph Fletcher correctly
observes (in his reconstruction of Robert Wicks’
argument known as “dependent beauty as the
appreciation of the teleological style”), to be a
thing of a given kind and to fulfil a characteristic
end is not enough in aesthetic judgements of
dependently beautiful things. When we judge a
thing as “dependently beautiful,” we make an
assessment of how well the thing fulfils its function.
In Fletcher’s words “to make such an assessment is
to make a judgement of qualitative perfection.”
Dependent beauty of a thing is a function of its
perfection in the sense that X instantiates the end
of being the kind of X it ought to be. X’s perfection
positively contributes to its beauty.

Yet, Malcolm Budd, Christopher Janaway, Nick
Zangwill, and other contemporary aestheticians
claim that only the judgement of free beauty
remains within the aesthetic realm, while the
judgement of dependent beauty (being an impure
judgement) does not. Several questions are un-
avoidable: is dependent beauty a concept that is
superfluous for aesthetic theory? Is dependent
beauty a subspecies of free beauty? Can we judge
an object dependently beautiful without judging it
freely beautiful? My short answers are “no” for
the first two questions and “yes” for the third one.
The detailed answers will be developed in what
follows.

To start with, the aesthetic judgement of depen-
dent beauty we made need not be grounded in the
first place in any judgement of free beauty, and
this independence still remains within the aes-
thetic realm. From the fact that something (poli-
tical art in our case) may be dependently beautiful
without being freely beautiful does not follow (as
it is held by many) neither that the judgement
of dependent beauty is made on non-aesthetic
grounds nor that it is a non-genuine aesthetic
judgement.

We cannot reduce our pleasures in experiencing
art to immediate/pure pleasure (there are other
kinds of pleasures that count). Kant also admits
that “something must be more than merely
tastefully pleasant in order to please as a work of
art.” As Gadamer puts it: “this thesis shows
clearly how little a formal aesthetic of taste corresponds to Kantian idea ... Kant’s demonstration that the beautiful pleases without a concept does not gainsay the fact that only the beautiful things that speak meaningfully to us evokes our total interest.”\(^{44}\) But Kant still insists in the paragraph 48 that to judge natural beauty, we need no concept of what kind of thing an object is meant to be. Even if I do not agree with this requirement and I will have more to say about this issue later on, it should be mentioned that the term “beauty” must amount to something different in art cases than in other cases (non-art cases but still aesthetic cases). We need to clearly state that natural beauty and beauties which we find in art are not experienced identically (and their effects on us are quite different). In the appreciation of natural beauty, there is little connection with thought or thinking that explains its existence; whereas with art pieces the beautiful is explained by the thought that is necessary to be grasped to appreciate their beauty.\(^{45}\)

The relationship between free and dependent beauty seems to be controversial enough, inspiring Kant’s critics to react from both analytic and continental philosophical aesthetics. Some critics see the distinction totally misplaced (a mistake) in Kant’s systematic philosophical aesthetics. Depending on their orientation, some hold that the privileged aesthetic position given to the free beauty is “dangerous” on the grounds that “it concentrates on aesthetics to the point of leaving us without an adequate philosophy of art.”\(^{46}\) Also Gadamer argues that:

> it seems impossible to do justice to art if aesthetics is founded on the ‘pure judgment of taste’—unless the criterion of taste is made merely a precondition … Here (in Kant’s paragraph 16) the standpoint of taste is so far from being a mere precondition that, rather, it claims to exhaust the nature of aesthetic judgment and protect it from being limited by ‘intellectual’ criteria.\(^{47}\)

Other theorists, like Ruth Lorand,\(^{48}\) Nick Zangwill or Christopher Janaway, tend to stress the primacy of free beauty over the dependent beauty in the sense that “we must be able to appreciate free beauty if we are to appreciate any beauty.”\(^{49}\) There is even a more radical position stating that dependent beauty is not beauty at all (but nevertheless this conception is obviously unacceptable since its consequence would be the removal from Kant’s aesthetics of almost everything we would designate as works of art).\(^{50}\) Nick Zangwill argued that:

> We must be able to appreciate free beauty if we are to appreciate any beauty. The primacy claim is that without a conception of free beauty, no other beauty would be accessible to us. We can only conceive of one because we can conceive of the other. There could not be people who cared only about dependent beauty but not about free beauty. Our love of free beauty is, as it were, the ground from which our love of dependent beauty springs.\(^{51}\)

However, Zangwill fails to provide an explanation of why the dependent beauty cannot be appreciated without any mediation of free beauty. He clearly states “I’m not sure how to argue for the primacy thesis” but continues to argue for works of artistic merit which excel in free beauty in the first place.\(^{52}\) It is not satisfactory to find out that free beauty is always prior to dependent one and we all begin to respond aesthetically only to what confronts our senses directly and immediately. Art abounds in the example of works of artistic merit without excelling in free beauty. For a meaningful beauty (political art’s beauty), the pleasure type of response we ascribe to free beauty is not enough. However, Kant does not claim that dependent beauty is based on free beauty. All Kant says is that dependent beauty is somehow inferior to pure/free beauty (otherwise why would he say that a church is “merely” a dependent beauty?)

Fortunately, there are theorists like Denis Dutton who acknowledges that Kant is “burdened with a contradiction” and proposes to discard the idea of free beauty. He seems to gain some support from Gadamer’s considerations presented in “Truth and Method,” according to which “Kant’s deepest philosophic difficulty is not with dependent, but with free beauty.”\(^{53}\)

We can confidently say that pure beauty (free beauty) is indeed almost “legendary.” It is impossible to imagine how we could appreciate a beautiful something (no matter if it is from art or from nature) in a conceptual vacuum. It seems almost awkward to say: “I don’t care what X is, but it is beautiful.” How often we hear anyone saying (after visiting an exhibition): “I don’t care...
who painted it or what it was but it was so
beautiful!” or “Even if what I thought was a dove
turns out to be a rat, it is still beautiful!”? When
we call something “beautiful” we normally reflect
on what kind of an object X is, or possibly could be,
or how it could be related to its context. There
is no “mere,” self-subsistent, de-contextualised,
pre-suppositionless beauty. To be able to pursue
this burdensome beauty (free/pure/self-subsistent),
one has to be for the first time on earth (and even
then, some context will matter in apprehending
beauty, like the background in which she/he sees
the flowers she likes).

The impure judgements of beauty are still
aesthetic judgements. The conceptual deliberation
is unavoidable when we apprehend beauty of any
kind. Just to put some flesh on these theoretical
bones, Yasumasa Morimura’s beautiful political
art would be helpful here as a clear example of
conceptual and contextual beauty, which cannot
be apprehended as free/pure beauty at the same
time. This proves that the fluctuation between
free and dependent beauty is not easily possible
as many Kantian commentators have thought.
Yasumasa Morimura is a Japanese appropriation
artist (many times labelled as the masculine/Asian
version of Cindy Sherman). He borrows images
from historical art (ranging from Leonardo da
Vinci to Frida Kahlo to Rembrant and Manet)
and overimposes or inserts his own face or body
into them. This operation is also undergone with
photographs of Hollywood’s pop stars. Morimura’s
art is nevertheless politically loaded. It raises
questions regarding gender issues (masculine–
feminine identity, opposing hetero-normativity),
cultural identity, Western–Eastern dichotomies
and prejudices, and challenges the beauty cannons
of the Western world. The artist’s own body
becomes a locus of the political. Morimura is not
performing in the first place a show by the means of
his impersonations—he is rather performing a task:
to make you aware about the unjust distribution
of success (all the stars he is impersonating are
icons of the Western film industry or art history’s
masterpieces). The act of overimposing his face
on these pictures or paintings acquires a political
significance: it confronts the viewer (especially the
Western viewer) with the otherness’ beauty and
determines her to think more about the cannons
of ideal beauty and artistic success. Had Mona Lisa
been an Asian man, would we have found her
still beautiful?

Morimura’s impersonations are intended to
be at least two things: (1) art and (2) instances
of a critical beauty, which somehow questions the
“iconic metaphors of beauty.” To appreciate this
art pieces as “beautiful,” we need to understand
the concepts and ideas the artist has employed,
the context (the cultural tradition, art history, the
artist belonging to a specific culture), and so on.
For instance, I personally do not find Leonardo da
Vinci’s Mona Lisa beautiful, even if I struggle to
attend its formal qualities following the require-
ments of a purist aesthetic reception. It does not
strike me as beautiful either at first glance or at
the second or third.

But Morimura’s Mona Lisa is beautiful for me
(in a Kantian, dependent way) and by no means
could it be apprehended as freely beautiful. To
apprehend it as being freely beautiful would mean
to miss its point entirely. Morimura’s Mona Lisa
is beautiful precisely because of what it means and
does. What this Mona Lisa means is strikingly
different from da Vinci’s one: from the formal
point of view they resemble, but they are not really
indiscernible as Duchamp’s Fountain and a regular
toilet are. Morimura has just appropriated da
Vinci’s image but the meaning of his work is a
totally different one. However, it is very plausible
for some of us to find da Vinci’s Mona Lisa non-
beautiful and Morimura’s beautiful. Morimura’s
impersonation is beautiful because it lets us know
what it means what we see (and it also lets us
know from where, with what purpose, and how
could we understand the author’s artistic gesture).
Morimura forces da Vinci’s Mona Lisa to become
a self-portrait of the artist in drag “injecting a
Western icon with the spirit of Onnagata—a
Japanese Kabuki theatre’s tradition of cross-
dressing.”54 Apprehending the “new,” Morimura’s
Mona Lisa is still pleasurable, but it is a different
kind of pleasure, an interested one: informed by
what the new portrait comes to mean and why.
Morimura’s Mona Lisa is beautiful because it is
such and such. If we experience it in a conceptual
vacuum (as the purist beauty requires), then we
miss its point and its beauty altogether. In other
words, if we see it without any conceptual content
and without having a purpose of its function in
mind, it does not seem beautiful at all (not even
freely beautiful).
FUNCTIONAL BEAUTY: BEAUTY AND FUNCTION IN POLITICAL ART

In what follows, I will focus on functionality in relation to beauty (dependent beauty a thing has as a thing with a certain function). Up to this point, I have argued that in spite of its unappealing look, political art is many times beautiful and that the aesthetic pleasure (as dependent, non-pure pleasure) in apprehending political art is still aesthetic and is still pleasurable. This means that political–critical art is dependently beautiful. Dependent beauty of a thing (according to Kant) is among other things, the beauty that it has as a thing with certain function. I want to suggest that beauty in political art’s case is a functional beauty; it is a combination of what this art does (the proper function it fulfills) and of the way in which it fulfills that function (with daring, wit, courage, force, relevance). Daring, wit, and courage are also aesthetic properties (non-perceptual but still aesthetic and still beautiful). We do not appreciate dependent beauty just for the sake of it or for the pleasure it occasions but for what it does and for what is meant. The fact that we do not appreciate it for what is customarily prescribed (immediacy, disinterestedness, uselessness) does not make it less aesthetic. There are various species of beauty (not only that accepted in official aesthetic theory). A beauty which is conjoined with function is still a kind of beauty and is still aesthetic.

This does not mean that all art is functional but political–critical art certainly is. If for other arts (let us say “fine” arts as opposed to functional arts—even though I do not endorse this distinction), it is difficult to identify their proper function, this is not the case with political art. We identify political art as political art with respect to its function (otherwise, why calling it political or critical art?). We can appreciate/evaluate individual instances of political art and reason how well they express (work out) their proper function. Political art is both functional and beautiful. Function does not nullify beauty. On the contrary, the fact that we know that a disharmonic feature is displayed in a piece of art with the purpose of rekindling our hearts makes that feature a beautiful one, even if it does not look so at first sight. Functionality informs (in the end) the way the object looks to us. X can look beautiful to us if we know that its function is to do something good and healthy. A horrifying face of someone suffering depicted in a movie is not pleasant to look at but looks beautiful to us once we know its purpose in that piece of art.

The fact that an aesthetic property is displayed in a certain way (even in an unappealing one) is meant to fulfil the function of political art. Once we understand that function, and the ways in which that function is achieved through those features which are displayed in the way they are displayed, we can see the work of beauty.

In the pre-aesthetic era (before the 18th century), in classical philosophy’s tradition, beauty has been understood as fitness for a purpose/function. In classical Greek thought, an object might be called beautiful (kalos) with reference to a purpose and non-beautiful with reference to another purpose. There are many things which exhibit properties which look fit for their primary function but we cannot claim that they are beautiful solely on this ground. Not all concerns with functionality are also aesthetic concerns. But there are objects which are both clearly functional and possess beauty. Stephen Davies argues that we judge a Swiss watch as functionally more beautiful than a quartz watch even though they both fulfil the same function of time showing.55 The Swiss one is aesthetically and functionally more beautiful because of the manner in which its properties fulfil the function of time showing (Davies says that we consider the Swiss model functionally more beautiful because of the skill and craftsmanship that “goes into its achieving that function”). This means that merely fulfilling the function is not the only reason why a Swiss model is functionally beautiful. Anyway, according to Davies, and I tend to agree, this idea of our reaction to beautiful Swiss watches fits better Kant’s dependent beauty than Parsons and Carlson’s internalist approach. Davies does not find Kant’s position particularly convincing because he conceives functional beauty differently. For Parsons, Carlson and Davies fitness for function is not a necessary condition but a sufficient one for an object to be considered as functionally beautiful. For Kant, fulfilling the function would never be sufficient for an item to be called functionally beautiful.

Knowing the function of an art piece must change the way the object looks to us. Knowledge of function affects the aesthetic appearance of the object. Not everyone agrees with that.
Even starting with the *18th century*, any possible connection between beauty and utility is seriously questioned. Burke’s study “The philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful” (1757) is an important piece of textual evidence. He contends that looking fit for a function is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for beauty. Looking fit is not a necessary condition for beauty since objects can appear beautiful without appearing fit—so the strong version of functional beauty is false. The weaker version is also false for Burke: to look fit for a purpose is not even a sufficient condition for something to be considered beautiful. Here is why. He offers the famous counter-example of the pig’s snout. A pig’s snout is so well adapted and it looks well adapted for digging and rooting but it cannot be considered “beautiful.” There is no logical connection between beauty and looking fit. A pig is not beautiful. But Alison (one of Burke’s early critics) is offering a counter-argument: the pig’s snout may displease for its dirty appearance and smell (in other words, it is not immediately beautiful or immediately pleasant at sight) but nonetheless contains a beauty, even if it is one that is obscured, in its suitability of form to function: “We fail to call pigs beautiful because they lack those varieties of beauty that strike us immediately.”

Political–critical art is somehow like Burke’s pig. We have to look at it with a kind of awareness and not immediately to be struck by its beauty. It is not an immediate pleasure we take in its apprehension but a pleasure which arises from a reflective contemplation and deliberative thinking. It is always important in our aesthetic experience to understand the function of the object we perceive. This understanding of the function of that object will alter/change our perception of it. Fitness for function can produce a kind of aesthetic pleasure once we understand the way in which the object looks fit for the function. Now, I am aware of the fact that in this perspective of beauty we could end up with some strange looking examples of beauty (like the pig’s snout). But, on the other hand, I see nothing unacceptable about that (neither for political art nor for beauty).

An odd-looking appearance may be very supportive for the re-emergence of beauty as a *critical category*—like Yanagi Miwa or Morimura’s impersonations are. The beauty of these impersonations rests exactly in the political critiques of the Western idea of beauty (in other words, we can claim that their impersonations are beautiful because they are critical). Morimura uses a Western image of beauty (e.g. Marilyn Monroe) just to subvert it and criticised it. In doing this, he actually produces a “new” beauty, a critical beauty (“Marilyn Monroe with Asian face of the artist”) with a critical function. The beauty of this impersonation does not occasion in the viewer an immediate and disinterested pleasure but on the contrary. We experience it as a beautiful piece of art for the function (political–critical) it performs. Then, beauty is neither conceptless or immediately pleasant at sight nor separated by functionality.

Beside the critical function of beauty within political art, I argue for the political relevance of some other functions of beauty, namely: healing, inspiring generosity, allowing sentiment and emotion to express (perhaps even to bring forth tears), and a rhetorical function as well. Unlike the commonsensical understanding of beauty in traditional aesthetic theory as distanced, useless, immediately eye catching, and pleasing at sight, contextually and conceptually informed beauty is purposeful and its impacts are detected in our responses to it. Beauty is always meaningful and only understood as meaningfulness does matter in political art pieces. As Marcia Eaton has pointed out, if we make beauty pure it stops mattering.

Political art is beautiful for what it does, for how it acts, and for the reasons it acts how it acts. For example, several contemporary artists recycle plastic bottles from the ocean or from New York streets and turn them into artistry (even in beautiful forms). The beauty of these pieces lies not necessarily in the objects themselves or in the way these objects are arranged and displayed to meet spectators’ eyes, but also (mostly) in our reflection about those objects. The fact that we know what they are made from, for what reason they are displayed as they are displayed, and with what purpose renders them beautiful and not the mere appearance of them or the immediate pleasure they occasion in our senses. We know what the function of these artistic forms is and the fact that we know their function renders them beautiful to us. Their functions are to express certain ideas of social or environmental justice. Beauty of an idea always has consequences in our lives in a way in which the beauty of the mere appearance has not.
Notes
1. Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert, “An Open Letter Written to Critics Writing on Political Art,” Centre for Artistic Activism, http://artisticactivism.org/2012/10/an-open-letter-to-critics-writing-about-political-art/ (accessed January 10, 2015).
2. Ibid., 1.
3. Max Ernst used to claim that his art is “not meant to attract, but to make people scream” [see Arthur Danto, Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005)]. The historical avant-garde has opened up a conceptual gap between art and beauty into which other aesthetic qualities might enter.
4. For example, David Hume advocates an early art for art’s sake position by stressing that the only function of beautiful art is the pleasure it affords. Edmund Burke, Roger Fry, and Jerome Stolnitz claim that attributions of beauty have nothing to do with considerations of functionality.
5. Theophile Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin (London: Penguin Classics, 1981), 35.
6. Jonathan Friedman, “Beauty and Function,” Thinking on Music—Exploring Music in the Human Experience, http://thinkingonmusic.wordpress.com/2012/11/12/beauty-and-function/ (accessed August 12, 2014).
7. Bernard Bosanquet, Three Lectures on Aesthetic (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1915), 48.
8. Dave Beech, Beauty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 13.
9. For anti-beauty positions see: Arthur Danto’s “Beauty and Morality,” in Uncontrollable Beauty, ed. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro (New York: Allworth Press, 1998): 32–34. Danto claims that post-modern art theory (of the 1990s) privileges a certain kind of “political” (art (accusatory and oppositional). In this framework, beauty was an inappropriate response to a disturbing social reality because beauty was regarded as a sort of consolation. Yet, as Danto points out “it is not art’s business to console. If beauty is perceived as consolatory, then it is morally inconsistent with the indignation appropriate to an accusatory art” (34). An anti-beauty stance is also detailed by feminist aestheticians Peggy Zeglin Brand and Wendy Steiner. Peggy Zeglin Brand makes several political complaints against beauty by arguing that “since antiquity, gender played a significant role in discussions of beauty with beauty traditionally associated with the body, the ‘frivolous’ concern with appearances, and sentimentality, denigrated terms which in turn were considered the province of the feminine” [Peggy Zeglin, “Brand, Symposium: Beauty Matters,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 57, no. 1 (1999): 3].
10. Beech, Beauty, 12.
11. Lyotard places the aesthetics of the sublime against those of the beautiful in an attempt to escape the capitalist aesthetic of the beautiful, envisaging the sublime as a negation of the consensual aesthetics of the beautiful [see Jean Francois Lyotard, “After the Sublime: The State of Aesthetics,” in The States of Theory: History, Art and Critical Discourse, ed. David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 297–304].
12. Hal Foster, Compulsive Beauty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).
13. Wendy Steiner, Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in 20th Century Art (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
14. Scarry posits that: “the sublime (the aesthetic of power) rejects beauty on the grounds that it is diminutive, dismissible and not powerful enough. The political rejects beauty on the grounds that it is too powerful, a power expressed both in its ability to visit harm on objects looked at, and also in its ability to so overwhelm our attention that we cannot free our eyes from it long enough to look at injustice. Berated for its power, beauty is simultaneously belittled for its powerless” [Elaine Scarry, On Beauty (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3].
15. The revival of beauty in art theory is tackled in the 1990s, for instance, by Dave Hickey’s, Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty, in The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), 15–24; Kathleen Marie Higgins’s “Whatever Happened to Beauty: A Response to Danto”, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 54, no. 3 (1996): 281–284.
16. Barnett Newman claimed that “the impulse of modern art is the desire to destroy beauty” [“The Sublime is Now,” Tiger’s Eye 1, no. 6 (December 1948): 51–53, here 52]; Jean Dubuffet also discredits the notion of “beauty”; “I consider the Western notion of beauty completely erroneous” [“Anticultural Positions,” in Beauty is Elsewhere: Ethical Issues in Art and Design, ed. Richard Roth and Susan King Roth (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1998), 12].
17. Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” in The Essential FrankfurtSchoolReader, ed. Andrew Arto, (New York: Gebhardt, 1982), 82.
18. John A. Passmore, “The Dreariness of Aesthetics,” in Aesthetics and Language, ed. William Elton, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), 36–55.
19. Peter Benson, “On Beauty and Being Just by Elaine Scarry,” Philosophy Now, http://www.philosophynow.org/issue44/On_Beauty_and_Being_Just_by_Elaine_Scarry (accessed February 12, 2014).
20. See, for example, Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Speaking Through Silence the enigmatic Beauty of Shirin Neshat’s identified,” Hillman Initiative Photography Initiative: Carnegie Museum of Art, http://www.nowseethis.org/thispicture/posts/1597/essay22 (accessed April 18, 2015). In an interview for Washington Post (January 31, 2014), Shirin Neshat mentions that her movie “Women without Men” disseminated through piracy in Iran for one week triggered “a lot of criticism, of course, on it being
too artistic” (The interview is available online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2014/01/31/exiled-iranian-artist-shirin-neshat-looks-at-the-egyptian-revolution/)

21. Danto, “Beauty and Morality,” 36.
22. Ibid., 36.
23. See Susan Sontag, “An Argument about Beauty,” Daedalus 131, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 22.
24. Arthur Danto, “The Abuse of Beauty,” Daedalus 131, no. 4 (2002): 49.
25. Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” The Journal of Philosophy 61 (1964): 571–84.
26. Danto, “The Abuse of Beauty”, 37.
27. Alexander Nehamas, “The Return of the Beautiful: Morality, Pleasure, and the Value of Uncertainty,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 58, no. 4 (2000): 402.
28. The turn away from beauty in contemporary political art (especially after WWII) is usually associated with postmodernist theory and anti-aesthetic art. Postmodernist critics and conceptual artists have started to be influenced by Marxist critiques of aesthetics and feminist theory of art. While feminist critiques understood “beauty” as an instrument for women’s objectification (and recommended its avoidance), postmodern critics and conceptual artists have started to repress both beauty and aesthetics on the grounds that to produce beautiful works of art became equated with supplying the market with what it demanded.
29. James Smith, Terry Eagleton (London: Polity Press, 2008), 372.
30. Philip Mallaband, “Understanding Kant’s Distinction between Free and Dependent Beauty,” The Philosophical Quarterly 52, no. 206 (2002): 66–81.
31. Nick Zangwill, “Beauty,” in Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 333.
32. Zangwill, “Beauty”, 333.
33. This statement appears at the beginning of Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures of Fine Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). The line immediately follows Hegel’s claim that beauty of art is higher than the beauty of nature (since it is born in spirit).
34. Arthur Danto, “Beauty and Morality,” in Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics, ed. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 25–38.
35. There are, of course, few exceptions from that “rule”: for instance, Adrian Piper defends the appropriateness of Kantian aesthetics in theorising political art (see the interview with Adrian Piper, conducted by Maurice Berger for Afterimage (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 226).
36. Maurice Berger’s, “Interview with Adrian Piper,” in Afterimage, ed. Grant H. Kester (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 226.
37. Ibid., 226.
38. Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Judgment, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).
39. Paul de Man, Aesthetic Ideology (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 106.
40. According to Robert Wicks’ account of dependent beauty, the judgement of dependent beauty consists in comparing any two objects’ teleological styles. These teleological styles can be compared either in respect of how, or in respect of how well each fulfills its end (Robert Wicks, “Dependent Beauty as the Appreciation of the Teleological Style,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 55, no. 4, 1997), 387–400.
41. Michel Joseph Fletcher, “Dependent Beauty and Perfection in Kant’s Aesthetics,” Philosophical Writings 29 (2005): 6.
42. For instance, Malcolm Budd holds that an object cannot be judged dependently beautiful without being firstly judged freely beautiful: “the judgment of free beauty is a ‘pure’ judgment of taste, so any aesthetic judgment must have at its heart a judgment of free beauty which is based upon nothing but the hedonic response in the object caused by a conceptually thin experience of the object” (Malcolm Budd, quoted in Philip Mallaband, “Understanding Kant’s Distinction,” 72). Christopher Janaway claims that if a person experiences something aesthetically, then he will allow a free play of his/her imagination and understanding which causes the feeling of pleasure—aesthetic pleasure (based on the perception of the formal purposiveness without a purpose which the subject experiences in that thing). Therefore, aesthetic pleasure is the appropriate hedonistic response caused by the experience of the object’s aesthetic qualities. This is the ground for the aesthetic judgement of free beauty. In short, Janaway believes that dependent beauty (an intellectualised response) starts from the perception of the object’s aesthetic qualities which gives aesthetic pleasure (free beauty). Hence, the judgement of dependent beauty is based both on hedonic response and intellectual response (the intellectual response is not enough in responding to dependent beauty). Philip Mallaband, “Understanding Kant’s Distinction,” 72.
43. Kant, The Critique of Judgment, paragraph 48.
44. Hans Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (London: Continuum, 2004), 42.
45. Arthur Danto, “The Abuse of Beauty,” Deadalus 131 (2002): 53.
46. Denis Dutton, “The Experience of Art is Paradise regained: Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty,” The British Journal of Aesthetics 34 (1994): 231.
47. Gadamer, Truth and Method, 42.
48. Ruth Lorand, “Free and Dependent Beauty: A Puzzling Issue,” British Journal of Aesthetics 29 (1989), 32–40.
49. Zangwill, “Beauty,” 334.
50. Dutton, “The Experience of Art is Paradise Regained,” 231.
51. Zangwill, “Beauty,” 334–5.
52. Ibid., 336.
53. Denis Dutton, “The Experience of Art is Paradise Regained: Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty,” http://www.denisdutton.com/kant.htm (accessed August 5, 2014).
54. From White Cube, http://www.whitecube.com/exhibitions/morimuraphotographs (accessed January 6, 2015).
55. Stephen Davies, “Functional Beauty Examined,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40 (2010): 315–32.
56. “How well fitted is the wolf for running and leaping! How admirably is the lion armed for battle! But will anyone therefore call . . . the wolf and the lion beautiful animals?” (Burke, *Philosophical inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, quoted in Allan Carlson and Glen Parsons, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 18.)
57. Alison, quoted in Carlson and Parsons, *Functional Beauty*, 23.
58. Marcia Muelder Eaton, ‘Kantian and Contextual Beauty’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999), 11–15.
59. Michael Lithgow, “Artists Recycle Waste into Beautiful Enigma”, *Art Threat*, (accessed November 5, 2010).