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A Dry Martini

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(Halmstad University)

This is a semi-philosophical inquiry into the subject of a Dry Martini, which is well known as an alcoholic drink. It is not truly a philosophical inquiry since I am not a philosopher. I am a geographer. The history of the American drink is rather murky. Some say that the town of Martinez in California invented the drink during the mid-1800s Gold Rush. When there was no Champagne to celebrate the good fortune in finding gold, the bartender insisted on something made from the ingredients he had on hand. There is also an assertion that it originated from New York's Knickerbocker Hotel, named after Martini & Rossi vermouth, which was first created in the mid-1800s.

Since knowledge is always metaphorical, so far as we understand something through something else, this inquiry is divided into two different paths. One of the paths leads the inquiry into the aesthetic experience of a Dry Martini. The other path leads the inquiry into the aesthetics of components – where humans and non-humans interact in the process of determining what aesthetics is in relation to objects, such as a Dry Martini. The question emerges at the intersection where these two paths meet – is it in the eye of the beholder and consumer that aesthetics is expressed, or is it a matter of time-space-layers and dominant perspectives within human and non-human networks where the aesthetic is determined and performed?

Path one – the ontology and epistemology of the lonely subject-object relation. Before moving on to the path of investigating how aesthetics is expressed, it is necessary to pay attention to the role of the performance of texts, and other objects as well, just in order to quickly glance at the second path. Texts have an agency. Texts are agents beyond dead and objective matter. Butler engages Morrison who says that words do not have direct causal power, but are influential on different levels at once: “language is thought of mostly as agency – an act with consequences” and that language has “... an extended doing, a performance with effects. Language is, after all, ‘thought of’, that is, posited or constituted as ‘agency’. Yet it is *as* agen-

cy that it is thought; a *figural* substitution makes the thinking of the agency of language possible. Because this very formulation is offered *in* language, the ‘agency’ of language is not only the theme of the formulation, but its very action. This positing as this figuring appear to exemplify the agency at issue”, (Butler p. 7). Later she proclaims, ”... speaking is itself a bodily act“, (p. 10).

So, when understanding the position of agency of philosophy when trying to investigate how aesthetics is performed it is necessary to move closer into, for instance Dewey, from whom it is possible to extract a few leads as to where the viewpoint of aesthetics is made.

The first clue is given in the Primary Experience as the Ontological and Epistemic Foundation of Science, and *Experience and Nature*, where Dewey introduced his ontology as naturalistic empiricism. The experience that is claimed to be primary is the one that is associated with a scientific point of view through the methods applied:

Genuine empirical method set out from the actual subject-matter of primary experience, recognizes that reflection discriminates a new factor in it, the act of seeing, makes an object of that, and then uses that new object, the organic response to light to regulate, when needed, further experiences of the subject-matter already contained in primary experience, (Mostajir, p. 112).

Further, when inspecting an object, such as a stone, he says that man’s doing with the world through interaction results in experiences. A “man” lifts the stone and says:

The stone is too heavy or too angular, not solid enough; or else the properties undergone show it is fit for the use for which it is intended. The process continues until a mutual adaption of the self and the object emerges and particular experience comes to a close, (*ibid.*, p. 113f).

An understanding of aesthetics, according to Dewey, thus involves the trained eye of an experienced scientific analyst, like himself. If the purpose is to foreground the trained and experienced scientist as determining nature through a trained and reflecting superior subject instead of God, it makes sense. However, there are similarities in the *modus operandi* between God and the portrait here of the scientist. God had the infinite and holy

power to baptize the world by saying: “Let there be light”. In a way, God performed the same procedure compared to the scientist. Supposedly, after observing and having a thought about it first. The similarity lies in “how” this is done. In both cases there are two isolated subjects inspecting, reflecting on and acting on a solitary object; God on the world and Dewey on a stone. There are merely two actors on stage, the subject and the object. There are no assistants, no crew and no institutional environment involved in the experience of the aesthetics. The thought of anything affecting the solitary act of aesthetic experience is ruled out:

Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality, (*ibid.*, p. 115),

The religious attitude ... is much broader than anything indicated by ‘moral’ in its usual sense. The quality of attitude is displayed in art, science and good citizenship, (*ibid.*, p. 116).

This is just to make sure that no other subject may interfere with the activity of experiencing aesthetics. The problem here is that, on the one hand, scientific experience requires a rigorous education and an enormous set of precognitions that filter all types of experiences of the world before us. Although, this is not the same as the scientist’s purpose being to construct an accurate mirror-representation of a world of objects, (*ibid.*, p. 114). On the other hand, the aesthetic experience is portrayed as a performance of an intimate and exclusive interaction between a subject and an object. When Kant speaks of existence and reality, his narrative also involves psychological interpretations, on the one hand, and logical and epistemological interpretations, on the other, thus excluding the possibility of any agency in the matter, or non-matter, investigated, (Hartnack, p. 29). The object in these types of narratives is not performing any agency of its own, but the peculiar thing is that the text about the stone is intended to perform a valid statement about how the world can be discovered through science. The only motive for the scientist is to find: “... balance, order, and integration with its environment”, (p. 117). Following also Kant, in the *Critique of Judgment*, it is said that the power to judge is an a priori principle, not just a concept, which also can be seen as a desire to mimic the acts of God.

I would say that it is an extremely powerful act to follow the desire to inspect, categorize, and determine the state of the world. Even the moment

before we realize an aesthetic experience it has been transformed from understanding the world, to changing the world through performative acts including both thought-and-actions, since thoughts are also actions that are performed. But, perhaps texts are more powerful than stones in some ways, depending on how big they are and the way that they are heading, of course.

There seems to be missing a cultural and social dimension tying everything together when Mostajir cites Dewey as claiming that with science, “experience presents itself as the method, and the only method for getting at nature” and that what makes the difference between the physical object and the subject looking into this is control: “that a total unanalyzed world does not lend itself to control”, (p. 111).

According to Mostajir, the reflective distinction between object and subject is, in essence, a recognition of the distinction between the mutable and immutable, allowing the development of methods to manipulate this mutability in beneficial ways. Problems arise when we deny reality to the totality of experience, relegating aspects of it to the realms of subjectivity and uselessness, and reify the abstracted world of physical objects as the sole true reality, (p. 112).

It can thus be concluded that the performance of aesthetic experience is performed by someone acting as a God-like figure who is trained for the purpose of doing so. It is an attempt to distinguish science from religion through the mimicry of procedures that excludes any other influences from the procedure than a subject and an object in order to produce control of the immutable. To me, this is not to be confused with a fallacy, it is rather to be seen as a strong desire to distinguish the work of a scientist or artist from religious dominance in a different space-and-time-layer. We need to be aware of the context in which the narratives are performed when considering aesthetic experiences.

Before continuing onto the second path and where the two meet, let’s have a look at the Dry Martini from this point of view. We can start by drawing up some wider aesthetic categories, such as:

- The look of the glass – the physical materials involved in drinking a Dry Martini
- The ingredients of the drink
- The composition of the drink – sight, substances, smell and taste
- The “lightheadedness” after consuming it
- The time-place of consumption
- The company with whom one is consuming the drink

- The memory of its effects
- The relation between humans and non-humans – the network component.

As far as I have come here, it may be possible to inspect some of the materials involved in an aesthetic experience by trained senses on the lonely subject-object view. Latour holds that the rationalization that took place during the so-called “scientific revolution” is not of the mind, of the eye, of philosophy, but of the sight, (p. 7). Why is perspective such an important invention? “Because of its logical recognition of internal invariances through all the transformations produced by changes in spatial location”, (Ivins, p. 9). With that in mind, the glass and all other parts of the Martini would vary according to geography. However, it could easily be evaluated as being too big, too small or not the right shape, as recognized in other geographical locations. It could also be evaluated if the glass was chilled before infusing the liquid into it or not. The ingredients could also be inspected as well as the composition of the drink. It is also characteristic how the alcohol goes into the blood rather quickly and produces a form of lightheadedness. The company could of course also be valued, however that might be a bit difficult to do sometimes due to social norms. We can account for all of its parts; sugar, water, juniper, the herbs, the material that brings heat to the boiler, the yeast, the factory that makes the distillation, the bottle, its cork, the machine that fills the bottles, the distributor, the shop that sells the liquid, the bars where it is consumed, the lemon and the Vermouth in it, the preparation of it. But it is difficult for us to actually grasp how these parts are related with the lonely subject and an object. This may be better understood if Foucault could be involved. He suggests how the same eyes suddenly began to look at “representations”. The “panopticon” he describes is a “*fait social total*” that redefines all aspects of the culture. What needs to be included, (if we follow Latour and Foucault) in order to inspect the Dry Martini, is thus a vision that brings in “social interests” or the “economic infrastructure” (Alpers, p. 201), and also an understanding of what seems to be in control of the interpretation could be rather tricky from the Deweyian point of view.

Path two – networks of humans and non-humans. In routing and taking a different path in order to arrive at the point where the first path ended, there is one crucial thing to remember. It may be fully enough to stay in a linear vision, and not include the intimate relation between humans and non-humans, including objects as well as other living species. It has already

been said that vision is not immutable, perspectives change, and it is possible to bring home a Dry Martini from Manhattan by putting them together at home, and also take them back by suggesting to the bartender how you think it should be composed. Beyond the matter of control over the investigation of a Dry Martini, we need to know how the holy act of naming works. Texts and narratives are powerful in providing evidence of the state of nature, and through ritual procedures it is possible to institutionalize the naming of things and relations. Apart from these institutionalized forms (such as with science) it also involves how the narrative is crafted: “A good novel makes the readers believe in its worlds by the force of persuasion (just like good science), not by the force of external authority”, (Kundera, p. 22). The novel narrative is indifferent to extra-linguistic reality, a trait which is compensated for by extraordinary sensibility to the reality of conversation, (Bruner). This means that science can provide us with nothing other than a good story! Science provides a good framework for investigating nature and social worlds by manipulating thoughts through the insights of a systematic way of investigating and narrating since we:

..... are structure determined systems we are open to any structural manipulation that respects the structural coherence proper to the structural domain in which it takes place. Or, the same said in more general terms, and in a way that result is more remarkable and at the same time more terrifying: any thing that we may choose to design can be implemented, if the design respects the structural coherence of the domain in which it takes place”, (Maturana).

In order to include networks of parts that are at play when judging the aesthetics of a Dry Martini, we need to view the doing of drinking and inspecting in terms of what the network consists and what is holding it together by drawing in social interest, economic infrastructure, and also the scientific institutional environment. In doing so, it is necessary to recognize a social and cultural perspective, and to acknowledge the power of texts and narratives as well as images. The conclusion here is that from a cultural perspective, we cannot exclude material objects as performing actions through agency. One can for instance see the meaning of “discourse” in a broad sense, as something intended to convey more than the fact that human communities exist socially through the medium of language (Pred, 1981 in Thrift 1996, p.79). It is even possible to expand semiotic analysis to include

the material world (Latour, 1998). The parts that assemble the Dry Martini in all of its bits and pieces are thus what Serres calls quasi-objects, (p. 87). Quasi-objects are objects that stabilize social relations. Without them, all relations would be fickle and unstable. If social relations only consisted of contracts between subjects, they would quickly vaporize into air. Quasi-objects often replace and embody human actors in situations where they are seen to be appropriate or where it is unbearable for humans to be. The slice of lemon is thus not an object, compared to a stone in the Sahara Desert; it carries meaning and acts with agency so that the aesthetic experience of the drink is recognizable and is experienced as a quality product.

Place, observer, and culture are intertwined and coupled, making it difficult to describe one without the other. Latour (1998) says that it makes a great difference whether culture is seen from a perspective that prioritizes the description of the structure of social life or whether the ambition is to trace the threadlike connections between humans that are produced by their actions. An inspection of a Dry Martini involves situated practices and thus cannot be defined as a *system* of actions creating meaning and values in a strictly *structural* sense. Latour says: “When the epistemological myth of an outside observer providing an explanation in addition to ‘mere description’ disappears, there is no longer a privilege”, (p. 5). Again, this is done with the reflexive knowledge that the observer has no privileged status in relation to other observers and that observation really is a question of moving among different frames of reference, (*ibid.*). We are all involved in making aesthetics and there is no privileged, God-like or scientific supreme viewpoint – we are placemakers among placemakers, Cheers!

The problem with material objects is that they are often viewed from the notion that particular forms of design influence the way that humans will interact and behave, and also how they are defined in terms of aesthetics. They are also seen as distinct and separate from the bodies that use them. This leads to the view that the material objects consisting of a Dry Martini are seen as complete, rather than being viewed as a process of something being made, (Carter, 2011). The Dry Martinis are, however not detached from the bodies handling them. The drinks are constantly being interpreted, manipulated, and reinvented in terms of use; they always allow for new ways of making use of them in terms of agency.

If we now look closer at the human network that holds together the Dry Martini, we need to involve more than the network that produces the drink. There is a website that gives an overview of the kind of people among

celebrities who prefer a Dry Martini.¹ We can read that famous people like Humphrey Bogart, James Bond, David Bowie, Johnny Carson, Winston Churchill, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway (although he seemed to have many favorites), Whitney Houston, Jack London, Dean Martin, Mino-gue Kylie, Richard Nixon, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Frank Sinatra, John Tra-volta, and Oprah Winfrey, all preferred Martinis.

A range of humans and non-humans are thus holding the network of the Dry Martini together through persuasive narratives and images of what is aesthetic and what is valued as good. It is not merely a question of a trained artist or scientist who determines the aesthetics. It is a complete set of parts held together in a network of thoughts-and-actions consisting of humans and non-humans.

Conclusion. In order to justify this text, I would like to refer to Werner Herzog's Kaspar Hauser, who responds to the enlightenment-in-spired scientist who wants to test Kaspar's intelligence by asking the clas-sical question to which there is only one correct answer. He asks Kaspar how to reveal which of two people he meets is lying about the direction to a village. The correct answer to this philosophical question is that the traveler must propose a question with a double negation in order to reveal who is telling the truth and who is lying. Kaspar thinks for a while before he says that he would ask both of the people if they were a "löwenfrosch" (lion's lure?). If one of the persons would agree to that, he would reveal himself as a liar. The point of this persuasive story is that there are many ways to arrive at the same conclusion, and maybe they are not correct every time, but they may give other perspectives on reality than expected.

What has been investigated here is how the aesthetic is determined from an epistemological as well as ontological viewpoint, from Dewey and Kant to Latour, Butler, and Serres. First, the inquiry led to a discussion about the aesthetic experience before the making of a martini, as a craft or as a type of artistic process. After that, the inquiry lead into the aesthetics of components – where humans and non-humans interact in the process of determining what aesthetics is in relation to objects, such as a Dry Martini. The question was posed, is it in the eye of the beholder and consumer that aesthetics is expressed, or is it a matter of time-layers and dominant perspectives within human and non-human networks where the aesthetic is determined and performed?

¹ <http://juxtable.com/celebrity-favorite-drinks/>

The answer to this question is that it is difficult to say something about aesthetics without also including a time-space-layer and a cultural network understanding of what holds all the parts together that constitute an aesthetic experience. The parts consist of products included in the drink, the economic, cultural, social and political ingredients that support the Dry Martini, and the powerful non-humans acting as agents through material objects, such as texts and narratives, and people involved in producing these narratives. There is not merely a lonely subject-object relation involved in a Dry Martini. It should be consumed in good company to be enjoyed in full, as I did a couple of days ago here at Wassard Elea.

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Martini Aesthetics: A Reply to Jonasson

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Full disclosure: I am one of the beneficiaries of Prof. Mikael Jonasson's martini-making prowess, and write, if not under the influence, then certainly in memory of the light-headedness that he notes accompanies the imbibing of a dry martini. I have learned much from Jonasson, not least that a gin martini loves a cucumber, and that a cucumber reciprocates that affection. I have learned from his paper as well, that in discussions of aesthetics we should not neglect the intricate social, cultural, economic and material networks that contribute to our experiences. The question is what role, precisely, do these networks play, if any, in an aesthetic experience or in the appreciation of an aesthetic object?

For the sake of argument, let us concede that a martini can be subject to aesthetic analysis and discussion. Many theorists would disagree (Adorno comes immediately to mind – perhaps he didn't drink) yet I don't see why we should be so exclusive. However, if we do include the martini, we need to be clear about how we are doing so, and this is somewhat, er, slurred, in Jonasson's paper, as we see in his list of eight ad hoc "aesthetic categories" (p. 6). Are we speaking about the martini itself as an aesthetic object, about which we can make aesthetic judgments, assign aesthetic values, appreciate or fail to? Or are we speaking about the martini in the context of an experience – the making and the drinking – an experience which itself has the character of being, somehow, aesthetic? For these are different – as different as vodka and gin – and lend themselves to different approaches. With a bit of Kant on the one hand, and Dewey on the other, I'll try to clarify these differences and see if I can't persuade Jonasson to better articulate how he understands the role of aesthetics in his work.

The Martini in itself. If we take the martini as a potential object of aesthetic evaluation and appreciation, we need to carefully distinguish what it is about that object – and about us as subjects – that is aesthetically relevant here. Aesthetics, long understood as a kind of sensory perception, has been dominated by the notion of *disinterest*. That is, when we view the

aesthetic object, we do so for its own sake, as it is in itself, apart from the promise of personal use, consumption, gratification, utility, and so on. As Kant notes “we do not want to know whether we, or anyone else are, or even could be, concerned in the real existence of the thing, but rather what estimate we form of it on mere contemplation (intuition, reflection)” – that is, on the basis of the mere appearance of its sensory properties when we are “indifferent” to its “real existence” for our quotidian concerns, (AK 204, 205). So, if I look to the martini as a way to wind down from a hard day; if I calculate its cost; if I view it with nostalgia from my youth; if I think it sitting just so covers a stain on the tablecloth – I am not approaching it as it is in itself, as an aesthetic object, and my appreciation or appraisal of it will not involve an aesthetic judgment. In this sense, aesthetic attention is very much object-directed; we are evaluating the perceptual qualities of this martini, now, as it presents itself to us. And, contra Jonasson, when we do so, we are viewing it as complete, distinct and separate from ourselves, (p. 9).

We can make many other kinds of judgments about the same object – moral, economic, political, instrumental – but these are not aesthetic evaluations *per se*. Jonasson is worried that this approach involves, in his provocative phrase, a “lonely subject-object relation” (p. 11) but there is room here for his attention to cultural networks of understanding, if we see these as contributive to, or backgrounded in, the moment of disinterested aesthetic appraisal. While I have just cited Kant regarding pure judgments of taste in which there is no conceptual content, he later, in section 16 of the *Critique of Judgment* (AK 229-231), discusses the notion of *dependent* judgments which have a conceptual and cognitive component that will help mitigate Jonasson’s concerns. Someone who simply hates gin will be hard pressed to judge whether this is a good martini (personal bias will get in the way); an ancient Roman, likewise, with no knowledge of martini culture, gin, vermouth, or glasses of a certain shape and size, will not be able to appreciate the martini on its own merits (historicity will get in the way). And, perhaps, an alcoholic who just needs a drink now will similarly be unable to make a dispassionate evaluation (addiction getting in the way). But what we are talking about here is *who is actually judging aesthetically* at any given moment, and not what that judgment consists in.

As Jonasson rightly notes, the “inspection of a Dry Martini involves situated practices” (p. 9) and a number of historical, cultural and material factors are inevitably bound up in, and inform, our disinterested attention to the martini in itself. A martini connoisseur (as Jonasson surely is) may be better placed to provide a dispassionate appraisal than a novice (such as

myself) but what I am stressing here is that an *aesthetic* evaluation, when and if it occurs, with however much background knowledge and experience it requires, will still be directed to the object as it stands before us, and will attend to its qualities as they are in themselves, or as they together contribute to that product, the dry martini, about which we may then render an aesthetic verdict.

A weakness in Kant is his emphasis on the distal over the proximal senses, but there is no reason to exclude the taste and smell, even the effect, of a martini in our aesthetic evaluations. A dry martini can fail to be dry enough; we can argue about olives versus lemons (or cucumber); we need to be part of a certain cultural and historical “time-space layer” as Jonasson puts it (p. 10) to be able to appraise it, but aesthetic appraisal will always be directed to *that* thing, *there*, as it appears for its own sake, else it is not aesthetic appraisal at all. Why we do this, what role or what good aesthetic judgments have in our greater lives is itself an *extra-aesthetic* question: whether a beautiful martini contributes to happiness and social cohesion; whether a beautiful apartment block helps to mitigate the crime and misery associated with poverty; whether the eradication of a pretty yet invasive species will help preserve a given ecosystem – all of these issues utilize the aesthetic in the name of some other value, whether social, political or environmental. And this use can be quite powerful, I do not deny it. But what I am trying to get clear is simply the logic of different types of judgments and what is involved when we make them. If we return to Jonasson’s ad hoc list, we can see that the first four items – the look of the martini, its ingredients, the smell and taste of it, even its effects – are all relevant properties of the object when we appraise it. The final four – circumstances of its consumption, the company we keep, memory, and Jonasson’s notion of networks – are not: at best they are contributive factors that facilitate our ability to approach the martini with disinterest; at worst they are personal or cultural biases that interfere with, or prohibit us from, making an actual aesthetic judgment of taste.

The Martini Experience. Given Jonasson’s emphasis on cultural networks and the partial dissolution of the aesthetic object into a “quasi-object” that carries meaning (p. 9), it is no surprise that Dewey’s work would interest him. For Dewey it is not the object that has aesthetic value but *an* experience, when significant, that can achieve it. And this experience is not of a lonely subject-object relation, for it need not involve an object at all. What lends *an* experience significance, furthermore, can indeed involve all of the

network of relations that Jonasson stresses: the dry martini is no longer “detached” from those making and drinking it (*ibid.*).

Dewey describes *an* experience like this: we have one when “the mate-rial experienced runs its course to fulfillment”, (*Art as Experience*, p. 35); when it is “so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation”, (*ibid.*). It has unity, which is “constituted by a single *quality* that pervades [it]”, (p. 37), a quality that Dewey calls aesthetic. It need not be pleasurable or positive: Dewey cites a quarrel between intimates, a catastrophe averted, a memorable meal, a storm (p. 36) – but what is necessary is that all of the parts or moments come together to form a singular, fulfilled or consummated whole. I’ll briefly note three intertwined problems that challenge Dewey’s theory, which I think Jonasson’s work also faces: those of demarcation, subjectivity, and aestheticization.

First, it is unclear how we are to frame *an* experience of a dry martini: did it begin with the invitation? With my arrival on the balcony? With the first sip? Was my martini experience fulfilled with the first, or were multiple martinis (I hesitate to admit how many) part of a singular experience that evening? What of the weather, the sunset, the food? Jonasson mentions the relevance of the ingredients, the distillation, the means of production, the list of famous and historical people who drank dry martinis, (p. 62) – exactly how long is the list of relevant factors that make my drinking the martini *an* experience on Deweyan terms? If I am ignorant about how gin is produced or distributed, if I know nothing of juniper or that Oprah Winfrey likes them dry, how and in what way is my experience impoverished or diminished? Jonasson may be right that an extensive cultural and material network importantly informs an ontology of (quasi) objects that support human relations, but he does not address the crucial *epistemological* question of how much of that network we need to know or be aware of in each singular aesthetic encounter. Near total ignorance of it brings us much closer to the lonely relation that he abjures.

These questions lead to the problem of subjectivity. For all that Jonasson seeks to situate us in a web of relations, at the end of the day, it seems that having *an* experience – and knowing or deciding that we are having one – is a purely subjective and private matter. That storm, that meal, that argument – that martini – was *an* experience for me only if I felt it to be one, only if *I* found it to be unified and significant. This suggests that on Dewey’s account we cannot share experiences: they are solitary even when they include others. Of the three imbibers on the balcony, how many of us found that evening unified and consummatory? It seems that I had an expe-

rience only if I say so: the individual is, in the end, the sole authority to demarcate – and render significant – a slice of her life. For Jonasson, who begins with an emphasis on intersubjectivity, this is an ironic conclusion to reach: that perhaps meaning is not shared, but is subjective, after all.

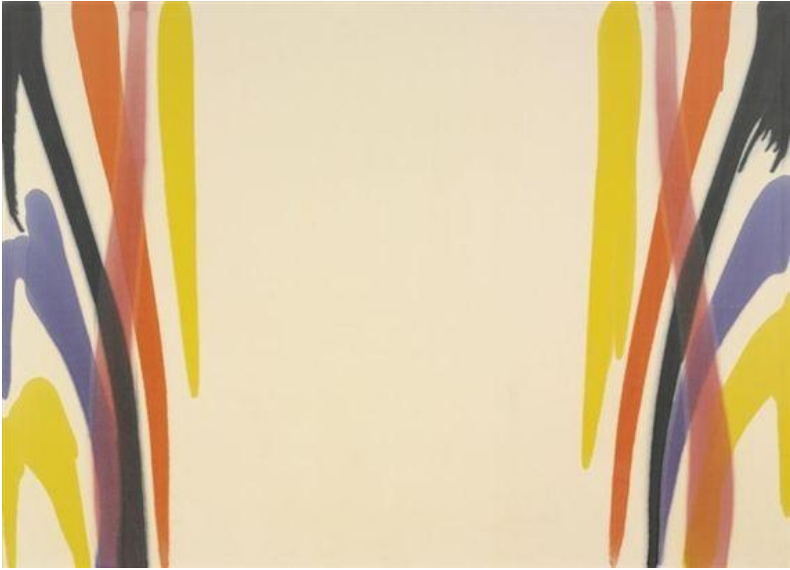
Finally, let me return to aesthetics. I am sure this has been asked of Dewey many times, but I fail to see what is particularly *aesthetic* about all this. Dewey appears to equate unity and completion with an aesthetic quality but he makes no explicit argument in its favour. The examples he provides are neither objects of beauty, nor experiences that are pleasurable – the two historically most likely contenders for being aesthetic – but all share in being meaningful. Well, words have meaning, actions have meaning, for Jonasson objects have meaning, but how and why unity and significance have an aesthetic tone – or are constitutive of the aesthetic – is never adequately explained. If everything has meaning then everything is aesthetic: and this renders the term empty, vacuous. Dewey’s work was based on this implicit presupposition, which helps us not at all in getting to the foundations of aesthetic discourse and theory. Such foundations were the topic of this year’s *Wassard Elea Symposium*, to which Jonasson has made a valuable and interesting contribution. If I ask for greater clarity and articulation, it is because I seek it myself. That, and a future invitation to share a Dry Martini with friends.

James Hamilton: Illustrations¹

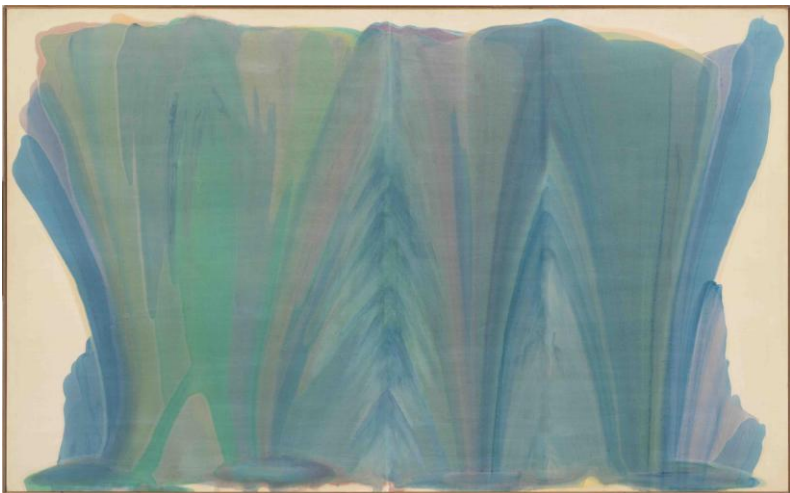
This is as close as I can come to the Morris Louis painting that I saw in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. (It really did make me weak in the knees). And please note that, technically, it is not one of the “veil” paintings, but is a “color field” painting.

Color field painting, which emerged in the 1950s, is characterized by the primacy of large swaths of radiant hues, and the interactions of color and form. It refers to the technique of thinning and applying paint to unprimed canvas, often by pouring, soaking and staining the material – the color literally becomes a part of the picture’s surface. This process is a delicate balance of skill and chance.

¹ Cf. “Verdicts: Aesthetic and Artistic Appreciation”, WER IV,4, pp.163-79.



But *here* is an example of one of Morris Louis' "veil" paintings. I suppose it too belongs to the class of color field paintings because of the manner in which it is made.



The nature of Louis's achievement in his series of Veil paintings from 1954 was aptly described by Clement Greenberg:

The crucial revelation he got from Pollock and Frankenthaler had to do with facture as much as anything else. The more closely color could be identified with its ground, the freer would it be from the interference of tactile associations; the way to achieve this closer identification was by adapting water-color technique to oil and using thin paint on an absorbent surface. Louis spills his paint on unsized and unprimed cotton duck canvas, leaving the pigment almost everywhere thin enough, no matter how many different veils of it are superimposed, for the eye to sense the threadedness and wovenness of the fabric underneath. But "underneath" is the wrong word. The fabric, being soaked in paint rather than merely covered by it, becomes paint in itself, color in itself, like a dyed cloth: the threadedness and wovenness are in the color. ... The effect conveys a sense not only of color as somehow disembodied, and therefore more purely optical, but also of color as a thing that opens and expands the picture plane.¹

On Folkmann & Jensen's *Contemporary Aesthetic Experiences*

Meng-Shi Chen

It is my pleasure to comment on Dr. Mads Nygaard Folkman's and Dr. Hans-Christian Jensen's well-written and enlightening paper "Contemporary Aesthetic Experiences?". While I very much enjoyed reading it, I would like to begin my commentary with their statement at the outset of the paper: "Art as a classic topic for aesthetic theory may today seem a marginal phenomenon, whereas design has a more massive impact in the way it affects people's lives", (p. 192). Although it seems common sense that design plays an important role in our contemporary aesthetic experiences, I think this statement nonetheless is too strong, and needs more explanation, as I am curious as to how it can be substantiated. Given the nature and history of

¹ "Louis and Noland", *Art International* 4 (May 1960), p. 28.

Western aesthetics, (the subject matters of which range from natural objects and phenomena, utilitarian objects, built constructions, to what is regarded as the fine arts), it is understandable why the authors would challenge “classic” aesthetic theories, particularly Kant’s aesthetics, and focus on design as an “overlooked” field in the historical development of the discipline. It seems that they try to broaden the “narrow” attentions of Western aesthetic theories and challenge the relatively limited scope of aesthetic experiences by showing that there should be a turn to design as a way to reflect our contemporary aesthetic experiences. And, according to them, art seems no longer to be the predominant means for determining our aesthetic experiences.

For any art lover who is also concerned with art’s “theory”, including and implying the speculation about what art is and how it affects our lives, the loss of its potential to reflect our contemporary aesthetic experiences is undoubtedly bad news. As long as the circle of art, including its creation, marketing, appreciation, etc., still exists, few would accept that it has become a marginal phenomenon for us. Yet following the Folkmann & Jensen arguments, aesthetic theory seems no longer *to be* the theory of aesthetic experience, and the crucial question turns out to be “what is aesthetic theory anyway?” So their contention, to question art’s role as the major subject for aesthetic theory is at the same time to open the door to design. However, regarding “aesthetic theory”, which is their target of criticism at the outset, a crucial question can be raised here: What do they mean by aesthetic theory and how does art as a topic fit into it? If we take aesthetics as one of the philosophical fields that deals with art, or more specifically, the properties of artworks and what they offer up to sensation and appreciation, art cannot and should not be a marginal phenomenon. To put it more bluntly, there is aesthetic theory because there is art, just as there are social and political theories because there are societies, governments and social and political conflicts. In this sense, to say that art seems to have become a marginal phenomenon in terms of aesthetic theory, though mild in tone, is to make a somewhat untenable argument, for aesthetic theory cannot but deal with art.

Art has existed for centuries, and although its existence is definitely not the product of aesthetic theories that tend to generalize its properties into rigorous definitions, it has undoubtedly remained (and will likely keep remaining) central so far as “theory” is concerned. Although it makes sense, as Folkmann & Jensen state, that design “is important not only as an expansion of the field of aesthetic appearance, but also because design puts at

stake what character aesthetic experiences may have in the contemporary age of globalization, mediatization and transformed objects” (p. 193), to push art to the margins of aesthetic experience is nonetheless as unjustifiable as lifting design to the centre of our concerns. That said, the role that art plays in aesthetic experience is not necessarily to be replaced by design in the contemporary age of globalization and the mediatization and transformed objects, for these features of “contemporariness” according to Folkmann & Jensen also shape what is to be regarded today as “contemporary art”. Art has never been marginal, not to say absent, in contemporary aesthetic experience; on the contrary, art to a great degree reflects our contemporary aesthetic experiences; very often it is contemporary art that changes our aesthetic views of the world.

In addition to claiming that art is insufficient or no longer has the potential to reflect our contemporary aesthetic experiences in terms of aesthetic theory, Folkmann & Jensen then name another candidate – the philosophical nature of aesthetics – that also seems to hold responsibility for an inability to reflect what they claim is contemporary aesthetic experience. On the one hand, they point out the unavoidability of the Kantian tradition of aesthetics to help us understand aesthetic experience. On the other, they urge that we need to also include cultural theory, as if aesthetics as a philosophical field that mainly deals with issues of ontology and the inter-relationships of objective reality and subjective response is unable to serve as an intellectual tool for our grasp of contemporary aesthetic experiences: “to address the question for what characterizes contemporary aesthetic experiences requires a meeting of philosophical approaches and cultural theory”, (*ibid*). Accordingly, they bring in some cultural theorists’ ideas to reveal the insufficiency of aesthetics as a philosophical field, which meanwhile challenges the Kantian aesthetic tradition.

Although Folkmann & Jensen’s cultural or sociological approach to some degree helps readers notice the “changed conditions of the production, circulation and consumption of aesthetic meaning” (*ibid*), in my opinion there needs to be a deeper investigation into the nature of (philosophical) aesthetics so as not to fall into a similar situation to their charges about art. To show what and how design can change our aesthetic experiences is not necessarily to question the nature of art as a source of aesthetic theory. Similarly, that there is a limit to the Kantian approach for outlining an aesthetic theory of design does not mean that philosophical speculation of aesthetic experience requires cultural or social concerns to make it a better theory (for design). In this respect, they seem to run the risk of blurring the

uniqueness of both art and philosophical (Kantian) aesthetics for the sake of building up a theory of design that appeals to their views of contemporary experience. In the next place, while they try to reveal the narrowness of attention of aesthetic theories, one should realize that there is almost no limit to what can become a source of aesthetic experience in the prominence of the *attitude* of aesthetic theory. While there apparently is a limit to philosophical (Kantian) aesthetics, there is no limit to our attitude toward it, which suggests an alternative way of broadening its relatively limited attention. Adding some very different approaches to a certain theory that has its own concerns is probably not the way to broaden its range; and I am afraid that what Folkmann & Jensen do in the end is actually to restore the prominence of art and the scope of philosophical aesthetics rather than elevate design to the center and widen aesthetic theory, specifically Kant's.

As I have noted, Folkmann & Jensen's ambition to provide a picture of the prominence of design in our contemporary aesthetic experience is thoroughly understandable and deserves high appreciation, which means that to a large degree they are successful in offering many persuasive arguments from different angles. However, one should realize that for contemporary readers, it is not difficult at all to understand that the existence of design in our daily lives is far more prevalent and accessible than the works of art that might only affect art lovers and museum goers of the bourgeois class. Moreover, with some philosophical background, it is equally not difficult to know that the attempt of a philosophical, especially Kantian, understanding of the status of design and its efficacy will inevitably exclude the issue of its social or cultural impact. As a result, their apparent ambition to give an aesthetic-theory-oriented outline of design seem fated to just add an *appendix* to philosophical aesthetics, especially Dr. Forsey's aesthetic theory of design. While the authors are quite aware of the omnipotence of design in terms of contemporary aesthetic experience, as far as its *impact* on the construction of aesthetic theory is concerned, they may need to go further and deeper to reveal the true nature of design that permits it to be *dominant* over any other fields of artistic and creative activity.

Folkmann & Jensen obviously owe their ideas to Forsey in her outstanding book *The Aesthetics of Design*, a pioneer of a philosophical approach to the unique character of design. Due to my limited knowledge of Forsey's Kantian notions of design, I am unable to judge how well they have done their job of interpretation. However, while their efforts to outline an aesthetic theory heavily based on a purely Kantian approach is apparent, the question is why we need Kantian aesthetics to help us grasp the nature of

design. While the question may be one for Forsey, their adoption of her ideas to outline their views appear paradoxical: if their intention is to show the dominant role that design plays in our contemporary aesthetic experiences, and if they are already aware of the insufficiency of Kant's aesthetics to fulfill this task as they argue in the beginning of the paper, then why bother going back to it, and seeking answers from a Kantian approach through Forsey's lens, even though it is a profound reading of Kant's third Critique?

I assume the answer may be simple and direct: Forsey's book is a distinct and rare, if not the only, work that discusses aesthetic concepts of design philosophically, with an intellectually deep look into the subject, and therefore it is a good idea to borrow her arguments. Folkmann & Jensen may not agree with the (my) answer as they themselves are well aware of the omnipotence of Kant's aesthetic ideas and state that they are a good starting point for thinking about issues of aesthetic experience, (p. 196). Yet this is not a sufficient reason to justify Kant's aesthetics as the tool to figure out our contemporary aesthetic experiences, not to mention that they already have questioned its qualifications from the very beginning and have brought other cultural approaches into the discussion. In this regard, the picture that they try to present has become a work of *montage* rather than a unified whole, which is arranged with different approaches and arguments that sometimes do not respond to their main concerns.

In addition to the issue of adding an appendix to Kant's aesthetic theory, another issue is about the treatment of Kant's aesthetics itself. For example, considering the second question they pose – "Kant talks about beauty and sublime, but are aesthetic experiences framed differently today due to changed conditions in culture?" (p. 196) – one may wonder if the question is simply a concern for Kant's aesthetics only, rather than for the status and impact of design. Although it is not difficult to see their intention to connect this question to the issue of contemporary aesthetic experience, it seems to me this is not a proper way of proceeding in the context of Kant's aesthetics, not because Kant is not a contemporary philosopher and therefore unable to be aware of contemporary conditions (i.e., to realize that there are some other aesthetic phenomena beyond beauty and the sublime that belong to the contemporary), but that his arguments about beauty and the sublime as two major aesthetic categories are likely due to his serious and profound concern about the reduction of the human condition to that of aesthetic appreciation. That said, there are likely reasons and criteria for Kant, even just set up by himself, to categorize aesthetic phenomena and build up his own system, and to question Kant's aesthetics in a non-Kantian way might be

pointless, and hence not a helpful or productive approach toward the original issue Folkmann & Jensen raised.

I assume they cherish the idea that it is through the reexamination of Kant's aesthetic theory (which is so unavoidable) that we will be able to realize the truly changed conditions in contemporary culture, and hence the prominence of design. Yet, if Kant's aesthetics has its own philosophical and systematic concerns that have nothing to do with the revelation of the dominance of any particular artistic and creative activity, nor any emphasis on the contemporary, to question its eligibility by showing these seeming flaws is a somewhat needless attempt. But why is this attempt a problem anyway? It is not a problem as far as the issue of "variety" (of approaches to our understanding of design) is concerned, as their paper successfully shows various approaches toward the status of design. Yet considering the main target of the paper, which is to show design's powerful place in contemporary aesthetic experience, its diversity, with a mix of philosophical and cultural concerns, nevertheless take us farther away from clarity on the main issue.

To argue about the *impact* and *dominance* of a certain art form or creative activity is perhaps not the task of philosophical aesthetics, especially Kant's aesthetics which originated as a self-contained system with its concerns about the critique of the human condition, but to argue *philosophically* about the impact of a certain artistic and creative activity that dominates our aesthetic experiences is a different issue, which I think needs a very different approach and I am a little skeptical if this is Folkmann & Jensen's sole attempt in that regard. While perhaps Adorno and the others of the Frankfurt School are good at this, there are other fields of humanities and social sciences – art history, sociology and anthropology of art, not to mention cultural theory as the upward trend in "contemporary" academic circles – that would likely do a better job in terms of arguing about the impact of certain art forms and creative activities, although the discipline of each field is sometimes controversial too. While a philosophical approach is good (and even necessary) for arguing about the natural (ontological) character of design, as Forsey does brilliantly in her book, to adopt it and argue about the impact and dominance over other creative activities that leads to the reconstruction of our aesthetic experiences is nevertheless questionable or extremely difficult. To put it simply, their main target seems outside the task of Kant's philosophical aesthetics, therefore to bring his approach into the discussion might confuse rather than clarify the main issue.

In terms of philosophical concerns, there is definitely nothing wrong with Kantian aesthetics or their interpretation of it, but to bring it into cultural and social domains in order to grasp our contemporary condition is a very complicated task; and vice versa, to question the eligibility of its own well-structured arguments from social and cultural viewpoints needs more cautious attention. In this respect, perhaps the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has done well in his book *Distinction*, criticizing Kant's aesthetics from his professionally sociological views. And regarding how to do justice to the original theory and meanwhile adopt it to argue for one's own viewpoints, except Forsey, the other good example is Lyotard who, while revealing and elaborating contemporary aesthetic experience, sticks to, and relies heavily on, Kant's discussions of the sublime instead of questioning it and preferring some other aesthetic phenomenon. That said, how Folkmann & Jensen question the eligibility for the contemporary condition of Kant's aesthetic ideas such as beauty and the sublime is somehow like an "external" critique rather than an internal one, which might not be very helpful to strengthen their argumentative points. It is not that Kant's aesthetics cannot be questioned or challenged from the outside, but to do so may risk twisting his ideas simply to fit into one's intended arguments. Similarly, in my view, to show the shortfall of some theory and then add some other very different approaches to it is neither a deep critique of it nor a productive way of applying it for interpretive purposes. It is somewhat like pointing out an insufficiency of physics, and arguing that we need knowledge of chemistry also to figure out the nature of our living world, which is absolutely correct yet might be pointless.

In my humble opinion, maybe it is not a bad idea for Folkmann & Jensen to reduce the application and discussion of Kant's aesthetic ideas, and hence of Forsey's, and emphasize and deepen the social and cultural impacts of design that, according to them, strongly construct our contemporary aesthetic experiences. The arguments without too many philosophical (Kantian) tones might do a better job in consideration of the authors' main goal, i.e., why and how the uniqueness of design shapes our contemporary aesthetic experiences. This is definitely not to question the importance of Forsey's work and its achievement in the professional field, but the adoption of her distinct way of building up a profound theory of design, be it ontological, epistemological, or metaphysical, would simply make the main goal of the paper somewhat unfocused. Yet by skipping the Kantian approach, their project would then probably become a social and cultural study of design rather than a philosophical one; and, in this case, will it still be an

aesthetic theory (study) of design? It is a complicated question as nowadays the term “aesthetic” has been overused, although there always seems to have been consent about what it refers to, correctly or incorrectly, which reflects the theme of the symposium – “Aesthetic Foundations” – what is the aesthetic anyway? The question then turns out to be whether aesthetics should necessarily be philosophical. In my philosophical view, the answer is yes, although this has to do with what philosophy is, and thereby to do justice to the dominance of some creative category like design that could determine our aesthetic experiences is to some degree to exceed the task or “capacity” of philosophical aesthetics.

While Folkmann & Jensen attempt to argue about the philosophical nature of design that leads to its dominant role in our contemporary aesthetic experience may sometimes be controversial, the paper undoubtedly gives its readers a great opportunity to (re)think the nature of design in general, which is mainly due to their clear and precise presentation and arguments from various theoretical viewpoints especially their careful reading of Forsey’s book. Furthermore, with their professional discussions of a design product – the TMA-2 headset – the paper is not limited to the level of theory but also provides considerable empirical evidence to support their theoretical arguments.

Report of Aesthetic Foundations, May 19-21, 2017

Wassard Elea refugium for artists and scholars held its *VIIth International Wassard Elea Symposium*, in Ascea. focused on the theme of Aesthetic Foundations. The contemporary diversification of aesthetics as applied to sport, film, video games, food, and so on, has involved a confident and facile use of such notions as aesthetic experience, aesthetic value, aesthetic judgement and aesthetic pleasure. But this use in fact often belies confusion about what these terms mean, or what we mean when we use them. The question of what makes any kind of encounter or object a particularly aesthetic one cuts to the heart of the discipline at its most complex. This year’s symposium was dedicated to the analysis of some core problems in aesthetics, such as the nature of aesthetic experience, the link between the aesthetic and pleasure, the kinds of objects that can rightly be called aesthetic, as well as the modality of aesthetic judgements.

With two intensive all-day sessions, the symposium was able to accommodate eight presentations with commentaries and twelve discussants,

coming from Canada, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, and the USA. A range of approaches to the theme were represented, from a conceptual analysis of the role of verdictive judgments in artistic appreciation to a Nietzschean challenge to the primacy of pleasure in aesthetic encounters. A number of papers sought to clarify the nature of aesthetic experience, as, for instance, being characterized by genuineness and authenticity; as being educative or formative at its core; as being fundamentally interpretive; or as leading to harmony and unity on a Deweyan model. As to what objects can be said to be aesthetic, the range of responses was from (a) anything, to (b) works of art only, and (c) design in particular. Design, it was suggested, can best illustrate how aesthetic categories have changed due to contemporary changes in production and media culture. A defense of Adorno argued that only works of art are aesthetic objects, and moreover that ugly art has an important role to play in social and political critique. The issue of art's autonomy or heteronomy, and the distinction between aesthetic and artistic values produced lively and, we hope, fruitful discussion for all participants.

The organizers, Jane Forsey and Lars Aagaard-Mogensen, would like to thank all those who submitted papers, and to the symposium's contributors, for a successful event. Proceedings of the symposium are published in this journal, IV, nos. 3, 4, and V, 1, 2. The theme for the *VIIIth International Wassard Elea Symposium* is tentatively entitled "Taste, Bad Taste and Tastelessness". A call for papers is expected in the fall.



Ein Martini-glas

The Critics' Guide to Good Behavior

Anna-Lise Malmros

Criticism in a respectable newspaper defines the foundation for what the paper finds good or bad in cultural life. Very seldom will the critics themselves be criticized. I have written for a jazz-rock magazine and for the paper *Information* for several years, and this article is based on six months' critical articles in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*. It is about the blessings and challenges of reading criticism every day, a lot of it, and it is based on solid knowledge. It is a "kind scolding".

Critics are the salt of the paper. In our home, *Politiken* comes in the morning and the reviews are read and discussed. They are new and fresh, they have personal style and they are influential. Very often they bring joy or protest; they have a certain kind of freedom, because the authors know that they can write what they like and how they like. When somebody reacts they realize their disadvantage: it is hard to take seriously that a victim finds herself victimized, and if a concertgoer has a different experience from the man from the paper, we will think, well, the fan cannot hear or read, the man from the paper knows (we think) better.

I have never seen in print rules for writing good criticism, but we all know that certain formal demands must be fulfilled. The paper has a great interest in not irritating its readers and in promoting its writers as stars. Also, the subjects – musicians, authors, painters, actors and so on – even if they are heavily criticized, must be accorded a certain (self)respect. We all know these things, but yet, sometimes the critics forget themselves, because nobody judges them in the way they judge others. When I get tough on some of the articles written in *Politiken* in the last six months, it is not because I hate or despise them, it is the other way around: this kind of writing can be so immensely inspiring, funny and full of life, when an experience of art (of some kind) has conquered a journalist totally and he *must* tell us what happened. This urge should perhaps make the job easy, and some people find that critics react like spoiled kids when they talk of having too little time and being poorly paid. I know it is a demanding job, and there are many excuses, when sins are committed. But let us forget the excuses and look at the sins.

You can find them in all papers and in all countries, and they are committed by even the best writers. Along the way we will also have some fun looking in detail at the language in a paper. After all (I think) *Politiken* is one of the best when it comes to the virtues of writing: linguistic invention, funny descriptions, original use of normal expressions. At the same time, the constant playing with the words is its Achilles' heel, because it creates both interest and headache. This is especially the case when the writing is about music. Often you can feel how the writer has been working overtime trying to find a tough, precise and funny metaphor to describe the totally abstract sounds he has heard. Now, there are many types of metaphors and one problem can be, that we as readers "finish them", thinking further in a certain kind of figurative language when it was not intended. Here are some examples:

"It does not matter if the boy's ass splits in the middle if it leaves room for the artist and he eventually has gun powder in his ass", (Erik Jensen).

"With an abortion of a Reprise the whole thing ends in a fart", (Jan Jacoby).

"If it had not been for (the saxophonist) Waidtløv's vitality the words 'desert wandering' would have been just around the corner", (Thorbjørn Sjøgren).

"Some dogs bark, but don't bite. Not even barks or noises are heard in Michael Mantler's music", (Thomas Michelsen).

In these quotations you cannot accuse the writers of being too obvious; the opposite is the case, and I do understand them. They have tried to get something out of what was (for them) nothing. They had to deliver. I have myself been blamed for a boring description of a concert with the Danish rock singer Thomas Helmig, but I will defend myself. That man is average – so was my writing.

Nevertheless, for many reasons, the critics have to do their best. They have tremendous influence when for example librarians have to decide in what to invest. And because a common reader of *Politiken* should be able to understand everything they write, they should invest all their energy, their metaphors should be coherent, and their references should be at least reasonably familiar.

"In the middle of the nineties the Los Angeles trio "Cypress Hill" had well-deserved success with their super-obscene and

expletive-littered hip-hop where the hashish-loving rapper B-real spitted sparks out in front of dj Mugg's very special sound pictures", (Janus Køster Rasmussen).

"The ballet is thought – especially in its deeply-coloured multi-dimensional scenographic format à la Robert Wilson – as archetypically thematic, and even then it is very private and extremely appealing", (Alexander Meinertz).

"Partly because the tunes are strung further than the main soloists Per Jørgensen and Arve Henriksen (trumpets) and Morten Halle (alto and soprano-sax) have had ideas for, yet with Henriksen's Lester Bowie-meets-Cootie Williams playing in a piece that combined a Spanish-flavored basis with references to Miles Davis' "Bitches Brew" period as an exception, partly because the music at the end is relating to so many styles, from afro-funk to almost minimalism, the compass needle cannot find peace", (Thorbjørn Sjøgren).

Well, we all have difficulty finding peace after such assaults. In that way you can effectively lose your readers (most of them). The references line up, there are too many and too many names even if some of them are well known, but the sentence itself is much too complicated. Sometimes we have to read an uncensored stream-of-consciousness, a flood that not even one little period is allowed to disturb. 79 words in one sentence are perhaps too many, and that is what we are presented with by chief editor Thøger Seidenfaden's paper (who was famous for extra-long sentences). The heavy style is, certainly, often made more accessible by funny expressions and, I admit, it often happens that the language is so well-wrought that I don't care about its meaning. But the private references, the "for-us-who-know from the board meetings" insinuations, should be kept out of the paper. It does not always happen, and then you ask for protests. Bettina Heltberg: "Sanne Salmonsens is torpedoed by Price's need for irony and reduction". What she knows of Price (he sometimes writes in the paper) is not our business, and he should not react but he does. He tells us "it was Salmonsens's idea" and the fighting goes on. But it was Heltberg who started it!

And there are frustrations:

"The pretty, simple language easily finds a way out of everything that would have been painful and that would be

most needed to know – and which is in fact promised by the cover of the book”, (Søren Winterberg).

“If Sørine Gotfredsen’s book has had a therapeutic function – and we must hope so because it has no other function – then the therapy has not worked out”, (Marie Tetzlaff).

We were cheated. The critics were frustrated and so were we. They insinuate that they know something but leave us, the readers, in frustration too. It can be hard to keep yourself out of the review, but it is a must. Niels Lyngsø: “Some of those things – those needed in Ib Michael’s book *Rosa Mundi* – could have produced a frightening and appealing strangeness in the poems, a riddle room without words behind the pretty words”. Here the critic starts to write poetry, because he wants something more than he has found in Michael’s book. The author could in full reason have reacted by saying, “it is your duty to write about my book, not to speculate on what you could write yourself starting with my book”. And why is “pretty” suddenly a negative word? Sometimes it is hard to understand what you read in your own paper.

“There are many positive things to say about Marx’s first crime novel, but not that it is a good crime story”, (Bo Tao Michaelis).

The writer demands that the form is right, that the author is a professional and therefore knows the requirements of a given genre. I would prefer him to judge the book as it is. For one thing we must allow our artists to cross over; for another thing, (perhaps) because of the popularity of the crime novel, certain of its elements are used in all other books, biographies for example. Products that cross the lines between genres are more often problems for critics than for readers. One of the toughest articles I have read in these past six months was called “Cross-over”. I have already quoted from it, but here is some more

“And then there is nothing more for them to present than banalities in old, stiff sauce. Over-cooked guitar-clichés and tunes too dried out to express more than a pathetic sense of being tired of life. Strings, piano and synthesizers complete the sounds of a “*still-leben*” that is no longer animate. The piece falls tired down to the earth, exhausted by its own lack of courage”.

I have picked the roughest part of the article, but it is long and tough. I think it goes far beyond the limits of ordinary decency, because you cannot sense any respect at all for the composer or the musicians. That kind of tearing-down you most often find when the writer moves out of his comfort-zone, when he writes of cross-overs. Then – he feels – there is no one to look over his shoulder (and slap him in the face, perhaps!). He can without risk let the music become so appalled by its own boredom that it drowns in the old sauce. But to me it is not appealing, it is not good writing.

“What is in the beginning entertaining, then tiresome, and at last all the way through to disturbing, is Haddler’s much too well-formulated and rubbished mixture of philosophical fragments”, (alluding to Kierkegaard), (Niels Brunse).

No hope is left. Mette Winge has written another tough article with the title “Sticky, slippery and clammy”. Exaggeration is a well-known sin, perhaps because we (the critics) seldom have the time to read once more and think again, so that we could wipe out repetitions and unnecessary pompousness. Heltberg and Winge write the toughest when they are clearly bored and in a hurry. Others can strip a product down to nothing in a respectful way. Skotte’s review of the group “Gnags” is a fine example of the latter. It is flawed by two missing words, but as a whole it is precise and without anything extraneous. Its format is underscored by an article the same day about the same product, but written in the opposite way in the newspaper *Information*. Skotte: “The sincerity is unmistakable and sometimes also touching, but the death, the loss and the farewell to love escape like wet hand-soap when Peter AG with a “hopsa”-phrase or a smart formula tried to nail them”. Nobody is hurt, but very quickly you understand – especially if you know just a little about the group – that something went wrong. Not in the process, that is nobody’s business, but in the product itself. In *Information* the critic Torben Bille writes: “There are not many, if any, who can sing in that way [like Peter AG] in Danish rock today. It is a demand to invest yourself, and it is not about money”. And as a conclusion Bille writes: “*Lumps, bumps and bulges* [the title of the LP] is the best album by “Gnags” since “The Lamo Man’s Song” and it is to this date the most lovely Danish record this century”. The quotations are taken from two very long articles, but nevertheless, I hope you understand, that Skotte has the words on his side while Bille has not. When you do not know what you mean or you want to write something other than what you really mean, the language gets stiff

and pompous. Do we have two experienced music-critics who have totally different ears/hearing? Who knows?

There is a long tradition in rock for articles that go “inside the musician”. We love to sit on the lap of an idol, drink the same coffee and smell the sweat. To a high degree Bille has written that way, and he is good at it. So is his student Erik Jensen when he writes: “Neil Young had to take a trip to Los Angeles to check the work of his old friends, and his “soul of fire” could of course not be seen mingling with it”.

It is – of course – only the big stars who get that kind of treatment. But that does not make it better. If you use that form you have to stick to it all the way. Then there will be level talk between the writer/journalist and the musician. There is no such thing as a “know-it-all”-critic. But there are a lot of clever people in the business. Some of them know so much that they have to use many languages – including latin sometimes – to explain what they mean. Sometimes it can be hard to read especially if the writer doesn’t really know what he is expressing. Søren Vinterberg does know: “Dunders’ sidekick Bill Milton could be named after the painter Freddy Milton”. I feel stupid, but perhaps Vinterberg just wants me to find out what he means and points to the fact that we (most of us) know too little about graphic novels. We’ll find out who this Milton is – Vinterberg cannot start from scratch every day.

Professional producers of meaning sometimes have problems keeping their own opinions to themselves. That can be ok. In the form itself lies the meaning, but often something “slips out” from the core. The group AQUA is told in an article about something else that their only LP is a flop, and Bo Tao Michaelis tells us what he thinks of the Swedish film-maker Ingmar Bergman in a little review of a TV garden program where some Vivaldi music is played: he prefers the garden man playing some Vivaldi for Bergman showing “blood in the mouth” and other awful things. What kind of comparison is that? Do you prefer kerosene or pea soup? (I drink everything said the girl in the bar). Strange meanings pop up. What does Jan Jacoby mean by a “vertigous speculative style”? (If then he had said ejaculative style....). And he writes: “Confronted with these two deepens the reservations I had to Inga Nielsen’s and Robert Hales’ performance in the same parts last summer”. Impressive that he remembers, I do not. Erik Jensen: “Titles like “Your sweet 666”, “Poison Girl”, “Join Me in Death”, “Death is in love with me” and “Gone with the sin” carry on the flirting with death style and can appear decadent but they are unfolded like beautiful coffin flowers because the tunes are flirting and playful”. Now I have to succumb

to coffin flowers. Not that I will listen to the record, I think I know all too well how it sounds. That should not be the result of a fine review – or should it?

I have certainly not wished to wag my finger at anyone or try to clip the wings of writers. There are traps and temptations, but there are also the most beautiful possibilities and challenges to be encountered. All talents should be used, although perhaps the technical side could be expanded a bit more than to let poor metaphors carry the burden alone.

Bent Mohn: “When the author uses the I-form, the language and style will have to change. I do not want to hear (read) an old man giggle and use language like a 14 year old girl”. The description is technical but simple and understandable for everybody and that procedure could be used with advantage more often than the poor metaphors. When they become over-used they show their limitations, and you can follow them down the road as they gradually become more and more fake: first “honest”, then “painfully honest”, “naked”, “totally naked”, and “with the nerve ends stripped bare”. Poor skeleton.

Rules:

I mean what I mean, let the others do the same

My sentences can be read by anybody

I admit there are some things I do not know

I do not use foreign language to impress the crowd

If I am drunk, tired or sick I must concentrate more

I do not know anything about the subject that the readers don't

I have no idols among writers

My memory is my own – not my readers'

It is a human right to change one's mind

I never forget that my reader is clever, curious, and well-educated without knowing everything, and there is no need to patronize him.



Le laid comme l'au-delà du sublime

Herman Parret

Même si la basilique Saint-Pierre à Rome et les pyramides d'Égypte sont les seuls exemples que Kant a introduits dans son *Analytique du sublime*, il ne se révèle pas trop difficile d'identifier tout un territoire artistique qui vit sous le régime du sublime kantien. Ruines à la Piranesi, vastes océans, tempêtes et inondations, pics enneigés, pullulent dans l'iconographie des paysagistes du XVIII^e siècle, et c'est bien les forces du sublime dynamique, comme Kant les a théorisées dans la Troisième Critique, qui se donnent à voir dans tant d'espaces oniriques et tant de lumières éblouissantes. Baldine Saint Girons nous a facilement pu convaincre comment le régime du sublime kantien élucide de larges portions de l'histoire de l'art¹, jusqu'à Whistler et Turner au XIX^e siècle, et Rothko et Pollock, à l'époque du modernisme dans les années d'après-guerre. Si les peintres du XVIII^e siècle étalent des *thèmes* sublimes – des scènes d'une nature intimidante et menaçante –, Whistler et Turner font voir plutôt des *ambiances* sublimes, tout comme les peintres de l'expressionnisme abstrait, Rothko et Pollock en particulier, qui transposent leurs couleurs dans une tonalité sublime certaine. C'est que ces artistes sont inquiétés par une profonde question métaphysique: comment montrer, «représenter» le Tout à partir d'expériences fragmentées. Cette quête de l'expérience transcendante du Tout, dans sa logique et sa phénoménologie, est scrupuleusement, génialement, effilochée dans l'Analytique kantienne du sublime. Pour Kant, si l'expérience du beau est une expérience de la mesure, du mesurable, l'expérience du sublime est celle d'être surplombé par le vaste et l'infini, provoquant dans l'âme un état qui entrelace panique et «délices» (le *delight* burkien).

Jean-François Lyotard radicalise l'esthétique du sublime, en exploitant précisément cette quête de l'expérience transcendante du Tout chez l'artiste. Kant lui offre le fondement philosophique, mais un Kant où la distinction de la beauté et de la sublimité, si constitutive dans les esthétiques

¹ Entre autres, *Le paysage et la question du sublime*, Arac, Le Musée de Valence 1997.

du XVIIIème siècle, surtout chez Burke, est supprimée. Le sublime y devient l'*irreprésentable* transcendant, et l'art "présentifie" [*darstellt*] le sublime qui n'est jamais une présence globalement saisissable et récupérable. Lyotard projette l'hypostase du sublime dans l'art contemporain qui exerce ainsi son impact déroutant et séduisant sur le sujet: l'art postmoderne provoque scandale et bouleversement. Et puisque, pour Lyotard, le sublime se détourne de la nature, ni la finalité [*Zweckmässigkeit*] ni la nécessité d'une "mise en forme" ne fonctionnent plus comme norme constitutive. Le sublime, pour l'artiste contemporain, est le territoire de l'informe, du hasardeux, de la matière pure, de la singularité absolue, de l'événement éphémère. La sublimité, dans sa gloire, est l'horreur. Lyotard a évidemment voulu capter à l'aide d'une esthétique du sublime un aspect essentiel de notre culture postmoderne et de son art: la fascination pour l'Altérité radicale, cet Endehors irreprésentable qui détruit forme et finalité, qui met en question le pouvoir absolu du cognitif, de l'intellect, de la raison même.

Kirk Pillow signale, dans les premières pages de *Sublime Understanding*,¹ que la conception kantienne du sublime justifie ce geste de radicalisation, puisque l'exploration des limites de la pensée représentationnelle est essentielle du traitement kantien du sublime. Le sublime est précisément cette limite contre laquelle l'entendement et tout effort de compréhension percutent. Ce choc est bien douloureux mais il s'agit d'une douleur qui s'oriente vers le Tout transcendant, sans véritable détermination et conceptualisation et sans que la compétence intellectuelle et cognitive soit mise au service. En somme, l'esthétique du sublime évoque un territoire existentiellement vital dont l'art est le suprême gardien. La question est de savoir comment construire le «domaine» philosophique, méthodiquement et adéquatement, tenant compte de la spécificité du «territoire» du sublime? Comment distinguer l'expérience du beau et du sublime qui sont toutes les deux des jugements réfléchissants esthétiques: ce «genre» a un statut *épistémologique* unique tandis que le beau et le sublime peuvent être décrits séparément comme deux variantes *phénoménologiques*. C'est en tout cas une suggestion de Paul Guyer² qui dé-radicalise ainsi l'antagonisme entre les deux Analytiques: Guyer nous avertit que l'on ne peut sous-estimer la complexité épistémologique de la théorie esthétique kantienne en la rédui-

¹ Kirk Pillow *Sublime Understanding. Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel*, MIT Press, 2000, Introduction, pp. 1-17.

² Paul Guyer "Kant's Distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime", *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (1982), pp. 753-784.

sant à une phénoménologie (ou psychologie) du beau et du sublime. C'est pourtant le chemin que je voudrais suivre puisque c'est la phénoménologie du sublime et de son expérience qui va nous mener tout naturellement vers une zone incertaine et subversive, celle de la *laideur*. Il est vrai que cette zone de la laideur, «évoquée» dans ce geste de description phénoménologique, ne pourra être circonscrite ensuite que par un retour à l'analyse des virtualités épistémologiques du jugement réfléchissant esthétique, notion générique qui transgresse les spécificités qualitatives des expériences du beau (la «contemplation») et du sublime (le "mouvement de l'esprit"). Les deux sentiments appartiennent logiquement et épistémologiquement à la même grande famille, celle de la réflexion esthétique, mais non à la même variété phénoménologique dans cette famille.

Le sentiment insupportable du sublime. La définition du sublime dans sa phénoménologie, c'est-dire par son *effet pathémique*, incorpore les sortes de satisfaction que le sujet, corps et âme, peut éprouver quand il juge un objet sublime. Les émotions [*Rührungen*] dont on trouve une phénoménologie évocative dans l'*Anthropologie*, ne sont certainement pas déconsidérées dans l'*Analytique du sublime*. Il y a des passages où Kant manifeste un jugement positif au sujet des *Rührungen*, en les distinguant de *Reiz*, les charmes et passions. La *Rührung* peut conduire à l'*élévation* [*Erhebung*] de l'âme. Kant, dans le domaine des «émotions du sublime», est, de toute évidence, bien dépendant de Burke qu'il donne une pertinente amplification. L'*étonnement* [*astonishment*] est dit par Burke l'effet suprême du sublime (Partie II, section 5), tandis que l'*admiration*, la *vénération* et le *respect* sont considérés comme des degrés inférieurs. Rappelons que chez Longin, c'est l'*extase* et l'*admiration* qui marque pathémiquement l'âme confrontée au sublime, l'*enthousiasme* même que Kant associe avec défiance plutôt au fanatisme et au délire et non pas tant à la création artistique. Chez Kant, le *respect* [*Achtung*], qui inclut en fait l'*attention* et l'*égard*, devient le pathème essentiel évoquant une certaine vocation éthique et une conception du sujet comme être suprasensible. Mais s'il y a rappel à l'éthique, cet rappel n'oriente pas globalement *Achtung*. S'il y a un air de respect dans le sublime, il n'est pas exempt d'une violence nécessaire. L'imagination doit être violentée parce que c'est par sa douleur, par la médiation de son viol, que le plaisir se réalise. On le sait, le plaisir n'est possible que par la médiation d'un déplaisir. Le moindre que l'on puisse dire, est que le respect n'est pas un pur état contemplatif mais un état du *Gemüt* en motion, le *Gemüt* qui

dans l'expérience du sublime subit une alternation rapide de tension et de détente¹.

Toutefois, il y a pour Kant une limite à cette violation de l'imagination, une limite à ne pas transgresser, et c'est bien cette transgression qui nous intéressera dans ce qui suit. C'est le fameux passage du §26 où Kant distingue *ungeheuer* et *kolossalisch*. Je cite ce texte primordial pour mon argument:

On ne doit pas montrer le sublime dans les produits de l'art (par exemple des édifices, des colonnes, etc.), en lesquels une fin humaine détermine aussi bien la forme que la grandeur, ni dans les choses de la nature, dont le concept enveloppe déjà une fin déterminée (par exemple des animaux d'une destination naturelle connue), mais bien dans la nature brute [*rohen Natur*] – en en celle-ci seulement dans la mesure où en elle-même elle ne comprend aucun charme [*Reiz*], ni ne suscite d'émotion [*Rührung*] par un réel danger, – pour autant qu'elle contient de la grandeur [*Grösse*]. En effet dans ce genre de représentations la nature ne contient rien de *monstrueux* [*ungeheuer*] (ni rien de magnifique [*prächtig*] ou de hideux [*grasslich*]); la grandeur, qui est appréhendée, peut être aussi considérable qu'on le voudra, si elle peut être comprise dans un tout par l'imagination. *Un objet est monstrueux lorsque par sa grandeur il réduit à néant la fin, qui en constitue le concept* [*Ungeheuer ist ein Gegenstand, wenn er durch seine Grösse den Zweck, der den Begriff desselben ausmacht, vernichtet*]. On nomme *colossale*, en revanche, la simple présentation d'un concept, qui est *presque* trop grand pour toute présentation (qui est à la limite du monstrueux relatif); c'est, en effet, que la fin de la présentation d'un concept est rendue difficile par le fait que l'intuition de l'objet est *presque* trop grande pour notre faculté d'appréhension².

L'*Anthropologie* nous renseigne d'une façon bien efficace, en distinguant entre deux types de «grandeur»: *magnitudo reverenda* [*ehrfurcht-*

¹ Immanuel Kant *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, V, 334.10.

² *Op.cit.*, V, 253 (traduction A. Philonenko, *Critique de la faculté de juger*, 92).

erregende Grossheit] et *magnitudo monstrosa* [*Grossheit die zweckwidrig ist: Ungeheuer*]:

Le *sublime* est la *grandeur* qui suscite le respect (*magnitudo reverenda*) par son ampleur ou par son degré: s'en approcher ... est séduisant, mais en même temps la crainte est effrayante. ... Le *sublime* est certes le contrepois, mais non pas l'opposé du beau: car l'effort et la tentative pour s'élever à la saisie de l'objet éveillent chez le sujet un sentiment de sa propre grandeur et de sa propre force. ... Si tel n'est pas le cas, l'étonnement [*Verwunderung*] devient *épouvante* [*Abschreckung*], laquelle est profondément différente de l'*admiration* [*Bewunderung*], qui constitue pour sa part un jugement où l'on ne se lasse jamais de s'étonner. La grandeur qui va à l'encontre de ce qu'elle vise (*magnitudo monstrosa*) est la *monstruosité* [*das Ungeheure*]¹.

Le terme *Ungeheuer* est intraduisible. Le sémantisme allemand comporte une dimension spatiale et temporelle. La connotation spatiale est celle de l'énormité difforme, mais ce rapport à la grandeur ne dit même pas sa signification première qui est bien d'ordre temporel: *geheuer* veut dire «ce qui arrive toujours de la même façon tout au long de l'année». Le *un*, dans une négativité forte, fait éclater le temps familier et ordinaire. Nul doute, il y a pour Kant une limite où le sublime bascule dans un en-dehors puisque l'imagination est tout simplement *réduite à néant* [*vernichtet*]: avec le *colossal* on reste à l'intérieur de la limite, dans le «presque trop grand», avec le *monstrueux*, par contre, on a dépassé la limite, on est en pleine épouvante et le déplaisir est total. Il est vrai que l'*Ungeheuer* fonctionne dans la «marge de la marge» en tant que l'en dehors du sublime. *Ungeheuer* est la Chose, pure négativité, inexprimable, abyssale comme le néant, le Différend par excellence. *Ungeheuer* fait violence à la subjectivité sans se soumettre à aucune légalité. Mais entre le sublime et l'*Ungeheuer* il n'y a qu'une différence de degré, d'intensité, et chaque fois la limite tremble et défaille. A la différence du sublime qui n'est que *presqu'*imprésentable, qui parvient encore à présenter adéquatement l'inadéquation de l'imagination, l'*Ungeheuer* excède, anéantit toute présentation possible. Passé la limite, l'objet su-

¹ Immanuel Kant *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, §68 (traduction de Alain Renaut, Flammarion, p. 205).

blime sombre dans l'*Ungeheuer*. Et pourtant, entre le presque-trop du sublime et l'absolument-trop de l'*Ungeheuer* la démarcation devienne indécidable. On pourrait dire que le même objet peut être jugé tantôt sublime et tantôt *Ungeheuer*, selon que la visée de l'imagination se porte en deçà ou juste au-delà de la limite.

Un article de Jacob Rogozinski offre une analyse bien originale de l'*Ungeheuer* et de son caractère subversif et destructif pour le sujet. Ce n'est certainement pas la tonalité psychanalytique et heideggérienne qui me séduit dans cet article mais l'idée qu'une aporie marginale, celle de l'*Ungeheuer*, peut bouleverser toute l'architectonique de l'esthétique kantienne puisqu'elle déstabilise non seulement l'Analytique du sublime, mais la *Troisième Critique* dans son entièreté.¹ Impossible de subir la sublimité du sublime sans l'*Ungeheuer* qui en est la limite, la circonscription. Il y aura toujours ce point de fuite d'une extrême violence. Il faut savoir que la distinction qualitative des affects parvienne à marquer la limite: le sujet «sent» qualitativement la différence entre l'affect marqué du plaisir/déplaisir du sublime et l'affect purement répulsif de l'*Ungeheuer*. Il est temps maintenant de formuler mon hypothèse. Le point-limite de l'imprésentable, au plus près de l'*Ungeheuer*, est la *laideur* [*Hässlichkeit*] dont l'effet pathémique est le dégoût [*Ekel*]. Par conséquent, le *laid* n'est pas le contraire du beau mais l'au-delà, le en dehors du sublime. Il n'y aurait dans ce cas pas d'expérience esthétique du laid. Une esthétique de la laideur serait alors inconséquente. Ce n'est pas l'opinion de tous les analystes de la *Troisième Critique*. Garrett Thomson, par exemple, soutient que le «jugement du laid» est tout simplement un «jugement de goût» inversé, et il prétend que le dégoût (*disgust*) peut être «pur et désintéressé».² Je n'accepte pas du tout cette lecture de l'esthétique kantienne, mais avant de plonger à nouveau dans le texte de Kant à ce propos, je voudrais faire un détour par Lessing qui, quelques décades avant Kant, pose explicitement la question d'une éventuelle esthétique de la laideur.

Le scandale de la laideur. Lessing, dans quelques chapitres du *Lao-koon* (1766), constate en effet que le laid et le dégoûtant des contenus (sujets et thèmes représentés) et des formes constituent une menace constante en

¹ «A la limite de l'*Ungeheuer* sublime et 'monstrueux' dans la *Troisième Critique*», dans Herman Parret *Kants Ästhetik/Kant's Aesthetics/L'esthétique de Kant*, Walter de Gruyter 1996, pp. 642-659.

² Garrett Thomson "Kant's Problems with Ugliness", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 50 (1992), pp. 107-115.

poésie et dans les arts plastiques, mais il semble y avoir toujours des stratégies de récupération “domestiquant” le laid et le dégoûtant.¹ On découvre chez Lessing une tendance à la dédramatisation et un souhait d’instaurer de la continuité entre catégories esthétiques. Ses maintes analyses subtiles, surtout littéraires, d’Homère à Shakespeare, montrent qu’il existe des mécanismes de domestication du laid. Le poète peut utiliser la laideur pour provoquer d’autres sentiments complexes comme le ridicule [*Lächerliche*] et le terrible [*Schreckliche*]. Et une laideur qui devient *ridicule* est parfaitement innocente [*unschädliche Hässlichkeit*]. Il est vrai que la laideur devenue *terrible* ne peut être que nuisible [*schädliche Hässlichkeit*], comme le personnage du comte de Gloucester, plus tard Richard III, dans *King Lear*. Dans ses discours, on entend le diable. Devant le laid nuisible, l’effet est différent: l’attitude esthétique se transforme spontanément en attitude éthique: le laid nuisible n’exaspère aucunement notre sensibilité sensorielle jusqu’au dégoût et le vomissement, mais elle fait plutôt appel au jugement moral. Autre façon, par conséquent, de neutraliser la menace de la laideur. Pour le domaine des arts plastiques, Lessing développe sa pensée en discussion avec Moses Mendelssohn, et il semble coincé dans l’incertitude et l’ambiguïté. Il distingue d’emblée entre la laideur des formes (la peinture *comme art*, écrit Lessing) et la laideur des contenus (la peinture *comme moyen d’imitation*). Un cadavre en décomposition, un visage couvert de sang et de poussière, des difformités corporelles, des cheveux collés ensemble, sont des contenus *laid*s dans la nature, on n’en doute pas. Mais quoi de leur représentation, de leur mise en forme picturale? C’est au niveau de la *peinture comme art*, que la question se pose: «la laideur garde-t-elle toutes ses forces une fois qu’elle est manifestée dans l’une ou l’autre forme artistique»? Lessing semble bien conscient qu’«une impression de l’image [d’une forme laide] sur l’âme [provoquerait] la sensation choquante du dégoût, en vue des lois de l’imagination» et que la laideur des formes “choqueraient notre vue, contrarierait notre goût pour l’ordre et l’harmonie et ferait naître l’aversion, indépendamment de toute considération *relative à*

¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing *Laokoon, oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und der Poesie, Sämmtliche Schriften*, Stuttgart/Berlin/Leipzig, Vol. IX, 1886-1924. Il n’y a pas de véritable esthétique du sublime chez Lessing. Le sublime n’est évoqué qu’une seule fois dans le *Laokoon*. Il note au Chapitre XXII, de façon bien orthodoxe, que l’expérience du sublime résulte d’une certaine «baroquisation» (exagération des dimensions), par conséquent de la déviation de la «juste proportion» marquant la beauté essentielle (XXIII, p. 156). En effet, l’auteur du *Laokoon* n’offre aucune théorie accomplie du sublime, comme le font Burke et Kant peu de temps après lui.

l'existence, réelle ou non, de l'objet [représenté]".¹ La possibilité même d'un signifiant laid/dégoûtant est expulsée du domaine esthétique. Un tel signifiant dont la laideur serait pourtant indépendante d'un contenu, serait l'*informe* [*das Unförmliche*] qui est dit *désagréable* [*unangenehm*], *horrible* [*abscheulich*] et *nuisible* [*schädlich*]. Et Lessing reprend la solution radicale suggérée par Mendelssohn: "A proprement parler, il n'y a aucun objet de dégoût pour la vue" [*denn eigentlich zu reden, gibt es keine Gegenstände des Ekels für das Gesicht*].² L'affirmation est osée, et le texte remarquable de Mendelssohn est cité par Lessing de la façon suivante:

[Voici] ... une remarque du critique [Mendelssohn], d'après laquelle les *sens les plus obtus* [*allerdunkelsten Sinne*], le goût, l'odorat et le tact, seraient seuls exposés au dégoût. "Les deux premiers", dit-il, "par le fait d'une douceur exagérée, le dernier par suite de la trop grande mollesse des corps qui ne résistent pas suffisamment aux fibres tactiles. Ces objets deviennent également insupportables à la vue, mais seulement par l'association d'idées qui nous fait souvenir de la répulsion qu'ils inspirent au goût, à l'odorat et au tact; car, à proprement parler, *il n'y a aucun objet de dégoût pour la vue*".³

«C'est tout à fait incontestable qu'il n'y a pas vraiment d'objets dégoûtants pour le regard [*ekelhafte Gegenstände für das Gesicht*]». ⁴ En résumé, Lessing considère la *laideur des contenus* comme étant du domaine axiologique, et expulsée ainsi du domaine esthétique, tandis que les *formes d'expression* peuvent être perçues comme laides seulement au cas où le regard esthétique associe par imagination les «sens intimes» (goût, tact, odorat) à la vue, qui en elle-même est incapable de dégoût. Le *Laokoon* est de 1766. La *Critique de la faculté de juger*, vingt-quatre ans plus tard, fait-elle avancer la discussion?

Revenons au texte de Kant. L'expérience du laid est certainement un cas-limite, c'est l'expérience d'une limite. Toutefois, la laideur est une *présence* qui a sans doute des propriétés formelles identifiables mais qui ne donne pas lieu à une expérience *esthétique*. Il y a bien peu de références à la laideur chez Kant, «cette *laideur* qui provoque le *dégoût*» [*Hässlichkeit*

¹ *Laokoon*, XXIV, 163-164.

² *Laokoon*, XXV, 166.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Laokoon*, XXV, 170.

welche Ekel erweckt].¹ Que la laideur n'est pas l'absence de beauté, que le laid n'est pas le «non-beau» est confirmé par une note de *Logik Philippi*: «La laideur est quelque chose de positif et pas seulement l'absence de beauté mais bien plutôt une *présence* qui est totalement contraire à la beauté».² Seuls un passage de la *Troisième Critique* fait allusion à la *laideur* et son effet pathémique, le *dégoût*. Ce passage énonce:

Une seule forme de laideur [*Hässlichkeit*] ne peut être représentée de manière naturelle sans anéantir [*zugrunde zu richten*] toute satisfaction et par conséquent toute beauté artistique: c'est celle qui excite le *dégoût*. En effet, comme en cette singulière sensation, qui provient de la pure imagination, l'objet est représenté comme s'il s'imposait à la jouissance, tandis que nous lui résistons avec force, la représentation artistique de l'objet n'est plus en notre sensation distincte de la nature même de l'objet et il est donc impossible qu'on la tienne pour belle. Aussi puisque dans ses productions l'art est presque confondu avec la nature, la sculpture a exclu de ses créations la représentation immédiate d'objets laids [*hässliche Gegenstände*]; en revanche il est permis de représenter, mais d'une *manière seulement indirecte* [*indirekt vermittelt*] grâce à la médiation d'une interprétation de la raison et qui ne s'adresse pas simplement à la faculté de juger esthétique, par exemple la mort (sous les traits d'un beau génie), la vertu guerrière (avec l'aspect de Mars) par une allégorie ou des attributs d'apparence agréable [*Attribute die sich gefällig ausnehmen*].

Ce qui est laid dans la nature peut être transposé, domestiqué dans la représentation artistique, de là la supériorité de l'art. Dans l'art il n'y a pas de laideur. Kant donne la sculpture en exemple: elle exclut, en effet, de son domaine la représentation d'objets laids. Par contre, la laideur est dans la nature sous forme de catastrophes et même en tant que mal radical (Kant évoque «les furies, les maladies, les dévastations de la guerre»). Et le malaise qu'elle provoque est une douleur d'ordre moral et non pas esthétique. Une fois transposée en art, la laideur naturelle se transforme en beauté ou sublimité. Il est vrai qu'il se révèle souvent difficile de découvrir la beauté

¹ I. Kant, *op.cit.*, V, 312.

² I. Kant, *Logik Philippi*, XXIV, p. 364.

ou la sublimité dans une œuvre d'art parce le sujet-spectateur est envahi par des émotions (*Rührungen*) qui font obstacle à l'appréciation purement esthétique. Conséquemment, le dégoût est dit le *pathos* exemplaire devant l'objet laid dans la nature. Des objets naturels comme les furies, les maladies, les dévastations de la guerre n'ont pas d'esthétique. Pour se mettre dans l'ambiance d'une vraie expérience esthétique, le sujet-spectateur doit se libérer en même temps de toute exigence morale qui détourne le sujet de la représentation artistique elle-même vers son contenu représenté, et de ses émotions qui obscurcissent le *Gemüt* en lui imposant des intérêts pour l'agréable.

Il se révèle ainsi que Lessing et Kant défendent en fait le même point de vue sur l'impossibilité d'une esthétique de la laideur. Ce point de vue peut sembler daté et inapplicable à l'art contemporain où la laideur est présente non pas seulement dans les contenus représentés mais également dans la manifestation matérielle, informe, abjecte. De ce point de vue, on pourrait soutenir que l'art contemporain et ses «présentifications» de la laideur pourraient trouver plus adéquatement leur soubassement théorique dans l'esthétique hégélienne que dans l'esthétique kantienne. On sait que, à la suite de la dialectisation du beau et du laid chez Hegel, Karl Rosenkranz publie en 1853 une *Ästhetik des Hässlichen*¹ qui offre la première esthétique systématique de la laideur: il y critique explicitement la conception de Lessing à propos de la laideur et réussit de passer sous silence la *Kritik der Urteils-kraft*. Il est évident que Rosenkranz pense à partir de l'acquis de l'esthétique hégélienne où l'informe [*Formlosigkeit*] (comme «amorphie», comme asymétrie, comme disharmonie) est intégré, par un geste d'esthétisation globale, dans le Tout dialectique.

On a sans doute privilégié jusqu'à maintenant la piste phénoménologique en mettant l'accent sur la discontinuité de l'expérience du sublime et du laid et en argumentant que le *Ungeheuer* (le monstrueux) provoque une toute autre réaction pathémique que la *Achtung* devant le sublime. On pourrait également déployer une stratégie plus épistémologique en montrant que le déplaisir [*Unlust*] que l'on ressent lors d'une expérience du sublime est bien différent que celui qu'on ressent étant confronté avec le laid, l'*Ungeheuer*. Kant exploite souvent cette piste² puisqu'elle donne de la consi-

¹ Karl Rosenkranz *Ästhetik des Hässlichen*, Königsberg, Bornträger, 1853 (édition photostatique: Stuttgart, Friedrich Fromann Verlag 1968).

² Voir Renée Ryan *The Beautiful, the Ugly, and the Sublime and Beyond: Kant and Postmodern Aesthetics* (non-published M.A. thesis, Institute of Philosophy, University of Leuven, 2001). Ryan offers some statistics: 40 occurrences of *Unlust* [dis-

stance épistémologique à ses Analytiques. Kant ne discute pas quel déplaisir pourrait être provoqué par la laideur. Et le déplaisir en tant que tel est à peine défini. On apprend au §10, dans le Troisième Moment de l'Analytique du Beau, que le déplaisir [*Unlust*] «est la représentation qui contient la raison déterminante pour changer en son contraire l'état des représentations (en les détournant ou en les éliminant)»,¹ définition passablement abstraite qui ne fait que suggérer que le déplaisir est un état d'âme de *disharmonie*, que son objet n'a pas de finalité, que le déplaisir ne peut mener qu'au *dissentiment* dans la communauté. S'il y aurait une différence dans le déplaisir devant le sublime et le déplaisir devant la laideur, ce serait tout simplement que le déplaisir du sublime est enchâssé, transposé par le plaisir, tandis que le déplaisir du laid est une peine, une douleur globale, totale et définitive. Il est évident qu'aucune attitude qui aurait comme cause ou effet une telle peine, ne peut être qualifiée d'*esthétique*.

Je ne peux ne pas mentionner le désaccord de toute une échelle d'interprétations de la *Troisième Critique* sur ce point délicat. Je signale seulement quelques protagonistes de ce débat. Tout au bout de l'échelle, il y a Hud Hudson² qui plaide pour une *Analytique de la laideur*, en plaçant le laid dans le système esthétique kantien même. Hudson soutient qu'il y a des jugements *a priori* du laid. Kant croît à l'existence de la laideur, ce qui est vrai, mais Hudson en conclut à la possibilité de l'expérience *esthétique* du laid. Il reconstruit les quatre moments d'une telle analytique par simple analogie: le jugement du laid est singulier dans sa forme logique, il a une validité subjective universelle, le laid est la forme de la *contre-finalité* de l'objet en tant qu'elle est perçue en celui-ci sans représentation d'une fin, le laid est ce qui sans conceptualisation est senti comme l'objet d'un déplaisir *nécessaire*. Surtout la formulation du troisième moment me semble paradoxale. Puisqu'il y a déplaisir dans la laideur, il y a de la rébellion dans le sentiment du sujet, en face de la laideur, qui résiste à toute finalisation, et c'est ainsi que Hudson a dû forger le terme de *contre-finalité*. L'exercice de

pleasure] in the *Third Critique*, mainly discussed in relation to *Lust* [*pleasure*] or referring to a component of the sublime feeling. Three other occurrences solely mention *Unlust* without any reference to the sublime or to pleasure: V, p. 220, 272, 331.

¹ I. Kant, *op.cit.*, V, p. 220.

² Hud Hudson "The Significance of an Analytic of the Ugly in Kant's Deduction of Pure Judgments of Taste", *North American Kant Society Studies in Philosophy: Kant's Aesthetics* (ed. Ralph Meerbote), Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1991, pp. 87-103.

Hudson me semble assez gratuit et artificiel, et je me tourne maintenant vers l'autre bout de l'échelle: Christian Strub¹ prend le point de vue le plus raisonnable. Epistémologiquement, il n'y a pas d'autre moyen de comprendre et situer la laideur que par l'examen de la possibilité d'un *déplaisir désintéressé*. Cette notion paraît hautement contrintuitive, et il se révèle vite que rien ne sort d'une comparaison contradictoire entre le beau et le laid, ou le *plaisir désintéressé* et le *déplaisir désintéressé*. Ainsi il n'y a pas de jugement de goût pur de la laideur, et Strub propose avec sagesse que l'esthétique kantienne contient un *systematischen Lücke*, un *vide systématique*. Le «territoire» de la laideur ne deviendra jamais, dans le cadre de l'esthétique kantienne, un véritable «domaine» épistémologiquement consistant.

Affres du dégoût. Je retourne volontiers dès à présent à la phénoménologie de la cause ou de l'effet de la laideur, c'est-à-dire le *dégoût* [Ekel]. A nouveau, il y a peu de définitions quelque peu consistantes chez Kant, et seuls quelques passages nous renseignent minimalement sur le statut du *dégoût*. Le § 48 où Kant insistait sur la non-représentabilité de la laideur en art, dit: «le *dégoût*, ... cette singulière sensation [*sonderbaren Empfindung*], qui provient de la pure imagination, [où] l'objet est représenté comme s'il s'imposait [*aufdrängte*] à la jouissance, tandis que nous lui résistons avec force [*mit Gewalt streben*]». ² Voilà une approche typiquement kantienne: dans cette seule phrase, il y a un *gleichsam* (*en quelque sorte*) et un *als ob* (*comme si*). C'est que l'objet laid n'a aucun impact raisonnable sur le *Gemüt*, et que c'est l'imagination excitée et dangereusement en déroute qui illusoirement pétrifie le sujet *dans sa corporéité*. C'est bien là l'essentiel de la laideur dégoûtante: elle menace la stabilité de notre corporéité, c'est notre corps qui «résiste avec force» à cette invitation à la jouissance que la laideur nous lance en toute tromperie. ³ Un autre texte moins souvent cité jette de la

¹ Christian Strub “Das Hässliche und die “Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilkraft”. Überlegungen zu einer systematischen Lücke”, *Kantstudien*, 1989, p. 80, 416-446. Voir également les contributions de Reinhart Brandt, Dieter Lohmar et Christel Fricke, dans Herman Parret (ed.), *Kants Ästhetik/ Kant's Aesthetics / L'esthétique de Kant*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter 1996. Ils défendent tous une position médiane souvent très subtile.

² I. Kant, *op.cit.*, V, p. 312.

³ Le texte classique sur la nature et les divers types de dégoût est de Aurel Kolnai, *Der Ekel*, 1929 (en traduction anglaise et en réédition: *On Disgust* (edited and with an Introduction by B. Smith & C. Korsmeyer, Open Court 2004). Ce texte est très riche en suggestions phénoménologiques. Puisque Paul Guyer traduit *Ekel* by *loathing* du § 48 (V, p. 312), je me permets de citer Kolnai sur *loathsome* dans sa

lumière sur les causes du dégoût: «l'essentiel [dans les beaux-arts] n'est pas la matière de la sensation (le charme ou l'émotion) [*Materie der Empfindung (dem Reize oder der Rührung)*], où il ne s'agit que de la jouissance [*Genuss*], qui ne laisse rien pour l'Idée, qui émousse l'intelligence [*dem Geist stumpf*], excite peu à peu le dégoût pour l'objet [*den Gegenstand nach und nach anekelnd*] et rend l'âme mécontente de soi et maussade [*launisch*] par la conscience de sa disposition, qui pour le jugement de la raison répugne à la finalité [*im Urteile der Vernunft zweckwidrigen Stimmung*]].¹ Le «dégoût pour l'objet» se développe à partir d'une certaine «jouissance» [*Genuss*] dans la «matière de la sensation» qui éloigne le sujet de sa finalité. Le plaisir [*Lust*] s'oppose précisément à la jouissance [*Genuss*] en ce que «le plaisir est culture» [*wo die Lust zugleich Kultur ist*], écrit Kant quelques lignes plus haut. La jouissance dans la matière, par contre, provoque le dégoût. En plus, cette jouissance de se perdre dans la matière des «charmes et émotions» a un impact direct sur l'état de santé de notre corps, elle mène au dégoût qui se manifeste dans des réactions corporelles comme la nausée, le vomissement, la convulsion. Le plaisir/déplaisir [*Lust/Unlust*] dans le sentiment du sublime n'a évidemment rien de la jouissance [*Genuss*] destructrice de culture et génératrice de dégoût que Kant, on n'en doute pas, n'introduit à aucun moment dans l'expérience esthétique.

Même quand il y a pour Kant une corrélation certaine entre la *laideur* [*das hässliche*] et le *dégoût* [*das ekelhafte*], les deux notions ne s'interdéfinissent pas. On peut être dégoûté pour d'autres raisons que la présentation d'un objet laid, si ce n'est que pour des raisons morales. Mais même si c'est vrai que tout objet laid est dégoûtant, il y a d'autres déterminants épistémologiques qui contribuent à l'identification de la laideur, comme le rôle de l'imagination et le jeu particulier des facultés en situation de laideur.

*

relation sémantique avec *disgust*. “It is more difficult to differentiate from disgust the tonalities of the repulsive, or even of the disagreeable or *loathsome*. Frequently the latter connotes an incomplete and somehow more formal disgust. One can only be repelled – in the strict sense – by things that do not have the characteristic of the disgusting: for instance, food which is neither spoiled nor personally detested, but which for some unknown reason just fails to be tasty. In such cases what one might call the objective contours of disgust are missing. An object may be repugnant to me an account of some mere fleeting association, but yet I do not therefore find it ‘disgusting’”, (p. 34). Cette suggestion et beaucoup d'autres devraient être exploitées pour une meilleure lecture du concept de *Ekel* dans le texte de Kant.

¹ I. Kant, *op.cit.*, V, p. 326.

Toutefois, une lecture attentive de la *Troisième Critique* doit constater que Kant ne développe pas de critère éthique pour distinguer entre le sublime et le laid. Kant n'introduit pas un questionnement concernant la *moralité du dégoût*. A-t-on le droit de sentir ou de vivre un *dégoût* devant un objet naturel ou artistique? Est-ce qu'on se met en dehors de son devoir éthique si on vit ou surtout si on cultive l'expérience du dégoût? Voir et vivre le monde comme laid et dégoûtant, est-ce un défaut moral? Pas de critère éthique, par conséquent, mais pas de construction systématique et explicite de critères épistémologiques non plus.¹ Dans ce domaine, c'est à l'analyste du texte kantien d'être inventif et de faire des propositions, comme l'ont fait Strub, Lohmar, Thomson,² et d'autres. L'«appréciation» [*Beurteilung*] de la laideur, en tant que sentiment négatif et destructif, est-elle universellement valide? Ainsi, on peut déduire que le laid ne nous permet pas d'accès aux Idées, contrairement au sublime. Le sentiment du sublime, on le sait, nous élève aux Idées malgré son corrélat informe. Et l'*informe* du corrélat, c'est ce que la sublimité et la laideur ont en commun. La contre-finalité également: le sublime et le laid sont essentiellement «contra-final» [*counterpurpose*]. Il y a de la friction, de la frustration et un grand malaise du sujet dans les deux «attitudes», comme il n'y a pas de plaisir intact pour le sublime ou pas de plaisir du tout pour le laid. S'il pourrait y avoir de critère épistémologique, ce serait plutôt au niveau d'une typologie de la mise-en-relation spécifique des facultés. Ce n'est de toute évidence pas un problème thématique chez Kant, et, par conséquent, il faut déduire et projeter nous-même un argument. Comment se réalise le *libre jeu des facultés* dans le sublime et dans le laid? Christian Strub nous incite à considérer, par déduction et dans toute son abstraction, quatre structures possibles de justification d'un plaisir/déplaisir universellement valide: le jeu libre de l'imagination et de l'entendement, et son opposé, et le jeu libre de l'imagination et de la raison, avec son opposé. On sait tous que le beau occupe la première structure (le libre jeu de l'imagination et de l'entendement), le sublime la troisième (le libre jeu de l'imagination et de la raison). Strub propose le *ridicule* comme le sentiment d'une opposition du libre jeu de l'imagination et de la raison, ce qui nous laisse avec la quatrième structure, celle du sentiment de l'opposition du libre jeu de l'imagination et de l'entendement, qui

¹ Il faut lire à ce propos le chapitre très illuminant sur le sublime dans Henry E. Allison *Kant's Theory of Taste. A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 302-344.

² Voir les notes supra pour les références.

occuperait alors la position du laid. Comment faut-il comprendre cet exercice de déduction et son positionnement épistémologique de la laideur? Le laid, dans ce schéma, serait l'effet d'un *déplaisir désintéressé*. Il s'agirait, par conséquent, d'un déplaisir dans le jeu, toujours libre mais *sans harmonie, tensif* (alternativement, *tension* et *détente*), dirais-je en langage contemporain, et surtout un déplaisir qui ne suppose aucun intérêt dans le sujet. Quoiqu'il en soit, un tel exercice de déduction épistémologique est hautement spéculatif, et ne nous apprend pas grand-chose sur l'impossibilité d'une esthétique de la laideur, impossibilité qui a été pressentie par Kant.

Mieux vaut conclure par un retour à la phénoménologie de la laideur. Première certitude: au niveau de la captation sensorielle et sensitive, le laid n'est pas l'opposé du beau, le laid n'est pas l'absence de beauté, le laid, comme l'énonce l'aphorisme de la *Logik Philippi* déjà cité, le laid est une *présence* tout à fait originale. Deuxième certitude: le laid est vécu comme au-delà du sublime, et doit être compris *dans sa relation avec le sublime*, non avec le beau. Il est évident qu'il faut construire un soubassement épistémologique distinct au laid et au sublime, et la *Troisième Critique* ne nous livre pas vraiment cette reconstruction transcendantale. Il nous reste la phénoménologie des *effets* pathémiques du sublime et du laid dans le sujet: *Achtung* (*respect*) et *Ekel* (*dégoût*). Deux stratégies phénoménologiques sont possibles à l'égard de la relation des effets du sublime et du laid. Lyotard représente la première option, celle qui incorpore la laideur dans la sublimité, et fait de l'expérience du sublime une expérience du choc, du scandale, de l'angoisse devant le vide de la *matière*. Le *Il y a* de l'événement, la *présence de la matière brute et brutale*, et c'est l'expérience esthétique par excellence, expérience postmoderne, expérience de la postmodernité et de son art. L'autre option est plus prudente, plus réservée: c'est l'attitude qui consiste à ne pas généraliser le *dégoût* comme unique tonalité ou coloration pathémique de notre vécu du monde contemporain et de sa production artistique; de sauvegarder ainsi une portion de sublime qui n'est pas globalement corrodée par le négatif absolu, par le différend totalitaire. Ce ne serait pas mal si on pourrait continuer à apprécier la beauté, la sublimité et la laideur, dans leur apport spécifique, et en jouir, au musée en dans la salle de concert, dans la vie de tous les jours, dans nos rencontres avec la nature et les hommes.

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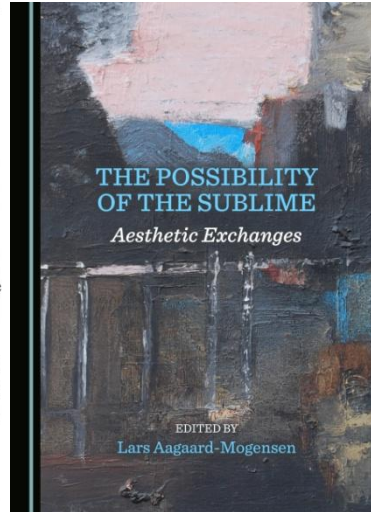
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The notion of the sublime, used to describe a particular kind of overwhelming or exhilarating aesthetic experience, has garnered a great deal of attention by philosophers, critical theorists and literary scholars. In the midst of this growing body of literature, Professor Jane Forsey published an article asking whether an aesthetic theory of the sublime is even possible and argued provocatively in the negative. Claiming that efforts to explain the sublime inevitably result in theories that are either contradictory or incoherent, Forsey posed a challenge to anyone who takes the sublime seriously as an aesthetic category.

Unlike other monographs and anthologies that deal broadly with the sublime in aesthetics, this collection examines specific conceptual problems with the very foundations of sublime theory in a manner that is tightly focused and rigorous.

Contributors to this volume are:

Joseph Margolis,
Rachel Zuckert,
Tom Hanauer,
Robert Clewis,
Sandra Shapshay,
Jennifer McMahan,
Jane Forsey's original paper
and reply to her critics.



From the Preface: Granted the analyticity of explanans and explanandum, when an explication is correct, explanandum should at the very least be informative, such as to clear away partial and corrupted uses of the given concept. But if that is not possible, 'sublime' is doomed to the compost heap or the vagaries of mysticism. While on occasion there is, here there's probably no need for – à la Moore – the reminder: that no discussion about the meaning of a concept is *merely* about the meaning of a term, and to think of sublime is not to think merely of *ways of thinking* about the world; it is to think of how the world actually is.

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