

## 'ORIGINAL NONSENSE': ART AND GENIUS IN KANT'S AESTHETIC

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The words 'original nonsense' are taken from §46 of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* in which Kant examines the nature of genius in relation to art. Kant offers no explanation of his use of the term 'nonsense'; at least, he does not in the immediate context of its first appearance. He uses it again in §50, almost at the end of the discussion of genius, but again without any definite elucidation. Most commentators, though not all, tend to repeat Kant's usage without comment, while subjecting almost every other concept in Kant's argument to exhaustive scrutiny. This practice suggests that what Kant means strikes most people as obvious, though so far as I can tell 'unsinn' is an unusual term for Kant to use at all, let alone in the third *Critique*. Of course, it cannot be understood without considering the other terms in Kant's discussion of art and genius: my hope is that it will be enlightening to confront them with questions about nonsense.

According to Ernst Cassirer, Kant's account of genius stands 'at the crossroads of all aesthetic discussions in the eighteenth century'.<sup>1</sup> Two of the roads in question here

are the neo-classical emphasis on the rules of art and the romantic notion of genius as 'a power of producing excellencies, which are out of the reach of the rules of art'.<sup>2</sup> Kant's presentation of the problem in §46 reflects his view of judgements of taste argued for earlier, that the judgement that something is beautiful is an aesthetic rather than a logical judgement (§1); that is, it concerns an individual's response to an object as opposed to an attribution of a property to an object. In judging that something is beautiful, I do not subsume the object under a concept, I do not apprehend the object in accordance with a rule for the application of a predicate. Rather, the determining ground of such a judgement is a feeling of pleasure resulting from the harmonious free play of the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding. Judgements of taste, then, are not determinable by concepts (§35); or, as Kant sometimes puts it, 'There can . . . be no rule according to which any one is to be compelled to recognize anything as beautiful' (§8).<sup>3</sup>

This analysis runs into a problem when Kant considers the nature of art. For works of art are artefacts, which means to Kant that they are made in accordance with rules for the achievement of an end or goal specified in terms of a concept, and that in our appreciation of them we must recognize them as such, as works made for some end or goal. This leads to a dilemma: either we estimate works of art as works, in which case we violate the conditions for judging things to be beautiful, or we judge artworks to be beautiful, in which case we violate the conditions for estimating them as artefacts, as works of

<sup>2</sup> J. Reynolds in *Discourses on Art*, Robert R. Wark (ed.) (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1981), VI, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Unless stated otherwise, translations are from J.C. Meredith's edition of *The Critique of Judgment* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1969).

<sup>1</sup> *Kant's Life and Thought* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1981), p. 320.

art. Kant resolves the dilemma by employing the notion of genius. Works of fine art are products of genius, and 'genius is the innate mental aptitude *through which* nature gives the rule to art' (§46). Having introduced this definition, Kant raises the question whether it is adequate to the concept usually associated with the word 'genius'. I think it is clear that it is not, for it is not the case that everything we are prepared to call a work of art is a work of genius. Ordinarily, we think of genius as producing very special works of art, great works as opposed to merely good or mediocre works. This is how I will employ the expression 'product of genius', taking for granted that Kant has established a necessary connection between the concept of genius and the concept of fine art.

Kant proceeds to elucidate his notion of genius in four numbered points, the first two of which are as follows. Genius

(1) is a *talent* for producing that for which no definite rule can be given: and not an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule; and . . . consequently *originality* must be its primary property.

(2) Since there may also be original nonsense, its products must at the same time be models, i.e. be *exemplary*; and, consequently, though not themselves derived from imitation, they must serve that purpose for others, i.e. as a standard or rule of estimating.

The combination of these two sentences seems to me to be a sufficient justification for Schopenhauer's reference in the first sentence of his doctoral thesis to 'the marvellous Kant'. They indicate the way in which Kant resolves the eighteenth century's conflict over genius and

rules in art. The products of genius are not the result of the application of rules, no matter how ingenious the rules or their applications: this means that the judgement of artistic beauty is not constrained by rule. However, the product of genius, the work of fine art, is not thereby arbitrary or accidental, for it must serve as a rule in relation to future work; that is, the artefact cannot count as a work of genius, as a work of fine art, if it cannot function as a rule within the arts.

The notion of originality is itself a richly complex one, but at least part of what Kant means when he says that it must be the primary property of genius is novelty. 'Everyone is agreed', says Kant, 'on the point of the complete opposition between genius and the *spirit of imitation*' (§47). A work of genius is not an imitation of any existing work, it is something new, an invention, an innovation. Given this, then Kant's second point, that there can be original nonsense, seems eminently plausible. Being novel or new is certainly not a guarantee of being good or great. But I am intrigued by the fact that Kant does not say just this. He chooses to say that something new or novel may be nonsense. My question is, with what right does Kant employ such a term in this setting? What justifies him in saying this?

One commentator who does not ignore this question is Timothy Gould, in his essay 'The Audience of Originality'.<sup>4</sup> Gould explores a suggestion made by Ted Cohen that 'a metaphor may be the best available example of what Kant called products of genius'. Thus, a successful metaphor is to be construed as a new way of making sense: it cannot be made sense of according to

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Gould, 'The Audience of Originality' in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, T. Cohen and P. Guyer (eds) (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1985).

existing rules and yet it does make sense, and in doing so extends our resources for making sense. Gould puts the point as follows: 'The provision of a sense not guaranteed by old rules is either exemplary – and followed, as though it were a new rule – or else it fails' (p. 185). An unsuccessful metaphor is, then, a failure in the attempt to create a new sense, and so is a candidate for the title of original nonsense: though, because of the associations with Lewis Carroll and errant metaphysicians, Gould prefers to talk of original senselessness (p. 186). He goes on:

For reasons which I take to be internal to the category, it is hard to give examples. . . . The most conspicuous might be drawn from recent times, from the works or effects of Dada, of some surrealists, or of certain of the so-called minimalists (loc. cit.).

Despite his sensitive treatment of the matter, Gould concludes that metaphor is not the best example of the products of genius, for a bad metaphor, in being banal or forced, is a less radical failure in making sense than failure in art (p. 187). I am in agreement with Gould on this point, but I also want to go further in rejecting the example of metaphor. Take a much-used illustration, Romeo's remark, 'Juliet is the sun'. Taken metaphorically, it is pregnant with sense; taken literally, it is a kind of nonsense, it is like a category mistake. On some theories, its being literal nonsense is a condition of its success as a metaphor. But this structure does not fit Kant's analysis of the products of genius. Kant's view is that, since there can be original nonsense, then the products of genius must be exemplary as well as novel. That is, as I read it, being exemplary excludes being nonsense, and vice versa. I see no ground here, at least, for thinking Kant would accept that from one point of

view works of fine art are nonsense and that, at the same time, from some other point of view they are exemplary. What is more, I do not believe that the example of metaphor, as elaborated by Gould, actually throws much light on the crucial question of what determines sense and nonsense in this context. Thus, we are told that a successful metaphor does not make sense in terms of existing rules. But this is also true of nonsense. The difference is that metaphor yields a new sense by providing a new rule, whereas nonsense does not. What needs answering here is what it is that enables us to establish this distinction, how we identify sense as opposed to nonsense. And one thing seems clear, which is that it is not by reference to rules of sense that we make this identification. But in that case we have not been given anything in this example of metaphor which advances our understanding of Kant's view of genius.

Finally, I want to maintain that the example of metaphor draws attention away from what seems to me to be one of Kant's great insights about the nature of art. Metaphors do not, normally, relate to one another in the way that works of art do. Ordinary, everyday metaphors, as opposed to metaphors in works of art, are embedded in conversational contexts, taking as their point of departure the literal and non-metaphorical conventions of the language. Works of art, however, relate to one another within various artistic traditions. A new work of art takes as its point of departure previous achievements within the art form. It is precisely this which I think Kant expressed in the passage I have quoted about originality and exemplarity. Every work of art which is the product of genius stands in a twofold relation to other works – being original relates a work to its predecessors; being exemplary relates a work to its successors. Works of art, then, are essentially embedded

in traditions constituted by works of art. This seems to be very different from the case of metaphor. Indeed, it would surely be extraordinary if Cohen's claim were correct; if, that is, metaphors, and not works of art, provided the best examples of Kant's account of the products of genius. Although in §49 Kant does employ figures of speech in illustration of the nature of aesthetic ideas, the generation of which is distinctive of artistic genius, this, as we shall see, is not to allow that metaphor constitutes a product of genius in the relevant sense.

I now want to look more closely at Kant's idea that nature gives the rule to art. He points out in §47 that the artist cannot formulate a rule to serve as a precept for the construction of the work, for this would undermine the autonomy of the work and of the judgement of taste upon the work. 'Rather', says Kant, 'the rule must be abstracted from what the artist has done, i.e. from the product, which others may use to test their own talent, letting it serve them as their model, not to be copied but to be imitated. How that is possible is difficult to explain'.<sup>5</sup> That there is a difficulty here can be seen from the clause 'not to be copied but to be imitated' – this appears to conflict with a point mentioned earlier, that genius is completely opposed to the spirit of imitation. In fact, Kant's difficulty here is mirrored in a curious muddle in the manuscript.<sup>6</sup> Initially, the manuscript read 'not to be imitated but to be imitated (nicht der Nachahmung, sondern der Nachahmung)', being subsequently corrected to read 'not to be copied (Nachmachung) but to be imitated (Nachahmung)'. This is the reading adopted by the

translators Bernard<sup>7</sup> and Pluhar.<sup>8</sup> However, Meredith introduces a conjecture at this point, his translation reading 'not for imitation (Nachahmung), but for following (Nachfolge)'. This brings the passage into line with what Kant says elsewhere in the *Critique*. At §32, he says, 'Following (Nachfolge) which has reference to a precedent, and not imitation (Nachahmung), is the proper expression for all influence which the products of an exemplary *author* may exert upon others. . .'. At §49, ' . . . the product of a genius . . . is an example, not for imitation . . . but to be followed by another genius . . .'

I think this textual muddle partly reflects the complexity of the story Kant has to tell about the relationship of works of genius to future works, but also partly a lack of clarity in his thinking about that relationship. The complexity concerns the difference between the way in which works of genius relate to future geniuses and the way in which works of genius relate to future artists who lack genius. The lack of clarity concerns the numerous notions Kant employs to describe these differing relationships. He talks of abstracting (or gathering) a rule or rules from the products of genius, but whereas it makes sense to talk of following rules, it makes no sense to talk of imitating rules: that would explain the clause 'not for imitation but for following'. Kant also talks about the product of genius serving as a model, but whereas it makes sense to talk of imitating a model, it does not make much sense to talk of following a model: that would help to explain the clause, 'not to be copied but to be imitated'. Kant talks, too, about the product of genius being an example for others, and it makes sense to talk of following someone's example as well as

<sup>5</sup> *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar's translation (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177, n. 43.

<sup>7</sup> *Critique*, trans J.H. Bernard (Hafner Press: New York, 1951).

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*

imitating someone's example, though these perhaps do not necessarily amount to the same thing. It is with respect to this latter pair of expressions that we can begin to appreciate the difference between artistic genius and artistic non-genius.

Given that genius is opposed to the spirit of imitation, we can say that genius follows the example of another genius whereas the non-genius imitates the example, the product of genius. Of course, neither goes in for slavish copying of previous artistic products, though the non-genius will imitate the style or the plot or the composition, and so on, found in earlier work. In this way, when a particular work or the work of a particular group of artists is taken as the example for imitation, there arises something like a movement or school. 'That is to say', says Kant, 'a methodical instruction according to rules, collected, so far as the circumstances admit, from such products of genius and their peculiarities. And, to that extent, fine art is for such persons a matter of imitation, for which nature, through the medium of a genius, gave the rule' (§49). One might question Kant's emphasis on rules extracted from the works themselves; not that I deny the possibility – the rules of harmony dictated in music schools would be one instance of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, imitation does not require the formulating or fixing of rules in that sense. Here, Kant's other notions – exemplars, models – come into play. Particular works of art can assume a normative function in so far as a teacher, or apprentice, refers to them as a guide in the making of his own work. 'Do it like *this!*' might be a typical command, accompanied by a pointing gesture. In this way, a work of art can serve as a rule without a rule having to be abstracted or extracted from it.

The genius, qua genius, is supposed to be above or beyond all this. His work is brought about neither by

imitation nor by following rules. And yet he does follow the example set by previous products of genius. It is just this which, not surprisingly, Kant found difficult to describe. At one point he puts it like this:

the product of a genius . . . is an example . . . to be followed by another genius – one whom it arouses to a sense of his own originality in putting freedom from the constraint of rules so into force in his art, that for art itself a new rule is won . . . (§49).

The work of genius, then, inspires – to use a word familiar in this context (and one that Kant himself uses in §§48 and 50) – another artist to create another work of genius. In this respect, the work of genius plays a different role from that which it does for the non-genius. It is still exemplary, but what it exemplifies is not a rule or a style but an achievement. In Kant's term, it is a standard, a standard of excellence, a benchmark, a yardstick by reference to which subsequent achievements are measured. This is the position Beethoven's nine symphonies hold in the symphonic tradition.

There is an interesting correspondence between the views just outlined and Wittgenstein's views as expressed in his 1938 lectures on aesthetics. Having talked about rules in art and about judgements of correctness, Wittgenstein says:

When we talk of a Symphony of Beethoven we don't talk of correctness. Entirely different things enter. One wouldn't talk of appreciating the *tremendous* things in Art. In certain styles in Architecture a door is correct, and the thing is you appreciate it. But in the case of a Gothic Cathedral what we do is not at all to find it correct – it plays an entirely different role with us. The entire *game* is different. It is as different as to judge a

human being and on the one hand to say 'He behaves well' and, on the other hand, 'He made a great impression on me.'<sup>9</sup>

It seems to me that these remarks, in themselves somewhat puzzling, are illuminated by Kant's account of works of genius which set standards of correctness but which themselves are not assessed in terms of correctness. Wittgenstein's analogy of the rules of etiquette emerges again in his reflections on his capacities as an artist. 'In my artistic activities,' he writes, 'I really have nothing but *good manners*';<sup>10</sup> and again, '... the house I built for Gretl is the product of a decidedly sensitive ear and *good manners*. . .'<sup>11</sup>

Wittgenstein's etiquette analogy does suggest a potential difficulty for the Kantian account of genius. For it might well appear that the person who makes a great impression on us need pay no attention to the rules of etiquette – behaving well, conforming to the rules, is a matter for the meek, the faint-hearted. The great man, the genius, creates his own rules. This is a difficulty Kant explicitly confronts: his solution to it brings us closer to an understanding of what he might mean by original nonsense. Kant writes

seeing that originality of talent is one (though not the sole) essential factor that goes to make up the character of genius, shallow minds fancy that the best evidence they can give of their being full-blown geniuses is by emancipating themselves from all academic constraint of rules, in the belief that one cuts

a finer figure on the back of an ill-tempered than of a trained horse' (§47; cf. §49).

Kant's image of cutting a fine figure nicely parallels Wittgenstein's analogy of a person making a great impression: neither amounts to mere conformity but equally neither can be achieved by disregarding all rules. As Wittgenstein put it in reply to an objection, '... every composer changed the rules, but the variation was very slight; not all the rules were changed. The music was still good by a great many of the old rules . . .'<sup>12</sup> (The context of this remark makes clear that Wittgenstein would have been prepared to accept the qualification, 'every *great* composer'.)

Here we need to remember a point I made at the beginning, that works of art are works, hence, in Kant's view, made in accordance with rules. He endorses this in §47:

Even though mechanical and fine art are very different from each other, since the first is based merely on diligence and learning but the second on genius, yet there is no fine art that does not have as its essential condition something mechanical, which can be encompassed by rules and complied with, and hence has an element of academic correctness (Pluhar's translation).

To accommodate this, Kant makes two crucial distinctions, the first between the material and the form of art. 'Genius can do no more than furnish rich *material* for products of fine art; its elaboration and its *form* require a talent academically trained, so that it may be employed in such a way as to stand the test of judgment' (§47). Corresponding to this distinction, there is the further

<sup>9</sup> *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> *Culture and Value*, trans P. Winch (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 6.

distinction between genius and taste. Genius is a productive faculty or ability, creating new ideas; whereas taste is a critical rather than a productive faculty (§48). 'Taste . . . is the discipline of genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it orderly and polished . . .' (§50). We can unite these two distinctions by recognizing that taste is the ability, which may be acquired by learning, to mould the form of the work of art in accordance with the academic constraint of rules.

There is a remarkable similarity between Kant and Wittgenstein on this topic of genius and taste. In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein thinks of genius in terms of originality, of inventiveness,<sup>13</sup> and contrasts this with taste.

The faculty of 'taste' [says Wittgenstein] cannot create a new structure, it can only make adjustments to one that already exists. Taste loosens and tightens screws, it does not build a new piece of machinery. . . . Giving birth is not its affair. Taste makes things ACCEPTABLE. . . . Even the most *refined* taste has *nothing* to do with creative power.<sup>14</sup>

And in an image reminiscent of Kant's trained horse, Wittgenstein says that 'within all great art there is a WILD animal: tamed'.<sup>15</sup> This seems to imply that for Wittgenstein great art involves both originality and taste, but this is explicitly denied in a later entry, ' . . . I believe that a great creator has no need of taste; his child is born into the world fully formed'.<sup>16</sup>

If Wittgenstein is equivocal on this issue, Kant is not.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., p. 36; pp. 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-60.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

[I]nsofar as art shows genius it does indeed deserve to be called inspired, but it deserves to be called fine art only in so far as it shows taste. Hence what we must look to above all, when we judge art as fine art, is taste, at least as an indispensable condition (§50; Pluhar's translation).

This makes clear that when talking of the products of genius as exemplary, Kant has in mind works which possess both genius *and* taste, genius in the context of this latter contrast being understood more narrowly as the material of the work (or the soul of the work, as Kant says at one point, §49). Figures of speech, such as metaphor, occurring within works of art, would count as products of genius in this narrow sense in so far as they exhibit aesthetic ideas; but it is only to the work of fine art as a whole, to the product of genius in the wider or fuller sense, that Kant attributes the tradition-embedded features of originality and exemplarity.

As we have seen, not all works of art are works of genius; thus, Kant allows that 'in order [for a work] to be beautiful, it is not strictly necessary that it be rich and original in ideas' (§50; Pluhar's translation). There may, then, be works which exhibit taste but not genius. Since taste is a necessary condition of fine art, it seems that there cannot be works which exhibit genius but not taste. In §48, Kant appears to confirm that this is so when he says that 'in a would-be work of fine art we may frequently recognize genius without taste and in another taste without genius'.

In fact, 'genius without taste' is a possible candidate for what is meant by 'original nonsense' – a soul without a body, as it were (see §43). It appears to complete the categorization which Kant employs – that is, works of

genius, works of non-genius, and original nonsense. Broken down into 'faculties', that yields 'genius and taste', 'taste without genius', and 'genius without taste'. But this is too simple: there is another kind of work which Kant refers to and which is also a candidate for what is meant by 'original nonsense', viz. the work of a bungler (Pluhar) or tyro (Meredith) which exhibits neither genius nor taste (see §§47 and 49). Such work is marked by idiosyncrasy and eccentricity in consequence of the maker's attempt to ape the originality of genius. But whereas in the product of genius 'a deviation from the common rule' is a merit, and shows 'courage', since it is demanded of the artist in making something 'appropriate' or 'adequate' to his idea (§49), in the work of the bungler it is merely ridiculous, empty-headed (§47), attention-seeking (§49). Equally, though an action which in one context may show courage, an outwardly similar action in a different context may be simply foolhardy.

There is a strong case for taking the work of a bungler to be what Kant means by 'original nonsense'. Nevertheless, there is also a case to be made for 'genius without taste' in view of the fact that Kant uses the distinctive word 'nonsense' once more, and only once more, at just the point where he should if this is what he meant by 'original nonsense'. In §50, having claimed that taste is indispensable, he goes on to say that 'in lawless freedom imagination, with all its wealth, produces nothing but nonsense; the power of judgement, on the other hand, is the faculty that makes it consonant with the understanding'. If taste, exercised in judgement, is what brings lawfulness into the ideas of imagination and so makes possible a work of fine art, a product of genius in the full sense, then the absence of taste will result in a work potentially rich in ideas but disorganized to the

point of unintelligibility. The proposal here is intuitively appealing. It is the notion of an artist whose work is imaginative and full of invention, though too full, exhibiting no evident consistency or coherence, or it is arbitrary and whimsical, or it is one in which we might think of the artist as having lost control of his material, as being overwhelmed by it all. 'If only', we think, 'he had the discipline, the strength of character and will to bring order out of this chaos.' ('One might say', wrote Wittgenstein, "Genius is *talent exercised with courage*".)<sup>17</sup> To quote again a sentence I used earlier, now continuing the passage:

Taste, like judgment in general, is the discipline (or corrective) of genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it orderly or polished; but at the same time it gives it guidance, directing and controlling its flight, so that it may preserve its character of purposiveness. It introduces a clearness and order into the plenitude of thought, and in so doing gives stability to the ideas, and qualifies them at once for permanent and universal approval, for being followed by others, and for a continually progressive culture (§50).

Without the discipline of taste, the work may be original but nonsensical.

If, as I have suggested, there are two plausible candidates for the title of 'original nonsense', I see no need to eliminate one in favour of the other. The distinction between different kinds of nonsense – paradoxical as that sounds – corresponds to a distinction between different kinds of artistic failure. One is irredeemably vacuous, the result of naive incompetence or outrageous effrontery; the other is a matter of unrealized potential,

<sup>17</sup> *Culture and Value*, p. 38.



a genuine attempt at artistic innovation which can be taken seriously and from which something can be learned – in short, an exemplary failure. Earlier, I quoted Timothy Gould to the effect that it is hard to give examples of original nonsense for reasons which are internal to the category. I am not sure what is meant by this, unless it is just that what we need to look for are examples of failures, albeit perhaps heroic failures, whereas it tends to be successful works which are deposited on, and not submerged by, the sands of time. Gould's own examples of artistic nonsense are controversial, and inevitably so; though it seems to me that the works of Dada, surrealism and minimalism all too often lack the kind of complexity and potential which I have characterized as belonging to genius without taste. As an example of that latter category, no less controversial, I offer Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.

If there is a shortage of examples of original nonsense, there is, ironically, no shortage of works which appear, or did once appear, to be original nonsense. It was in these terms that people, critics as well as the general public, reacted to artistic innovations throughout the nineteenth century – to Turner's paintings for instance, to the first impressionist exhibitions, to the post-impressionists, etc. These works often struck their first spectators to be the work of bunglers, patternless, pointless, unruly and chaotic displays of colour. Even if it is not the fate of genius to be misunderstood, on Kant's view it is not surprising that it often is, at least to begin with. The appearance of nonsense is dissipated, if at all, through the exercise of taste, the critical faculty. This involves not merely discerning some kind of order or pattern in the work – there is a fine illustration of this in relation to a Jackson Pollock painting in David Bell's recent paper,

'The Art of Judgment'<sup>18</sup> – but also seeing the work as continuous with accepted examples of the relevant kinds of art. Thus, Turner was made sense of by Ruskin's placing him within the landscape tradition running from seventeenth-century Dutch painting to Constable.

I have reverted to talking, as I did at the beginning of this paper, of taste as exercised by the audience of art, whereas in the middle of the paper I talked of taste as an aspect of artistic capability. This reflects the variation in Kant's way of talking about taste as between the Analytic of the Beautiful and the sections on genius in the Analytic of the Sublime. If this looks like inconsistency, then it needs to be remembered that in estimating works of art we are involved in making judgements of dependent beauty rather than judgements of free beauty (§§16 and 45; cf. §48). This means that in judging a work to be beautiful, to be a work of fine art, 'A concept of what the thing is intended to be must . . . be laid at its basis' (§48), a concept which guided the production of the work. At its most general, that concept is 'work of fine art', but that in turn will supervene on more specific concepts such as 'painting', 'literary work', 'sculpture', 'piece of music'; and, more specifically still, 'poem', 'novel', 'landscape', 'portrait', and so on. These concepts do not fully determine our judgement of the work, any more than they do its production: '. . . a mode, as it were, of execution, in respect of which one remains to a certain extent free, notwithstanding being otherwise tied down to a definite end' (§48). The explanation of this is that our grasp of such concepts, both for the artist and the audience, is given through examples.

. . . [T]he artist, [says Kant] having practised and

<sup>18</sup> *Mind* (1987), pp. 236–7.

corrected his taste by a variety of examples from nature or art, controls his work and, after many, and often laborious attempts to satisfy taste, finds the form which commends itself to him (§48).

Similarly, the exercise of taste in judging art will involve coming to see a work as a further example, congruent with the old, in which the achieved form is 'adequate' or 'appropriate' (§48) to the rich and original play of the artist's ideas. Our inability to see a work in this way, to see how it can fit in, leaves us with the judgement of original nonsense.

My emphasis on seeing a work of art in relation to past works might appear to be in conflict with Kant's view of a work of art as exemplary, serving as a rule for future following. But there is no real conflict. A rule points forward in virtue of the way it organizes (our sense of) the past. And it is entirely characteristic of great art that it changes the ways in which we appreciate the art of the past. The point is made superbly by F.R. Leavis in his comments on Jane Austen:

She not only makes tradition for those coming after, but her achievement has for us a retroactive effect: as we look back beyond her we see in what goes before, and see because of her, potentialities and significances brought out in such a way, that for us, she creates the tradition we see leading down to her.<sup>19</sup>

It is as if Jane Austen's work provides a rule for a new ordering of 'the existing monuments' (to use Eliot's famous phrase), an ordering which itself will influence, and be modified by, future literary innovations.

Now it might seem that Kant's notion of genius giving

the rule to art could be undermined by Kripkean rule-scepticism. After all, it might be said, any one work can be thought of as following or fitting in with any other; and, if this is so, then the distinction between artistic sense and nonsense would appear to be arbitrary. However, the ground of this distinction in Kant's aesthetic is his account of the human cognitive faculties and of their harmonious interplay. Not just anything can count as a beautiful work of art; although, crucially, what is and what is not cannot be specified in advance of particular human responses. In the last analysis, Kant's 'continually progressive culture' (§50) rests on 'agreement in judgments'.

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