

of the city. Why is the stranger city important? It is important because it tends to unleash the aural-pictorial-plastic imagination. Such creative imagining emerges under conditions of *porous social ties*. The stranger city is an ecology of such porous ties. It is the *via media* of unsocial sociability. Paradoxically, strong social forms emerge where society is “weak” in the sense that its linguistic norms, rules and authority are feeble. Under conditions of weak linguistic interaction, figurative schemata, visual thinking, musical and plastic-haptic forms come to the fore. This occurs because the noise of language is reduced. Opinion, rhetoric, propositional judgments, verdicts, and convictions are all treated sceptically. The reasoning of debate, which can never escape conventional premises, is set aside. *Logos* and *doxa* are downplayed along with dogmatic, moralising, and righteous assertions. Through the graphical, schematic and pictorial media of the imagination, new forms (shapes and figures) emerge.

Shape implies order – *kosmos* in contrast to *kaos*. Everybody has experienced the impulse to replace *kaos* with *kosmos* when we say: “Let us meet where there is a whiteboard. I think more clearly when I can sketch things out.” Sense can be made out of the fog of a messy situation when we can sketch a solution. Just as there is individual and group sketching, there is also a social whiteboard. It is not language. Language is not the house of being. The house of being – being that pushes towards giving itself form – is the city. In cities, more than any other social medium, human beings outwardly in their external environment) represent aural, visual and haptic forms to themselves. Cities allow considerable scope for experimenting with new shapes and patterns. Some experiments are idiosyncratic and quickly die. Most experiments repeat (with minor differences) what already exists. Successful forms by definition are repeated. It is notable just how quickly compelling forms are picked up and replicated in cities. While repetition is a key aspect of any form creation, it is not repetition per se that defines the creative city. It is emergence. Emergence stands on contrariness: the capability to unify what is divergent: “out of many, one.” This is not the negative capability of social critique. It is the “musical” capacity to harmonise the discordant. What contrary minds do on an individual level, great cities do on a collective level. The city in this sense is the site for experiments that turn existing forms into the materials out of which new forms emerge. This *poietic* activity turns the past into the future, memory into expectation, and history into that which is new and unexpected. Out of this compounding of time, it creates a “new order of the ages”.

Object-Oriented Aesthetics: The Legacy of Plato in the Philosophy of Art

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For the products of the arts have their excellence in themselves; it is enough, then, that they have these [fine qualities] in some way when they have been made.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.4.1105a27-29

Aristotle thought that artistic excellence lay entirely in the objects of art. In this he was merely stating plainly the view already maintained by his predecessor, Plato. Plato himself was not so conservative, however. The conception of artistic excellence that preceded him was dynamic, but through persistent effort and argument Plato brought about a change of focus in aesthetics that has persisted down to the present day. I shall call the focus that Plato brought to art “object-oriented aesthetics” and describe it as follows: an aesthetics is object-oriented just in case it locates artistic excellence entirely in art objects, their objective properties or their objective relations. Plato’s object-oriented aesthetics is a special case: it locates artistic excellence entirely in beauty, which is seen as an objective property instantiated in art objects.

In this paper I will begin by exploring the context in which object-oriented aesthetics arose. I will set object-oriented aesthetics against another focus which I shall call “activity-oriented aesthetics”, in which the excellence of an artistic production lies in the artist’s activity. This activity is merely expressed in the finished work, even when the work is overwhelmingly admirable. Excellent artistic activity originates and persists in the artist’s manner, execution and style.¹ Just as there is a special

¹ A product of chance or accident can be beautiful only in an equivocal sense. It has the appearance of something that might have been fashioned, but it is not *artistically* beautiful. Similarly, a chance arrangement of matter cannot be *naturally* beautiful, however wondrous it may appear.

case of object-oriented aesthetics in which *objective* beauty is the fundamental aesthetic concept, there is a special case of activity-oriented aesthetics in which *artistic* beauty,² a property of the artist's activity, becomes the fundamental aesthetic concept. Artistic beauty is beauty that radiates from the activity of an artist. It is visible directly in the activity itself, but it is also visible in the work through and to which it is transmitted. (The combination of activity and work I shall call 'artistic production'.)

The concept of artistic beauty is latent in Ancient Greek usage, but it did not find expression in traditional Western theories of art, which tend to focus either on properties of the work (colour, shape, structure, organic form, disposition) or on the way the work affects a spectator (emotion, judgment, communication). This is the legacy of Plato. I will examine four arguments of Plato's that lead away from artistic beauty: (1) the argument that beauty is not the same as attractiveness, (2) the argument that beauty is a sort of adornment, (3) the argument that beauty is "the appropriate", (4) and the argument that beauty is transcendent. I will show, in each case, how object-oriented aesthetics supplants activity-oriented aesthetics, and why it seems so appealing for aesthetic theory. Before turning to Plato, however, I should like to say a little more about the general idea of artistic beauty that he supplants; where it originates, what its focal meaning is and why it is important to a theory of artistic beauty.

The practice of art that arose in Ancient Greece aimed, in its highest development, at the idealisation of form, whether that be in building, sculpture, painting, music or poetry. The Greeks used the adjective *kalon*, which is usually mistranslated in English as "beautiful", to praise art, virtue, and understanding. *Kalon* was the regular term for excellent accomplishment, whether that accomplishment was intellectual (philosophy and science), practical (ethics and politics), or productive (art and technology). But it had a different sense in these different contexts. In intellectual contexts it meant "right" or "true". Thus Socrates, in Plato's *Hippias Major*, condemns some propositions as false and praises others as *kalon* (here the correct translation of *kalon* would be "true"). In practical contexts, *kalon* meant "good" or "noble". Thus, in the same dialogue by Plato, Hippias says it is *kalon* (i.e. "noble") to bury your parents. And in art (which the Greeks called *techne*), the term *kalon* had implications about the

² When I say *artistic* beauty I mean, "beauty that radiates from the activity of an artist" Artistic beauty is visible directly in the activity itself, but it is also visible in the work through and to which it is transmitted. The combination of activity and work I shall call "artistic production".

production of the work in addition to the product itself: it tended to mean "fine" (as in "finely made") rather than just "beautiful in appearance".³

It is the context of art that I am concerned with here (though some of what I say will apply to the other areas as well). Suppose that we accept the suggestion of the Ancient Greek language, and adopt as our hypothesis the view that any artistic production, any human making, is beautiful just in case it is an excellent accomplishment. The idea here is that the beauty of art lies primarily in its manner of making, rather than in the thing made or the experience of spectators. I am not saying that there is nothing beautiful in the product. The product can be aesthetically beautiful, for example, by having a look that is naturally appealing. But an object of art can be an excellent accomplishment, and thus artistically beautiful, whether or not it is aesthetically beautiful as well. This explains how excellent works of art can appear disturbing, confronting, even ugly (in a purely aesthetic sense) and still have artistic beauty. There are many ways that works of art can do this: they may express deep and confronting truths, or they may ironically and comically point out our limited human capacity to accept certain juxtapositions of colour and form, and so on. But to focus on this is to give priority to aesthetic beauty over artistic beauty. We concentrate on the appearance, and feel a need to explain away the confronting or ugly appearance, rather than to concentrate on the production and explain the excellence of its accomplishment.

An object of art *can* be artistically beautiful, however, just in case it reflects the excellent activity of its production. This reflecting performed by a work of art is often mistaken for an aesthetic property of the work itself rather than something the work does. Artistic beauty lies in the way that the reflecting performed by a work of art allows spectators to recreate and experience, though never exactly, the excellence of the production. In this sense it is always better to be an artist than a critic, no matter how well the critic appreciates the accomplishment of the artist.⁴ But just as artistic beauty is not primarily located in the work of art (only reflected there), it is also not primarily located in the artist (though it is *projected* there). Excellent artists may (but do not always) begin with a settled and highly specific project that they intend to realise through their skill. They may refer to such projections as they work, but the making, when it is truly excellent, always involves discoveries, alterations, and adaptations that are

³ Indeed, *techne*, which is the Ancient Greek word for 'art', focuses on the activity more than it does on the product. A better English translation for *techne* in most contexts would be "artistry"

⁴ Often a work of contemporary art is dismissed by an unappreciative spectator with the words, "I could have done that". Yet it is precisely the point of "doing that" which such spectators miss; they do not, in most cases, see what the artist has done in the accomplishment of the work, and they do not, usually, engage in the making of art themselves.

not part of the “authentic” project. No one could ever make just exactly what they set out to make, since the authentic projection is only an idea.⁵

There is a danger at this point of looking for artistic beauty in the life of the artist, in the lusty, vibrant, tumultuous experience of Van Gogh, in the serenity and enlightenment of Vermeer, in the pain and suffering of Frida Kahlo. But this is to get things backwards. Although there may be another kind of beauty in the life of the artist, from the point of view of artistic beauty, *biography* is also secondary. In the biography, as in the finished works, there is a reflection of the excellent activity that is artistic beauty. But this is only a reflection. Artistic beauty is not so much in the life as in the *living* of the artist. Thus, it is not primarily the artist that is artistically beautiful. Nor is it the work of art. Nor is it even the project or projection of the work. It is primarily the activity of the making that is artistically beautiful; it is this activity that *is* the excellent accomplishment.

I think that when we conceive of artistic beauty and artistic production in this way, it makes sense to think of the two as essentially related. But the very conceiving of artistic beauty involves a distortion, as we try to hold on to something that by its nature is moving and living. Realising this puts us in a better position to understand better how and why Plato replaces the concept of artistic beauty with the concept of objective beauty. For only when beauty has been objectified can it be available for philosophical argument. Let us examine Plato’s four arguments for an object-oriented aesthetics with this in mind.

1. The Beautiful and the Attractive

The most popular, though not the most refined, beliefs about art have generally treated beauty and attractiveness as the same thing. In most cases, when ordinary people commend a work of art as beautiful, it is because they find it directly pleasing, delightful, engaging, enthusing, or *aesthetically attractive*. Productions that are aesthetically *unattractive* (those that are horrifying, devastating, depressing, or repulsing) tend to be recommended only when they are “important” or “courageous”. The term ‘beautiful’ is less often used of them. But even here the important message or the courageous truth of the work is *artistically attractive* to us, even

⁵ This importance of not locating artistic beauty in a projection is admirably expressed by Heraclitus when he says, “the most beautiful cosmos is like sweepings aimlessly piled up” (fragment 124). With characteristic irony, Heraclitus ridicules the reigning philosophical view of his day, according to which the universe is a *kosmos*, that is to say, an “ornament”, purified and objectified, realised through time in the inexorable working-out of nature. For him, the greatest beauty is more visible in the sweepings of the work-shop, the indications of attemptings (all at once successful *and* unsuccessful) at the nexus of idea and reality

though the work is aesthetically unattractive, and one feels torn as to whether or not beauty is involved⁶ Even when a work appears both aesthetically and artistically unattractive, people sometimes apply the old saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” in a consoling way. Though said of a work that he doesn’t find at all attractive or beautiful *himself*, the spectator grants that the work must seem attractive and beautiful to *someone*, and to that small extent upholds the view that in art attractiveness and beauty go hand in hand.

Plato cautioned against an uncritical association of beauty with attractiveness. At one level he accepted the connection. He thought that absolute beauty was truly attractive, indeed for him absolute beauty was perhaps the only thing that was (truly) attractive. But at another level, Plato thought, the work of artists presented a kind of false image of beauty, which he thought was falsely attractive. He criticised the artists of his day for being imitators⁷ rather than creators of beauty, and the *way* in which he thought their “imitations” were misleading was by taking as their model an imitation of beauty rather than beauty itself. For him, real art must set its sights on real beauty. But rather than set their sights on real beauty, artists, Plato thought, looked to something else, namely pleasure. Plato criticised the artists of his day for making their products merely gratifying and pleasing to people, and in so doing *falsely* attracting them. Thus, artistic activity was not, in his view, *really* excellent, nor could artists be said to produce things excellently.

There is a lot that is wrong with Plato’s criticism of artists, but there is something important in his view that beauty and attractiveness should be distinguished. Whereas everything beautiful is attractive, there is more to beauty than attractiveness. I would like to support Plato’s distinction between the beautiful and the attractive by appealing to two connections in which it appears to hold. The first is in connection with euphemism. In the *Republic*, Plato ridicules the way that lovers euphemise the appearance of the beloved:

One, because his nose is uptiled, you will praise as piquant,
the beak of another you will pronounce right royal, the
intermediate type you say strikes the harmonious mean, the

⁶ This is the source of one kind of artistic ambivalence: the mixed feeling of artistic attraction and aesthetic repulsion. This ambivalence can be a source of great excellence in art. Another, less praiseworthy kind of ambivalence in art is typically produced by “Shock-Art”, art that is neither important nor courageous, but which provokes morbid curiosity or shameful interest.

⁷ All art, of course, *is* imitative whenever it depicts, portrays, or represents some original object. Whether or not all art does this is an interesting question: even abstract, conceptual, or expressionist art may be said to portray/depict/represent a form, concept or emotion. But I am not now interested in whether or not all art is imitative in this way, since surely this is not in itself a vicious form of imitation.

swarthy are of manly aspect, the white are children of gods divinely fair, and as for 'honey-hued', do you suppose the very word is anything but the euphemistic invention of some lover who can feel no distaste for sallowness...

(*Republic* V.474d-e)⁸

To euphemise is to describe something that is not really beautiful in a way that nevertheless expresses how very attractive that thing appears.⁹ Yet when these same lovers have had their fill, and move on to others, their descriptions of the formerly loved ones become more sour: the first was "pig-nosed", the other "had a beak like a crow", the swarthy one was "a real brute", the white one "anaemic", and the honey-hued "jaundiced", and so on.¹⁰ The phenomenon of euphemism and its detection shows that there are cases in which something that attracts us appears beautiful though it is not.

The second source of support for Plato's distinction comes from the context of judgment. There is a story told by Xenophon that one day a courtesan by the name of Theodote came to Athens. Some friends told Socrates that she was in town and that many painters had gone to paint her portrait. "She is very beautiful," they said. "Let's go, then," replied Socrates, "for beauty must be seen, not just learned of" (*Memorabilia* III.11).¹¹ Now there is an intriguing feature of this response that has shown up in many theories of aesthetics, including Kant's. And it is that when a friend recommends a work of art as beautiful, we generally *don't* take that as claiming that the work is merely attractive *to them*. We do not dispute that it is attractive to them, but nor do we take it for granted that the work *is* beautiful. Instead we take the claim that it is beautiful as a claim against us and so we must go and see the work for ourselves. So long as the judgment is in suspense, it seems reasonable to suppose that each person believes there is more to beauty than attractiveness.¹² It is interesting to consider

⁸ Plato, *Republic*, translated by Paul Shorey in E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (eds), *Plato. Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). Unless otherwise noted all translations of Plato in this paper are taken from Hamilton and Cairns.

⁹ A lover who euphemises in this way might even observe that he is attracted to non-beautiful features.

¹⁰ These kinds of descriptions, sometimes called "sour grapes", might in some cases betray a residual attraction the lover has, despite his now explicit recognition of the non-beautiful features.

¹¹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, translated by E.C. Marchant (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923).

¹² When you see the work things become more complicated, because there are many possibilities: (a) you find the work attractive, judge it beautiful and think that this adds *confirmation* to your friend's view, (b) you find the work attractive, judge it beautiful, but don't think this adds any confirmation to your friend's view, (c) you find the work attractive but don't think it is really beautiful, (d) you find the work unattractive but think it is really beautiful, (e) you find the work unattractive, and you don't think it is beautiful, but you don't believe this disconfirms your friend's view, or (f) you find the work unattractive, you don't think it is beautiful, and you think this *disconfirms* your friend's view.

that when friends disagree about judgments on such matters, the disagreements are often sharp, deep, and protracted.

Thus, I think that there is a distinction to be upheld between beauty and attractiveness. And I think Plato was right that the subjective affections of the spectators are logically and materially independent of the quality of the art. The spectators' affections *might* reflect the artist's excellent accomplishment. But they may be entirely unrelated. Plato emphasised this: a person cannot misjudge whether an appearance is attractive to him, but he can misjudge whether an appearance is excellent. Nevertheless, I think that Plato drew the wrong lesson. For he saw the distinction between the beautiful and the attractive as an opportunity to reject everything that is subjective in art. But artistic beauty *does* have a fundamentally subjective element, since it is the unique, excellent activity of a particular subject, whom we call the artist. The excellence is actually *generated* in the activity of the artist, and it would be more correct to say that we get our ideas of artistic excellence *from* this, rather than that there are objective, external standards of excellence that we apply to it. That is not to say that excellence isn't something real, or that excellent activity can't be distinguished from inept activity. But it is to say that we only ever have *guides* to excellence in objects that have been realised. The *realising* of excellence in artistic production is always original, creative and subjective.¹³

When Plato dismissed the association between attractiveness and artistic beauty, he also dismissed the subjective element in art. He sought objective beauty first in simple properties of a work, then in objective relations, and finally in a mysterious absolute object that he called "the beautiful itself". The next three theories of beauty in art that I want to consider all stem from Plato's attempts to find beauty in something objective.

2. Beauty as Adornment

The first such theory I want to consider attempts to define beauty in terms of something that *causes* a thing to be beautiful.¹⁴ This idea of looking for the cause of beauty in an artistic production makes an advance on looking to the subjective reactions of spectators, since it can direct us to the artist

¹³ Excellent accomplishment is thus, to a certain extent, also private. No one shares the exact subjective state of the artist in the accomplishing of his art. I imagined this privacy in a fictional character I called "the internal poet", a poet who composes real and excellent poems, but only in her mind. For an interesting story that imagines someone who completely overcomes the privacy of the artist, see Jorge Luis Borges' "Pierre Menard: Author of the *Quixote*" in his collection *Labyrinths*.)

¹⁴ For the discussion of this theory in Plato, see the *Hippias Major*.

and the making of art.¹⁵ But in his passion for the objective, Plato thought of the cause too concretely, and so missed the chance of seeing it in excellent activity. At first he considered that the cause of beauty might be some substance that could be added to things to beautify them, or separated from things, making them less beautiful.¹⁶ Big golden frames around paintings, for example, and rich decorations encrusted with sparkling jewels. This is the sort of thing Plato considered: beauty might be gold, or silver, or some other substance. Even in his more careful considerations, Plato allowed only the slightest abstraction. Perhaps, he thought, beauty was to be found not in a material substance, but in what we might call a simple property: a bright solid colour, or a geometric shape.¹⁷ Yet Plato still thought of these simple properties in the manner of substances, as “things” that could be added to a work to make it beautiful, as one adds an ingredient to a recipe to make it taste good. On this view, then, beauty is something like an adornment.

There are all sorts of problems with this view. But there are two especially interesting ones. The first is that when beauty is conceived of as *being* a substance or property, then the beauty of a work lies entirely *in* the beautifying substance or property. Thus, an artistic production will be uselessly beautiful: baroque, ornamental, floral designs on silverware, for example.¹⁸ Consider a tattoo on a worker’s right arm: to say the arm is caused to be beautiful by the addition of the tattoo completely misses the point. The useful arm is beautiful, and also the useless tattoo, but in different ways. To miss the point about the usefulness of beauty is to miss one of its most essential features. Artistic beauty always shows us a way of *doing things excellently*. It inspires us to do things excellently. But an adornment does nothing.

Secondly, we should take note of the relation between the so-called beautifying property and the material. We should notice that where adornments interfere with, compete with, or obscure the material, they seem to lose their beauty. We may find that what is simple and unadorned is simply beautiful. Or we may find that there are things which any attempt to beautify is ridiculous. Again this problem points us towards the process and accomplishment of art rather than the material or properties of the object. For it is in the *making* that the properties and material are transformed, and blended appropriately, excellently, into a work of art.

¹⁵ But that is not to say that looking to the subjective reactions of the spectators might not do the same thing, if we look at them in the right sort of way, viz. as *recreations* of the artist’s making.

¹⁶ Strangely, he also insisted that there could be at most *one* beautiful substance.

¹⁷ For more discussion of this view, see the *Philebus*.

¹⁸ This is, I think, Kant’s theory in the *Critique of Judgment*, Part 1, sections 6-8. It is a theory of aesthetic beauty, *not* a theory of artistic beauty.

What causes an artistic production to be beautiful is not some inert objective property, but the excellent activity of the artist. Through the artist’s *way*, even things that have properties which have never seemed attractive before may become so. It is that *way* which causes a work to be beautiful.

3. Beauty and “The Appropriate”

Out of the failure of the adornment theory comes the idea that perhaps beauty is “the appropriate”. If we knew, or had a knack for making things “fit” the appropriate context, we would always produce beautifully. Some people know what clothes “suit the occasion”, and they look beautiful. A good musician knows what phrasings “fit” the piece, and the music is beautiful. A good cook has a knack for the appropriate spices. A good painter for the appropriate colours. A good architect for the appropriate scale. And so on. When a creation fits, or “works” in its context, we applaud it as beautiful. This sense of appropriateness does some justice to the idea that beauty is excellent activity. In particular, it focuses, at least in part, on the excellence involved in production, and not just on the excellence of the product or content.

Notice that the term “appropriate”, when described this way, has a strongly subjective element. It is the artist’s sense of appropriateness that *makes* beauty. We do not see *beforehand* what will fit most excellently, otherwise we would be the artists. And the reason we don’t see beforehand is because the excellently appropriate creation is unique and never yet made. Plato was very interested in the relation between beauty and the appropriate,¹⁹ but in his attempt to make even appropriateness into something objective, he turned away from the context of excellent activity, to the ideas of decorum and composition. The objective conceptions of appropriateness he arrived at were different in each case, so I will discuss them separately, starting with the idea of decorum.

One way of making a conception of “the appropriate” objective is to associate it with the idea of *decorum*. Then conventions will determine what is appropriate, and we will be able to make tolerably clear judgments about the divide between appropriate and inappropriate, beautiful and ugly. We can hardly deny that socially and politically, decorum is a standard that has great influence over art; it plays a significant role in what goes in public galleries, what is performed by major theatre companies, what is constructed inside municipal boundaries, what is printed by major presses and so on. And yet there are few of us who feel satisfied that art is simply a

¹⁹ See the *Hippias Major*

matter of *decorum*. Indeed, very original and creative artwork tends to be out of step with convention. And yet, when excellent, these productions “work” to create new attitudes and new conventions. Excellent accomplishments may be more or less conservative; they may pay respect to conventions, but to the extent that they are excellent, they exceed conventional standards and attitudes.

But there is a greater difficulty with the standard of decorum, namely that it is a standard externally applied. We should like to think that artistic productions have something about *them* that makes them wonderful, beautiful, gorgeous; not that it is just something about our conventions or our society. In other words, we look for the ground of their appeal. But we cannot return to looking for that ground in a beautifying material or property. Plato ingeniously discovered a different way of defining the appropriate, one which appeals to intrinsic features only, but not to any beautifying element. Why not take *organic form* as the model for the appropriate? A production is beautiful in this sense when its parts stand in an appropriate relation to the whole, when they are in a special kind of equilibrium. On this view it does not matter if a community finds a particular work to be indecorous; it may still be beautiful in itself. In many dialogues Plato appealed to this idea. In the *Republic*, for example, he writes:

It is as if we were coloring a statue and someone approached and censured us, saying that we did not apply the most beautiful pigments to the most beautiful parts of the image, since the eyes, which are the most beautiful part, have not been painted with purple, but with black. We should think it a reasonable justification to reply, “Don’t expect us, quaint friend, to paint the eyes so fine that they will not be like eyes at all, nor the other parts, but observe whether by assigning what is proper to each we render the whole beautiful.” (IV.420c)

And in the *Phaedrus*:

... any writing ought to be constructed like a living creature, with its own body, as it were; it must not lack either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to suit each other and the whole work. (264c)

These examples reveal Plato’s interest in the idea of beauty as organic form, but they also indicate how underdeveloped his conception of organic form was. It would have been wonderful if he had followed through with the idea that artistic beauty is a living, changing, *active* thing, to be found

in the creative processes of art, and reflected in its outcomes. But Plato’s view seems to amount only to stating that beauty is an internal relation of appropriateness of the parts of a production to each other and to the whole. It doesn’t specify what the relation is, and it misses the most promising part of the idea, namely that the equilibrium of living things is always developing.²⁰ Moreover, it seems that Plato’s way of thinking about organic form collapses back into his view that art is merely imitation. A beautiful speech cannot just have a harmonious composition, it must be an accurate imitation of some true state of affairs. A beautiful painting must represent things as they actually are. In this way, Plato’s idea of the appropriate makes art necessarily uncreative and unoriginal.

4. Transcendental Beauty

The line of reasoning we have been following seeks an objective ground for the predicate “beautiful” in what is the case. On this view, any object, action, thought or proposition will be beautiful just in case it is true to what is. Plato accepted this identification of Beauty with Truth as *Transcendental*. It is difficult to state precisely what this means. I think it helps to say that it requires a total reconfiguration of *attitude* toward the beautiful. In the *Symposium*, Plato contrasted what falls within “beauty’s wide horizon” (210d), namely every familiar beautiful thing, from beautiful people to beautiful theorems, with something else, which

in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven or in earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting. (211a).

It is here that Plato’s attempt to objectify beauty reaches its final, empty conclusion. For there *is* no object that is always beautiful, just by itself. Artistic beauty is temporal and active: it is located in the making and in the

²⁰ If he had thought about this, perhaps he would have considered the appropriateness of art to lie in the process of production, where the harmony of the resultant work is but a reflection of the appropriateness of that process.

recreational experiencing of a work by the spectator.²¹ Works of art provide a *temporary stability of experience*, but they are not the surrogates of something that could ever provide a permanent stability, they are surrogates of a subjective experience, that of the artist. Works of art are human, and temporal; they *are* excellent accomplishments, but just because they are *human* accomplishments they are imperfect, mundane, and transient. They could not otherwise be beautiful.

Conclusion

I began by saying that Aristotle simply restated Plato's views about works of art. It is instructive to note the context in which the restatement is made. For Plato also held an object-oriented ethics (which must be the subject of another paper). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle departs from Plato in taking ethics to be about activity, and in the second book he contrasts ethics with art in order to emphasise this departure. For Aristotle, *ethical* excellence is an activity, a kind of living, rather than a static feature of an ethical object (such as "justice itself", and so on). An ethical action doesn't have its excellence in itself. We have to look at the agent, specifically to whether his performance stems from an excellent "decisional state", that is, an *active* habit to decide and live in excellent ways. That Aristotle does not part from Plato in aesthetics in a way similar to his departure in ethics is an indication of the hold that Plato's object-oriented aesthetics was to have over the subsequent history of art theory.

We considered a contrasting view of aesthetics that lay dormant in the Ancient Greek word for beauty, namely the view that beauty is closely associated with excellent activity. Ironically, we saw that although this idea holds promise for a theory of artistic beauty, the Western theories of beauty that sprang from Ancient Greece, through the philosophy of Plato, consistently avoided opportunities to promote this idea. Had the view of artistic beauty as excellent accomplishment been adopted in Western aesthetics, we might then have seen much more attention to the way of art, and the way of life, in creating beauty.

²¹ In this sense, "spectator" is a very bad word, since it suggests a passive onlooker, when in fact, whenever he has an experience of *art* the spectator is actively recreating the excellent accomplishment of the artist. Such recreation may be very crude and inexact, or the actual accomplishment may not be very excellent, so the experience of the spectator might seem dull, but only when there is no recreation at all, only when he is "just looking" can we say that the spectator is passive. And in such cases, the experience is not of *art* but of a mere *thing*.

Memory of the Future: The Foresight Experience of 'Greece 2021'

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1. Preliminary remarks

As is indicated in the title here, I am not coming from current Greece, but from 'Greece 2021', that is to say, the Greece of the 21st century and two hundred years after the Greek revolution against the Ottoman occupation. I am not only a traveller of space but also a traveller of future time. In this spirit my discourse claims its inspiration from both *utopia* and *uchronia*.

In accordance with the title the conference: Culture and Memory in the Greek World, and the title of this essay, the first question one has to formulate could be the following: why, in this period of the historical trajectory of our humanity, do we ask questions about memory? Some hypotheses-*aporias* may be elaborated:

- The production of computer memory is more and more powerful and extensive. But as communication technologies have destroyed "intense communication" or at least, insofar as a deficit of communication has been created because of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), have we destroyed the "real", "authentic", "genuine" memory? Or is it too late to discuss the question of "memory"?¹
- Brain research has uncovered many secrets of cognitive functions and some aspects of memory are under systematic scientific investigation. It is hoped that mental processes and the mechanism of "memory" will be elucidated – will they be transparent as a result?²

¹ M. Augé, *Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains* (Paris: Aubier, 1994).

² *Connecting Brains and Society – The present and future of brain science: what is possible, what is desirable?* Synthesis and Proceedings of European Workshop, 22 and 23 April 2004, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (Amsterdam: Rathenau Instituut, King Baudouin Foundation, 2005).