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Beauty as Utter Meaninglessness

While once observing artworks strewn about my super-crowded backroom, Kim Light casually remarked "Sue, you really are obsessed with beauty, aren't you?" I was a bit thrown off, for beauty was still a rather dirty word. I casually glanced around the office to absorb her vista, and somehow mustered up the courage to respond "Well, yes, I guess I am." After she left, I realized that her comment was probably meant more as a put-down, than as a compliment, for she obviously deemed more merit in the transgressive artists that she was exhibiting such as Kim Dingle, Gregory Green or Keith Boadwee, than in the unusually pleasant artists that I loved and sponsored. Her observation had left me feeling a little guilty, as though I had taken the easy road, electing to show obviously "beautiful" works, while her gallery artists were disrupting the system. But the main point that artists have continually reinforced over the years, is that there's more transgression and criticality in affirmation than in purposeful disruption, for it takes courage and wisdom to make art whose presence one unconsciously desires.

Years ago, David Pagel wrote "The Politics of Negativity," in which he distinguished those artists who "entertain the possibility of utter meaninglessness from those who attempt to control this impulse toward negativity by channeling it into political activism" (*Art Issues*, Summer 1991). Besides the unforgettable Pagel philosophy "Transience is no tragedy," which appeared in his first *Los Angeles Times* review, this essay has remained his most influential and daring. But, in re-reading it, I realize that my memory was misinformed, since I remember him delineating art made from a positive, or creative desire, and art made from a negative, or reactionary position. All is not lost on this error. For although only one category exists, he

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divided negativity into acts of refusal and reactive politics. Regarding the former, he observed, "these profoundly negative endeavors risk incoherence in their radical antipathy to society, in their gamble that their audiences or viewers will never comprehend what they have to say." Somehow, my brain simply refused to store such courageous acts of refusal under negativity. As long as negativity is traceable to "radical antipathy," it is still rather affirmative. One of Wittgenstein's aphorism's that floats about in my memory bank is: "Courage is always original" (*Culture and Value*, 1980, p. 36e), so courage could never remain filed under negativity.

Beauty as Pleasure Without Interest

This is not the only memory problem to have a positive outcome. While I am currently unable to locate the source, try as I have, I somehow acquired an awkward translation of Kant's primary point in his *Critique of Judgment*.

That is beautiful which gives us pleasure without interest.

Historically, the "without interest" portion of this concept has given philosophers much to ponder over the past 150 years. Had I read the following translation of Kant's first moment (of which there are four in total) initially, I might have never stumbled upon a theory of generosity.

Explanation of the Beautiful Resulting from the First Moment

Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Hafner Press, 1951, p.45).

Prior to this concluding remark, he proposed, "Everyone must admit that a judgment about beauty, in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgment of taste. We must not be in the least prejudiced in favor of the existence of the things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, in order to play the judge in things of taste" (*CJ*, p. 39). It seems that Kant's careful instructions to judge "without interest" foreshadowed Marx's notion of self-deception

inherent in false consciousness and the 20th century theorists' obsession with ideology. His notion of aesthetic judgment has proved a valiant attempt at undermining humanity's innate prejudice and vulnerability to self-deception.

Having these two passages at our fingertips, we are better grounded to access the further implications of the anonymous simplification of Kant's conception of beauty in terms of "pleasure without interest." In the absence of such a context, I misinterpreted "without interest" to mean literally without cost, or interest paid (as in usury) by the beholder. Having grown up in a Moslem culture where usury, or making money from money, is strictly forbidden, it made sense that it could be virtuous to give without demanding something in return. That is to say, viewing beautiful art could be analogous to receiving a gift. Intent on framing beauty in terms devoid of gaze aesthetics, it seemed plausible to conclude that whenever an artist acts from duty (in a Kantian sense), the viewer is the beneficiary of the artist's generosity. Kantian duty requires each person to act as one wished everyone to act, irrespective of any payoff.

Each generation's aesthetic contributions can be discussed in terms of Kantian duty, that is to say, each generation accidentally alters the art practice. For example, when Pollock began painting on the floor, he probably didn't request others to throw away their easels and get down on their haunches, but they did anyway. Kant viewed "interest" as a gain, so my conception of beauty as a gift would appear to be in jeopardy, should I continue to claim that it's based on a genuine interpretation of Kant. But I would argue that the two views are compatible only if the gift is a sort of happy accident, presented and received unintentionally, wholly without expectation of its inherent value. For if beauty is to persist as a revolutionary mechanism (Kant's "purposiveness without purpose" characterized by the Third Moment), it cannot be visible from the onset.

Explanation of the Beautiful Derived from this Third Moment

Beauty is the form of the purposiveness of an object, so far as this is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose (CJ, p. 73).

Conceiving beauty in terms of an artist's unexpected generosity survived as a kind of working model for understanding beauty in terms other than Classical Beauty (the ideal of perfection), until I

realized that the viewer has also demonstrated an unintentional generosity.

The Pleasant as Pleasure With Interest

Beauty with a capital B has always privileged an artwork's outward appearance, coupled with some authoritarian ideological conception of the beautiful that has only served to oppress other equally legitimate conceptions of beauty. I would argue that the main reason why beauty became such a dirty word during this century is that we have historically associated beauty with authoritarian programs, such as the Nazis' deployment of seduction, the discourse of glamour and fashion, the spell of advertising, and the glory of capitalism. Of course, bewilderment would befall Kant should he ever learn that beauty was misassociated with such heinous "interested" acts of conscious manipulation. Beauty and freedom are entwined, which is perhaps the second reason why beauty is so rare. Under the duress of capitalism and its related ideological state apparatuses, beauty has almost suffocated.

The continual abuse of the category of beauty stems from our culture's privileging the gaze, which is why I cringe everytime I hear our doyen of beauty, Dave Hickey, remark "I know what I like when I see it." In *The Invisible Dragon*, Hickey rather cavalierly decrees that "beauty was the agency that caused visual pleasure in the beholder" (p. 11). Poor dear-old Kant. Now beauty is an agency, hardly purposeless, and someone out there is extolling the virtue of beauty in terms of the efficacy of the image. "[A]ny theory of images that was not grounded in the pleasure of the beholder begged the question of their efficacy and doomed itself to inconsequence." Yes, efficacy is relevant to a theory of images, but beauty's efficacy can only be recognized in hindsight. Beauty's power lies in its invisibility, if it is to prove accidentally revolutionary (the moment of self-affirmation, refusal, Situationist detournement, resistance... whatever you want to call it).

Regarding the discovery of beauty's efficacy in hindsight, Kant observed the following:

Thus we can at least observe a purposiveness according to a form, without basing it on a purpose (as the material of the

nexus finalis), and remark it in objects, although only by reflection (*CJ*, p. 55).

To Hickey's credit, had he either remarked "I'm always surprised by what I end up liking" or viewed vision as the agency that caused "satisfaction" in the beholder (given an appropriate definition of satisfaction), I might have bonded with him on the spot. But, to say that beauty is the agency of visual pleasure reduces beauty to charm, which is "with interest." Kant had very specific points to make when it comes to charm, seduction, glamour and other enticing visual mechanisms.

But as regards the beauty attributed to the object on account of its form, to suppose it to be capable of augmentation through the charm of the object is a common error one very prejudicial to genuine, uncorrupted, well-founded taste. We can doubtless add these charms to beauty, in order to interest the mind by the representation of the object, apart from the bare satisfaction [received], and thus they may serve as a recommendation of taste and its cultivation, especially when it is yet crude and unexercised. But they actually do injury to the judgment of taste if they draw attention to themselves as the grounds for judging beauty (*CJ*, pp. 60-61).

Kant clearly distinguished the pleasant ("the satisfaction of the pleasant is bound up with interest" & "That which pleases the senses in sensation is "pleasant" (*CJ*, p. 39) from beauty. Any discussion of enticing visual mechanisms is rather a discussion of the pleasant, and not beauty. When visual pleasure is ancillary to the absurdity of an artist's particularly profound effort, beauty perseveres. Perhaps beauty's bad name can be attributed to a third reason, the conflation of the pleasant with the beautiful. Too much visual pleasure was the agency that caused a bellyache in the beholder. Contrarily, beauty's variability never satiates.

Devoid of interest, beauty's efficacy (unlike that of seduction, visual pleasure, charm or glamour) isn't recognizable at the onset, so its relationship to the art market is a moot point. Nonetheless, Hickey, the Milton Friedman (*Free to Choose*) of the contemporary art world, pushed his conception of beauty toward the most "interested" arena, the art market:

[W]e might say that the 'most efficient beautiful image' is that which valorizes the most egregious content to the

wealthiest, most powerful and influential beholders exclusively; and in this category, I think we must acknowledge Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*—a painting that we must regard either as a magnificent 'formal breakthrough' (whatever that is) or, more realistically, as a manifestation of Picasso's dazzling insight into the shifting values of his target market (pp. 58-59).

Although he laments this event as the "cornerstone of the first great therapeutic institution" (Alfred Barr's MOMA), this story is meant to exemplify Hickey's "rhetoric of beauty," which politicizes "the artist's radical, infantile wishes...makes them publically available, and proposes them in fact as social options" . While the rhetoric of beauty attests to beauty's revolutionary prowess, framing Picasso's "realistic" intentions more as purposeful purposelessness than as purposeless purposiveness is hugely problematic. The latter would imply that Picasso's sales were accidental and that his actions remained "without interest." It is no wonder that Picasso marks the end of this century's conscious interest in beauty. In an art historical sense, Cubism officially negated retinal beauty. "Picasso passed on a heritage of 'ugliness'. That is, beauty would be determined by different standards, and the pretty, the beautiful, the lovely could no longer define art. The break with academic 'beauty' was complete" (Frederich Karl, *Moderns and Modernism*, 1985, p. 282).

Figuring out how to sever the viewer's gaze from a conception of beauty has been a primary intellectual enquiry over the past three years. Not only has western culture spent too much time "looking at" art and valuing it from the perspective of the dominant culture, but there also seems to be a notion of "interest" built into the desire for an immediate response that people casually associate with beauty. According to Kant, neither are examples of beauty. For if judging as beautiful those works that facilitate your practice of oppressing women, minorities and the poor, then there is Kantian "interest," in terms of gain, incentive or motivation. Similarly, if viewing an artwork excites your body, but leaves your mind dry, then there is Kantian "interest," for you're earning something hard-and-fast when gazing upon such an object. Of one thing I'm certain, finding beauty is a ridiculously slow courtship, a reflective dalliance between experience and judgment.

In contrast to the idea of an artwork being a gift recognized

only in hindsight, most beholder/artwork models entail some notion of even exchange, posting the costs up front and eliminating any possibility for an excess of generosity. In *The Invisible Dragon*, Hickey draws the following analogy:

The rhetoric of beauty tells the story of the beholder who, like Masoch's victim, contracts his own submission—having established, by free consent, a reciprocal, contractual alliance with the image. The signature of this contract, of course, is beauty. On the one hand, its rhetoric enfranchises the beholder; on the other hand, it seductively proposes a content that is, hopefully, outrageous and possible...and...is not presumed to be an end in itself (p. 63).

Even metaphorically framing the beholder as a masochist is hugely problematic, for as Hickey states "by negotiating the conditions of his own servitude and 'educating' his persecutor, Masoch's victim dominates the scene of his own submission and derives from it a yield of pleasure" (p. 62). This may be an eye-catching analogy, but as long as Hickey names servitude or submission as the beholder's cost and a yield of pleasure as his/her gain, the beholder has consciously entered a contract in expectation of some predetermined gain. The very notion of such an investment presumes foreknowledge of a return. Hickey's contractual alliance rather exemplifies Kant's conception of the pleasant.

Beauty as Purposiveness without Purpose

Contrarily, beauty is available only when the beholder has acted in a mutually generous manner, and experienced the artwork "without interest," or without expectation of some gain. It is significant that this sentence be in past tense, because when we go looking for beauty, we will only find the pleasant. One of Kant's preconditions for "without interest" is that experience precedes judgment. Beauty's revolutionary capacity subsists in its capacity to thwart knowledge, so "looking for" objects that fulfill our conception of beauty merely affirms our taste. Given our rather selfish society, one may argue that Kant's particularizing beauty is not only irrelevant, but that it also sets up such an impossible ideal, that it eliminates any possibility for beauty. Rather, it attests to the rarity of beauty.

We constantly swing between polar ideals—"the best things

in life are free" (the left) and "there's no such thing as a free lunch" (the right). Before we go on to a further explanation of beauty as a gift, let's return to our discussion of "disinterested satisfaction," which is the actual translation, even though it's discussed as "without interest." For obvious reasons, some cultural theorists have interpreted "disinterested satisfaction" to mean indifference, to which they relate well, because Duchamp once said that there is only art—not good, bad or indifferent. Duchamp's notion of indifference relates quite nicely to Pagel's affirmative construction of negativity (utter meaningless); whereby, art serves a purposiveness without purpose. Such art exemplifies Kantian duty, because it was created from a site of unconscious desire, free from a moral imperative and without anticipation of its audience's approval.

Perhaps, Kant would be mortified to find that his unprejudicial ideal of indifference would become so twisted into the cool indifference familiar to our late-capitalist consumer society. This cool indifference has often been valorized as detachment, so familiar to Formalist genres such as minimalism, opaque painting and ironic abstraction, and most post-conceptual art practices. No one could advocate detachment less than Kant, whose categorical imperative ("always act in such a way that you can also will that the maxim of your act should be a universal law") privileges the subject's role in grounding his/her conception of duty. To many readers, such a privileging of Kantian duty would imply a moral imperative, but this is to work forwards and not backwards. The difference can be attributed to the fact that acting from Kantian duty must be unmotivated (yet another way of saying "without interest"), which is apparent only in hindsight.

Beauty as Free Play

Unfortunately, Kant's second moment suggests the kind of definitive thinking that has led most cultural theorists to view him as a positivist.

Explanation of the Beautiful Resulting from the Second Moment

The beautiful is that which pleases universally without [requiring] a concept (*CJ*, p. 55).

"Without requiring a concept" can be understood as just another form of "without interest," but "pleases universally" appears hugely authoritarian, for none of us feels comfortable imposing our taste on others. But isn't that what we imply when we say, "That's beautiful." We immediately hope others will be equally excited by our imagination's discoveries. Kant's point seems to be that beauty is such a remarkable quality (Kant uses "exemplary") that it's inevitably one of our strongest beliefs (Kant uses "conviction"), even though its determining ground is subjective. Kant's discussion of "free play" "without a concept" suggests that "pleases universally" is the effect of an object that is universally communicable:

The cognitive powers, which are involved by this representation, are here in free play, because no definite concept limits them to a definite rule of cognition. Hence the state of mind in this representation must be a feeling of the free play of the representative powers in a given representation with reference to a cognition in general. Now a representation by which an object is given that is to become a cognition in general requires imagination for the gathering together the manifold of intuition, and understanding for the unity of the concept uniting the representations. The state of free play of the cognitive faculties in a representation, by which an object is given must be universally communicable, because cognition, as the determination of the object with which given representations (in whatever subject) are to agree, is the only kind of representation which is valid for everyone (*CJ*, p. 52).

While I doubt the existence of objects that are totally "universally communicable," his characterizing the imagination and understanding in "free play" suggests that beauty is not a fixed category. Rather, beauty is forever in a state of readjustment, as language usage must be, since our imaginative capacities and realm of understanding are shifting moment by moment. "Now, if in the judgment of taste the imagination must be considered in its freedom, it is in the first place not regarded as reproductive, as it is subject to the laws of association, but as productive and spontaneous (as the author of arbitrary forms of possible intuition) (*CJ*, p. 77). One could argue that Kant's assigning each beholder a role in the judgment of taste proves him the forebear to most Post-structuralist theories, in particular

Barthes' construction of the death-of-the-author. To avoid being reproductive, beauty must entail an open system.

Beauty as Unreasonability

Having thoroughly reviewed the possible interpretations of "without interest" (disinterested satisfaction, dissatisfaction, without cost, purposiveness without purpose, indifference, detachment, utter meaningless, unintentional, indeterminance, incoherence, unmotivated, without (requiring) a concept, fruitlessness, illogical, and unprejudicial), we're ready to fine tune Kant's conception of beauty. Contrary to popular misreadings of Kant, he associated neither perfection nor an ideal with beauty. "Therefore by means of beauty, regarded as a formal subjective purposiveness, there is in no way thought a perfection of the object, as a purposiveness alleged to be formal but which is objective" (*CJ*, p. 64). An ideal both presumes comparison to a model and a rational concept. "The correctness of such an ideal of beauty is shown by its permitting no sensible charm to mingle with the satisfaction in the object, and yet allowing us to take a great interest therein" (*CJ*, p. 72).

For better or worse, Kant does propose the prospect of genius, but it more closely resembles an open system.

We thus see (∴) that genius is a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given; it is not a mere aptitude for what can be learned by a rule. Hence originality must be its first property. (2) But since it also can produce original nonsense, its products must be models, i.e. exemplary, and they consequently ought not to spring from imitation, but must serve as a standard or rule of judgment for others. (3)...Hence, the author of a product for which he is indebted to his genius does not know himself how he has come by his ideas; and he has not the power to devise the like at pleasure or in accordance with a plan, and to communicate it to others in precepts that will enable them to produce similar products (*CJ*, pp. 150-1).

It's remarkable that such a reasonable guy as Kant could have had so much faith in mystery and magic! But he does offer one caveat: "Abundance and originality of ideas are less necessary to

beauty than the accordance of the imagination in its freedom with the conformity to law of the understanding. For all the abundance of the former produces in lawless freedom nothing but nonsense; on the other hand, the judgment is the faculty by which it is adjusted to the understanding" (CJ, p. 164). In the end, Kant concludes: "For beautiful art, therefore, imagination, understanding, spirit, and taste are requisite." For beauty to remain an open system, taste must be one too. "And while it (taste) brings clearness and order into the multitude of thoughts [of genius], it makes the ideas susceptible of being permanently and, at the same time, universally assented to, and capable of being followed by others, and of an ever progressive culture" (CJ, p. 163). Unfortunately, the 20th century conception of taste is entirely different, and in fact, precludes, rather than engenders, progress. Consider Wittgenstein's deep suspicion of taste as a hindrance to creativity.

The faculty of 'taste' 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 (Wittgenstein, p. 59e).

Even the most refined taste has nothing to do with creative power (*Ibid.*, p. 60e).

Beauty as Reflective Judgment

I began this essay by suggesting that viewing beautiful art could be analogous to receiving a gift and I've done my darndest to show why this gift must be something other than a mere pleasant sensation. So what is this gift? And why would I want to receive a gift for which I have no interest? Perhaps Kant's point is that since humans are inherently prejudicial, they don't know what they like; they only think they know. So, don't knock it, 'til you've tried it. Or as Kant might posit, "Don't knock it, 'til you've experienced it, and thought about whether it pleases universally, long and hard." Contemplation and reflection are very important activities for Kant, so perhaps "beauty is the agency that causes free play," that engenders reflective judgment, which when deemed valid for everyone, generates heaps of pleasure in the beholder's mind. And what could prove more satisfying than zoning out in a state of reflective judgment?

For that apprehension of forms in the imagination can never take place without the reflective judgment, though undesignedly, at least comparing them with its faculty of referring intuitions to concepts. If, now, in this comparison the imagination (as the faculty of a priori intuitions) is placed by means of a given representation undesignedly in agreement with the understanding, as the faculty of concepts, and thus a feeling of pleasure is aroused, the object must then be regarded as purposive for reflective judgment. Such a judgment is an aesthetic judgment upon the purposiveness of the object, which does not base itself upon any present concept of the object, nor does it furnish any such. In the case of an object whose form...in the mere reflection upon it ..., is judged as the ground of a pleasure in the representation of such an object...The object is then called beautiful, and the faculty of judging by means of such a pleasure...is called taste (CJ, p. 27).

But since "the judgment of taste is merely contemplative," (CJ, p. 43) we appear to have come full circle. If we begin in a contemplative state of judgment and then derive a notion of beauty, which is purposive for reflective judgment (an occasion for the "free play" of imagination and understanding), then life's satisfaction offers only an intellectual pursuit. For some, we have not really uncovered anything useful. But, I would argue that the beautiful challenges us to think differently, to question our prior judgments, to refresh our knowledge base, and finally to alter reality. This is the secret of its revolutionary prowess. Diotima, the only female character in Plato's *Symposium* made this point almost 2500 years ago. She termed beauty that exists in the eye of the mind, divine beauty:

This, my dear Socrates, is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute; a beauty which if you once beheld, you would see not to be after the measures of gold, garments, and fair boys and youth....But, what if man had eyes to see...divine beauty,...not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life...Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be able to bring forth, not images of beauty, but reality, and

bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may. Would that be an ignoble life? (Plato, "The Love of Beauty," *Philosophies of Art & Beauty*, p. 77)

To be a gift, reality must be brought forth "without interest" (purely accidental, unstrategic, or unintentional) on the artist's part. Otherwise, if the artist wills such a response, it is the artist, and not the viewer, who receives the gift. The idea of beauty as existing in the eye of the mind is not without 20th century adherents. The painter Jean Dubuffet once remarked, "Art addresses itself to the mind and not to the eyes. It has always been considered in this way by primitive peoples, and they're right." All of this leads Kant to conclude that the relationship between the beautiful is a necessary satisfaction, an intellectual pleasure which is a luxurious gift.

Explanation of the Beautiful Resulting from the Fourth Moment

The beautiful is that which without any concept is cognized as the object of a necessary satisfaction (*CJ*, p. 77).

Beauty as Love's Gift

It would be preposterous to end this essay without commenting on other cultural theorist's conceptions of gifts. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Emerson concluded:

But our tokens of compliment and love are barbarous. Rings and other jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me. Therefore the poet brings his poem; the shepherd, his lamb; the farmer, corn; the miner, a gem; the sailor, coral and shells; the painter, his picture; the girl, a handkerchief of her own sewing. This is right and pleasing for it restores society in so far to its primary basis, when a man's biography is conveyed in its gifts, and every man's wealth is an index of his merit....We can receive anything from love, for that is a way of receiving it from ourselves; but not from any one who assumes to bestow ("Gifts," *Emmerson's Essays*, 1926, pp. 375-6).

Emmerson's characterized giving is equally "without interest," for "assuming to bestow" would be "interested" and hardly mutual, and runs counter to the notion of giving constructed throughout this paper.

Perhaps, the most famous study of gift-giving was Marcel Mauss' 1924 book *The Gift*, in which he observed that the earliest form of economic exchange did not operate through barter between two individuals, but through giving gifts and the "social obligation to return gifts with other gifts" (Harland, *Superstructuralism*, p. 44). Unfortunately, most contemporary theorists view gift-giving as highly inefficient, impossible to realize, and ultimately depleating, even though almost everyone recognizes that "economic competition between individuals is still incompatible with direct social bonding between individuals" (*Ibid.*, p.45). Nonetheless, most theorists happily characterize some exchange (witness Hickey's contractual alliance). Jacques Derrida is perhaps the most insistent gift-buster, for I read somewhere that he out-and-out refuses to give gifts: he doesn't believe in them. Contrarily, Jean Baudrillard tried in earnest to restore an economy of symbolic exchange, whereby exchange is not measured in terms of equivalent values. Symbolic exchange presumes the principle of the gift described in Mauss' book. According to Baudrillard, the principle of the gift is quite antithetical to the principles of use-value and (economic) exchange-value. From the giver's point of view, the gift represents pure loss and wastage, since the exchange-gift is "lost and given without economic calculation of return and compensation" (Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, 1975, p. 82). From the receiver's point of view, value cannot be measured against other values. "Objects or categories of goods cathected in the singular and personal act of symbolic exchange (the gift, the present) are strictly incomparable. The personal relation (non-economic exchange) renders them absolutely unique" (*For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, p.132).

Harland concludes, "to give and receive gifts in what we still recognize as 'the proper spirit' is to strike a blow against all measuring, coding, regulating systems" (p. 181). I would argue that this is yet another one of beauty as a gift's revolutionary propensities. "What matters with the gift, then, is not the value of the thing but the act of giving and receiving. The gift, in its movement from person to person,

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asserts the priority of the relationship... "Symbolic exchange" represents for Baudrillard a triumph of process over stasis" (*Ibid.*). The main thrust of Baudrillard's obsession with the sign, is to demarcate how the "symbolic" has given way to the "sign," so "symbolic exchange" has become a thing of the past. Society would benefit more if he were less interested in categorizing the sign, and more interested in finding a way to restore symbolic exchange.

Helene Cixous is far less pessimistic about our capacity to revive gift-giving. She returns to George Bataille's models to counter the masculine giver who, caught up in the mechanisms of exchange, gives only with a certainty of return. Building on Bataille's observation that the sun is the perfect gift-giver, because its radiance persists without expecting anything in return, she views the feminine gift-giver as understanding the futility of a mechanical systematization of human existence. She values the gesture that giving affirms, and recognizes what the giver draws from the gifts as profit.

Conclusion

Trying to rehabilitate society using Kant's principles concerning his *Aesthetic Judgment of Taste* always proves a sticky mess, for beauty just is, it cannot "be." Beauty is simply a happy accident, that occurs when one least expects it, so we can only be open to the possibility for beauty. To attempt to achieve beauty would be erroneous. The very suggestion that one could turn this paper into an "ought" would run counter to the concept of beauty. Rather, the artist and the viewer must carry out their earnest investigations voluntarily, without any expectation of a gain. Everything matters in the end, but only when our pursuits represent purposiveness without purpose. The best we can do is to ensure the kind of freedom that makes beauty possible: the freedom to explore every unconscious desire, the freedom to think reflectively "without interest," the freedom to keep Kant's "free play" of imagination and understanding open and flexible, and the freedom to persist without anxiety about what the future will hold. At best, Kant's message in the *Critique of Judgment* concerns freedom.

Mike Kelley

Hollywood Filmic Language, Stuttered



(*Caltiki the Immortal
Monster and Rose Hobart*)