Ethics, Meaning, and the Work of Beauty

G. Gabrielle Starr

Literary study may currently appear to be invested in a reexamination and revaluation of the aesthetic.¹ The reasons for such a renewed interest in beauty and its kin equally may seem obvious from some perspectives. One narrative posits that aesthetics is the late-twentieth-century answer to ideology, a can’t-we-all-get-along response to the perceived fracturing of the academy brought about by ideological and critical conflict. Such an approach, though satisfying in the way of all neat reductions, is only about as accurate as one might expect; it is, like many a Victorian heroine, no better than it should be. In some cases, this explanation may be correct, but a turn to aesthetics can be differently explained and holds different value for critics who recall the powerful role aesthetics plays in Enlightenment philosophy, a legacy whose revision was at the heart of the critical theory of Jauss, Lyotard, Foucault, and their followers. The response in the 1990s to the barely accessible complexities of such theory has been, at its best, to resituate literary criticism, to integrate theoretical acuity within accessible writing about art and culture. In the drive to bring theory and practice closer together, the aesthetic, as a theory of the relationships between readers and texts, raises compelling interest. Hand in hand in recent years with a turn to history, the discontinuities and processes through which texts and meaning are made, we find a turn to beauty, a mode of sensibility through which texts enter into and change the worlds of the people who read them. But the return to the aesthetic, like the return to history, raises significant questions about how literary studies as a discipline is constituted, and at the core of the conflicts surrounding turns to aesthet-

¹ G. Gabrielle Starr is assistant professor of English at New York University. She is currently at work on a book of British genre history entitled Lyric Generations: Novel and Lyric in the Long Eighteenth Century.

Both in the eighteenth century and at the start of the twenty-first—
are problems of labor and meaning.

Recent work by critics like Elaine Scarry has made bold and intelligent
statements about the potential of the aesthetic, but in turning to aesthetic theory,
many contemporary critics tend to reenact the melding of categories at the heart
of the emergence of eighteenth-century British aesthetics: aesthetic experience and
aesthetic inquiry are compressed and frequently conflated, and aesthetic inquiry
is, in turn, all but replaced by ethics or hermeneutics. This pattern is in part the
result of giving precedence to the Shaftesburian tradition of aesthetic theory. As
Ronald Paulson points out, most literary study of the aesthetic proceeds from
Shaftesburian assumptions and suppresses or ignores the serious challenges of-
tered to this strain within the eighteenth century by “less respectable” thinkers
like Hogarth. This essay sketches a pattern common to ethical and hermeneutic
approaches to the aesthetic both then and now, examining the reasons aesthetics
tends to become an appealing object of contemporary theory-as-hermeneutics
and a de facto domain within the larger field of ethics. In opposition to this tradi-
tion, I bring together works by Hogarth, Swift, and Proust—an unlikely group-
ning, perhaps—in order to explore what happens when the temptations of herme-
neutic and ethical approaches to the aesthetic are held, even briefly, at bay. The
pressing questions are those of discipline. First, if aesthetics matters, what does
aesthetic inquiry produce that no other form of questioning can? And second,
what role might both the question and its answers play in current reformulations
of literary study?

The merging of aesthetic inquiry with ethics or hermeneutics has its most
explicit statement in the eighteenth century and is reinforced by late-twentieth-
century critique. Major texts in the early years of British and continental aesthet-
tics tend to emerge as answers to problems that on the surface do not concern the
aesthetic at all. The theories of aesthetics promoted early in the century by Shaft-
esbury or Hutcheson are, in large part, a response to the perceived moral crudity
and inadequacy of Hobbesian philosophy. Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments
(1759) undertakes to resolve the foundations of both public and private virtue as
a rebuttal of “licentious systems” like Mandeville’s utilitarian approach to vice
(and simultaneously provides the framework by which a capitalist economy can
be made a civil one). Kant’s Critique of Judgment (1790) steps in to resolve the
apparent conflict between the first and second Critiques and to reconcile or unite
freedom and necessity. It is thus that Enlightenment aesthetics becomes tempting
fruit: to quote Terry Eagleton, the aesthetic often seems ready or able to “intervene,”
to function “as a dream of reconciliation,” but its peculiarities also make
it seem an answer to scholarly dreams of interpretation. The apparent position
of aesthetics as a cultural and intellectual in between—mediating questions of
cognition, gender, economics, class, national identity, even ethics—means it seems
the perfect, if overdetermined, subject for critical dissection.

For twentieth-century critics like Derrida, De Man, or Eagleton, Enlight-
enment aesthetics is accordingly the object of a landmark hermeneutic enterprise.
For De Man, aesthetics holds within itself a fracture “fatal” to the culturally
enforced unity of philosophy and ideology. Derrida finds aesthetics at the heart of
what he reads as the fundamental Enlightenment antipathy to insuperable differ-
ence. Eagleton argues that aesthetics provides a key support for the precarious stability of the bourgeois liberal subject. For these theorists, aesthetics does a lot of work, holding up precariously balanced philosophical projects and offering a way to challenge their integrity. Whatever aesthetics may be, its critical capital comes from the way it performs in larger systems. Aesthetics in this sense is a discipline par excellence, mediating larger cultural practices and concepts to shape knowledge so that it is eminently serviceable. Aesthetic theory then becomes a critique of this disciplinary role.

Such an understanding of aesthetics makes a great deal of sense: the ease with which the aesthetic slips into other disciplinary modes seems one of its fundamental characteristics in the Shaftesburian vein of the tradition. When Shaftesbury turns to beauty, it is a turn to the social, the fruit of a care for the relationships between judging subjects. A judgment of beauty is the considered product of societal commitments, the actions and claims of a conversational circle of educated men and women. Aesthetic judgments signify the productive commerce of social beings; they take on meaning through their implications of community and can be made to build it. This is the essence of the Whiggish common sense Shaftesbury places at the basis of taste. Common sense signifies a “sense of public weal, and of the common interest; love of the community or society, natural affection, humanity, obligingness, or that sort of civility which rises from a just sense of the common rights of mankind, and the natural equality there is among those of the same species.” Shaftesbury’s grounding of beauty, even in “sense,” requires social support. What is intriguing here is an oft-noted characteristic of Shaftesbury’s thought: the relative indeterminacy of the borders of the philosophical or disciplinary areas surrounding taste (ethics in particular).

It would not be amiss to wonder, given Shaftesbury’s arguments, whether for him there really could be any such thing as aesthetics at all. There is of course nothing in British philosophy called “aesthetics” (prior to Alexander Baumgarten’s 1750 treatise) in the same way that there is “ethics” or “metaphysics,” but noting neither the absence of a name nor the absence of a classical model gets at the heart of the peculiarity of aesthetics as it comes into being. It is also insufficient, though certainly correct, to note that Shaftesbury tended to combine disciplinary modes throughout his writing. The problem is at bottom one of ground: on what basis might one stake a claim to aesthetics, to its importance, disciplinary integrity, and coherence? This is not a Kantian question about the (supposed) autonomy of aesthetic objects, nor is it simply the more familiar Shaftesburian question about the status of an aesthetic judgment (as disinterested and, hence, independent). My concern here is rather the constitutive boundaries of the aesthetic as a mode of inquiry; it is also eventually, though not isomorphically, about the constitutive shape of aesthetic experience. If aesthetics is merely the lesser sibling of ethics, does it require its own tools, terms, or inquiry at all? Could we not merely be satisfied with its ontological and disciplinary superiors? And finally, as I stated the question above, the problem of aesthetics as discipline or branch of knowledge is this: what does aesthetic inquiry provide that ethical, political, historical, or hermeneutic inquiries do not?

The recognized necessity of finding an aesthetic “ground”—sometimes as a basis for taste, sometimes as a basis for pleasure, sometimes as ontological
principle—is apparent in almost every significant essay on the subject in the period. There are, in general, two methods of approaching the issue. First, as with much neoclassical literary criticism, there is the possibility that aesthetics, understood as a science of art, is rulebound. In cases such as this, aesthetics is less a philosophical discipline than a practicum for artists and viewers, and any need for grounding is satisfied by providing rules of creation or criticism. Aesthetics is grounded in natural law, and aesthetic judgments are justified by that law. In more theoretical treatises, the rules of art as juridical ground usually appear subordinate to the implications of taste as a cross-disciplinary principle, as in Hutcheson’s Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue (1725). While Hutcheson does not equate the moral sense and the sense of beauty, he gives them the same ground, arguing that our internal perception of ideas and objects allows us to find beauty in actions (and hence in virtue) as well as in objects of sight or hearing: “The Author of Nature has much better furnish’d us for a virtuous Conduct, than our Moralists seem to imagine . . .: He has made Virtue a lovely Form, to excite our pursuit of it; and has given us strong Affections to be the Springs of each virtuous Action.” Beauty in this formulation does not have a unique ground in the mind or the world; the perception of beauty is a specific result only of God’s interest in our motivations. While ethics may be closely related to aesthetics, God’s law of justice is spelled out with a clarity and precision that no aesthetic induction based on taste could ever match. The ground of aesthetic taste is analogic and relative to the ground of neighboring philosophical divisions.

Even without an explicitly moralist standard of origin, early-eighteenth-century theories of the aesthetic tend to relativize its ground and designate its primary field of jurisdiction as mediation between competing goods and values. This is true of Joseph Addison’s arguments in The Spectator; he links aesthetics and morality, but he grounds his discussion of beauty in faculty psychology. The imagination emerges as the faculty of perception most profoundly associated with the aesthetic. For Addison, the imagination is introspective, working through an inner eye, but it is also perceptual, oriented toward the outside world. As he puts it in The Spectator no. 411 (1712), “[T]he Pleasures of the Imagination . . . arise from visible Objects . . . when we have them actually in our view” as well as “when we call up their Ideas into our Minds by Paintings, Statues, Descriptions, or any the like Occasion.” The pleasures of vision are pleasures of the imagination because they are not the result of qualities that inhere in objects but rather of things the mind does to our perceptions: producing the sensation of color from the perception of reflected light, for example. The imagination, even more than sight, is the faculty that has the potential to link our inner and outer worlds.

Much like the sense of beauty, the Addisonian imagination is a mediating force, doing work that reconciles individual with community, inside with outside. However, the balance between the presumed privacy of any emotional or aesthetic experience and its communal properties is not an easy one—it must be elaborately theorized (by Shaftesbury or Smith) and carefully maintained, just as the balance between imagination as introspection and perception must be defended against the problems of the quixote and the solipsist (as in the cases of Charlotte Lennox or Samuel Johnson). Beauty, to take one aspect of aesthetic experience,
must be saved for the ethical and communal because without due care, it seems to lead to private, unconsidered consumption. Unless beauty is absorbed into a discourse of use, discipline, and balance, it seems somehow incomplete—for critical purposes. To meet this problem, aesthetic experience is supposed by its theorists to work to create ethical community; by implication, aesthetic criticism seeks to make beauty produce some meaning that goes beyond itself. Aesthetic criticism disciplines beauty, assigning it duties of its own.

Beauty is not enough in the early years of British aesthetics, and it remains so in recent aesthetic inquiries, even in those whose authors claim allegiance to beauty itself. One of the best of recent books on the subject, Elaine Scarry’s On Beauty and Being Just, seeks to defend beauty from antagonists who assert its ideological perversion or insufficiency. Scarry points out that latter-day critics of beauty tend to see the beautiful object as liable to ethical violation; in being wantonly seen and adored, it is objectified. From the other end, the judging subject is seduced without regard to the ethical demands of being in the world. In defending beauty against these attacks, Scarry and other critics like Emory Elliot and Isobel Armstrong follow the pattern of eighteenth-century critics before them, situating beauty in regard to community practices: for Scarry, justice and a foundational care for object and world (something like what Heidegger associates with Dasein); for Elliot, an inclusive literary practice and canon; for Armstrong, a radical, democratic aesthetic. Scarry does not equate beauty with justice (nor does she explicitly discuss Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hogarth, or many other theorists), but in a much more considerable move, argues that beauty prepares us for justice, providing training in features of ethical life that are indispensable to being and pursuing the just: “Through its beauty, the world continually renews us to a rigorous standard of perceptual care.” Such perceptual care becomes the basis of a broadened and refined attention to justice: “Beauty seems to place requirements on us for attending to the aliveness . . . of our world, and for entering into its protection.” This proposition, though attractive, is loose; the connection is temperamental, “voluntary,” tenuous, and nowhere near the clear call of necessity that generally belongs by right to ethical principles (although ethical necessity could be debated, too). There is potential for a category mistake here, and aesthetic experience and aesthetic inquiry may be collapsed. Beauty itself, I venture to uphold, teaches little about justice (history offers few examples to support a claim to such educative power); Scarry’s investigation of beauty, however, may be more productive. As Shaftesbury before her, Scarry holds that aesthetic inquiry and education step in to fill the gaps aesthetic experience appears to leave behind.

The odd form of labor that Scarry posits—beauty’s work as preparation for justice—is not its only task. Scarry’s suture of beauty and justice goes side by side with her concern for the training and shaping of individuals responsive to the beautiful, eager participants in the imagined communities built around it. Beauty becomes the foundation of an academic community, too, one whose ethical standards are tied up in attitudes of care. In all of these cases, beauty is expected to be a workhorse of magnificent proportions, and it is to “work” in our discipline or in our lives by meaning something else. Aesthetic criticism here is both ethical and hermeneutic, interpreting beauty as object or experience and showing how it points
to something else, to our capacities for justice or to our capacities to teach, learn, and read. What might the investigation of beauty offer on its own?

Given the examples of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Smith, Scarry, Eagleton, De Man, or Derrida, it might appear that thinking the aesthetic all but requires its immediate translation into something else, whether it is ethics, ideology, or politics; aesthetics may well be uninteresting without such transformation. The problem begins with the fact that, as Armstrong puts it, aesthetics fundamentally involves affect, and for affect, “[W]e have no (or few) terms of analysis.” To think about what aesthetics “means”—usually a hermeneutic process—seems, perhaps tautologically, more “significant” than any other approach. The treatment of inquiry in the realm of aesthetics as interpretation of aesthetic relations is a tactical choice and as such has clear value even if, by translating aesthetics, it leaves the aesthetic behind. On the other hand, ethics trumps aesthetics, and this replacement may seem, also tautologically, “right.” If ethics is the supreme legislator of our existence as humans, there ought to be nothing wrong with ultimately referring the aesthetic to the ethical; but treating aesthetics as ethical inquiry fails to answer aesthetic questions—that is, if aesthetics makes sense at all.

Hogarth believed it did, and his deferral of ethics and interpretation in favor of affect is probably one of the reasons that far fewer literature scholars pay serious attention to the Analysis of Beauty (1753) than to works more concerned with interpretation, works like Shaftesbury’s Characteristics (1711) or Burke’s Enquiry (1757). Against the assumptions of dominant strains of aesthetic inquiry, both then and now, Hogarth’s work is revolutionary. The strength of his contribution comes not only from his challenging the stance of disinterestedness fundamental to Shaftesbury’s aesthetics but also because he argues that the search for an ethical equivalent of beauty is the product of and leads to a misunderstanding:

It is no wonder this subject [beauty] should have so long been thought inexplicable, since the nature of many parts of it cannot possibly come within the reach of mere men of letters; otherwise those ingenious gentlemen who have lately published treatises upon it . . . would not so soon have been bewildered in their accounts of it, and obliged so suddenly to turn into the broad, and more beaten path of moral beauty; in order to extricate themselves out of the difficulties they seem to have met with in this.

Hogarth refuses the complicated and, for him, disingenuous stance of connoisseurship, a pretence toward knowledge that substitutes schema for experience. Hogarth will not displace the beautiful with anything else, especially with an ethics like Shaftesbury’s. Hogarth thinks and imagines in material terms—those of pleasure and of form. For him, form is not the suspiciously abstract entity contemporary scholars tend to associate with formalism; it is, at its best, always embodied, the material completion of a smokejack, a pineapple, or a woman (to use Hogarth’s examples).

What is difficult about Hogarth, but centrally important, is that two things are in play. There is always a call to ethics in human life; this call (for some of us) insists that Hogarth’s pineapple, a line, and a woman are in no way equivalent, and that ignoring this inequality, even for a moment, is unacceptable. Yet, any
automatic ethical condemnation of Hogarth’s ideals of beauty would be faulty because aesthetic relationships are not all-defining. Beauty is just one part of the complex web that ethical analysis works to resolve in any instance, and theorization of ethical standards based on an abstraction from aesthetic conduct ignores the contingency of the aesthetic and the boundedness of all emotional experience. Ethical condemnations of the aesthetic do it the disservice of granting it a legislative and definitive power it otherwise lacks. Beauty is smaller than that and is only one part of any encounter in the world.

It would be foolish to argue that the beautiful, the sublime, or the ugly does not have ethical, social, or hermeneutic importance: Paulson’s critique of *The Analysis* reveals that with clarity. But what must be emphasized even more strongly is that neither ethics nor hermeneutics can answer aesthetic questions. *The Analysis* opens up the question of what happens if, even for a moment, the unique disciplinary potential of aesthetic experience is made central. Hogarth stops with what he considers irreducible—what he calls the serpentine line. If there is any significance to this line, any reason for its aesthetic value, it is its incitement to pursuit:

> It is a pleasing labour of the mind to solve the most difficult problems. . . .
> The eye hath this sort of enjoyment of winding walks, and serpentine rivers, and all sorts of objects, whose forms . . . are composed principally of . . . the waving and serpentine lines. Intricacy in form, therefore, I shall define to be that peculiarity in the lines, which compose it, that leads the eye a wanton kind of chase, and from the pleasure that gives the mind, intitles it to the name of beautiful. (33; italics original)

Hogarth extends this criterion to the nonvisual from the start and puts the question of labor firmly onto the mind and not onto beauty itself. The mind’s desire to pursue challenges is the foundation of the pleasures of aesthetics. This has formal consequences, but coming from within (the mind) rather than from without (objects with definite form), it does not have a formal origin. The pleasure associated with a particular composition depends upon the mental response to visual or intellectual challenge; form itself is not legislative and is crafted in response only to a mental principle, the requirement that the mind be enticed to pursue (or as Coleridge might say, drawn on by pleasure). The aesthetic is thus freed from dependence on its manifestation—problems can be as beautiful as waterfalls, and sensory perception does not rule the day.

To return to the question I introduced earlier, the test that aesthetic inquiry must face is not how it violates, complicates, supports, or rewrites the ethical but what, if any, unique information aesthetic inquiry produces and what, if any, unique role aesthetics plays in human experience. Hogarth’s inquiry into aesthetics suggests that aesthetic experience involves a mental drive (something prefiguring perhaps Schiller’s play drive—a strain of investigation that has born excellent fruit in recent philosophical inquiry, most notably in the work of Kendall Walton). Hogarth argues that the unique role aesthetics plays is that it structures appetites (both physical and mental). An aesthetic structure of appetite is one that privileges pursuit over attainment. Aesthetics, then, is not grounded in objects or in perception but in the way individual subjects approach both ideas and things.
Hogarth's use of a mental principle to ground the aesthetic is suggestive, opening up broader possibilities for modeling aesthetic thought. Based on readings of the relationship between aesthetics and the imagination in Swift and Proust, I suggest it is possible to imagine other answers—literary answers—to the question of the possibilities of aesthetics. I here juxtapose eighteenth- and twentieth-century literary texts by making an appeal to eighteenth- and twentieth-century aesthetic theories that enact similar relations. The juxtaposition of Swift and Proust offers a literary dimension to the historical trace I pursue in aesthetic criticism. Scarry turns to Proust to support her claims about beauty, and in doing this, turns to a text that melds the two principal strains of early eighteenth-century approaches to the beautiful. Proust's pursuit of memory is a pursuit of beauty that has passed away, a project deeply compatible with Hogarth's *The Analysis*. However, while Proust celebrates the importance of pursuit in the experience of beauty, his work also participates in the Shaftesburian vein of aesthetic thought, valuing disinterest and connoisseurship. This double involvement is a useful reminder that theoretical oppositions are not always realized in their purity, and it offers a starting point for comparatist analysis.

Scarry cites an excerpt from *À la recherche du temps perdu* to illustrate an attitude of care toward the beautiful, a desire to prolong contact with it, to keep it close and safe. For Scarry, the impulses to create art, to think in an aesthetic manner, and even to procreate, are born of a desire to make beauty eternal, to reproduce the beautiful both as something or someone in the world, as in the opening of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence: "From fairest creatures we desire increase, / That thereby beauty's rose might never die." In her view, this is one of the basic reasons why beauty prepares us for justice. Proust's ceaseless return to the beautiful valorizes care for both the fragility of aesthetic experience and the fragility of those of us who live it; human fragility is at the basis of Scarry's ethics and Proust's urgency. In the episode Scarry cites, Marcel sees a beautiful milkmaid on the train to Balbec: "Flushed with the glow of morning, her face was rosier than the sky. I felt on seeing her that desire to live which is reborn in us whenever we become conscious anew of beauty and happiness." This woman is unlike any other Marcel has seen:

So, completely unrelated to the models of beauty that I was wont to conjure up in my mind when I was by myself, this handsome girl gave me at once the taste for a certain happiness . . . that would be realized by my staying and living there by her side. . . . Above her tall figure, the complexion of her face was so burnished and so glowing that it was as if one were seeing her through a lighted window. . . . I could not take my eyes from her face, which grew larger as she approached, like a sun that it was somehow possible to stare at and that was coming nearer and nearer, letting itself be seen at close quarters, dazzling you with its blaze of red and gold. She fastened on me her penetrating gaze, but doors were being closed and the train had begun to move. I saw her leave the station and go down the hill to her home; it was broad daylight now; I was speeding away from the dawn. (706–7; Pléiade 2: 17–18)

Scarry draws some general hypotheses about experiences of beauty from this and similar passages. First, no two aesthetic experiences are alike. Second, an experience of beauty is unique not just because of the singular character of every object
of beauty, but because each experience is tied to a unique moment of perception, whose exact terms can never come again, even in imagination. Proust, however, goes on to point out something about this episode that Scarry neglects: what happens when beauty encounters the pressures toward “general and disinterested” analysis? The train pulls out, and the sunlight of the girl’s face disappears:

But alas, she must be forever absent from the other life towards which I was being borne with ever increasing speed, a life that I could resign myself to accept only by weaving plans that would enable me to take the same train again some day and to stop at the same station, a project that had the further advantage of providing food for the selfish [intéressée], active, practical, mechanical, indolent, centrifugal tendency that belongs to the human mind, for it turns all too readily aside from the effort that is required to analyze and probe, in a general and disinterested [générale et désintéressée] manner, an agreeable impression that we have received. And since, at the same time, we wish to continue to think of that impression, the mind prefers to imagine it in the future tense, to continue to bring about the circumstances that may make it recur—which, while giving us no clue as to the real nature of the thing, saves us the trouble of recreating it within ourselves and allows us to hope that we may receive it afresh from without. (707–8; Pléiade 2:18)

Human beings have problems with the unique; gripped in habit, we may want to make beauty like other things, and this is not always good. Having experienced a moment of beauty, we wish, in Proust’s view, to call it up wholesale; if we cannot get the thing itself, we want to be “practical” about it, to approximate it as closely as possible, and to keep thinking it is in our possession even if it is not. The drive to reproduce and hold on to beauty in words, images, art, memory, even theory (the drive at the core of Scarry’s argument), can transform beauty into something else. If beauty and truth, as Shaftesbury claims, are forever wrapped up together—“For all beauty is truth”—it is perhaps because beauty moves those who see it, feel it, or think it to the metaphorical or analogic, and it is also thus that beauty seems (but only seems) to resist the analytic. Making metaphors is good, even desirable—no one could regret Proust’s metaphors—but both maker and reader must recognize them for what they are.

Each transformation through metaphor may produce new beauty, which itself may be interrogated, analyzed, and enjoyed, as long as viewers recognize that newness and transformation. However, when the impulse to transform and refigure shifts from the purely metaphorical to the analogic, problems multiply. If the metaphorical belongs to the experience of beauty, the analogic seems to belong to aesthetic criticism, where beauty is often placed in analogic relation to truth or justice. The movement that beauty may initiate—one toward metaphor, analogy, and even desire—is not itself beauty and can, in fact, turn us away from the aesthetic entirely. Proust gives us a reminder of the slippery relation of aesthetic experience to aesthetic criticism: as with the dreamer Marcel, in the desire to analyze and interpret, theorists can be drawn away from the goal and may end up doing something more like substitution than analysis. They—perhaps we—may only imagine, repeatedly, the figure of the milkmaid. The imagination, whether critical or creative, can be habitual, and instead of really linking us with the world, can just turn us closer in upon ourselves. This is what happens
when theorists turn beauty into an ethical or hermeneutic shadow of itself.

It is useful to think about what the resistance of metaphorical or analogic translation of aesthetic experience can produce. Scarry turns to Proust for her literary exemplar; in returning to the eighteenth-century origins of her Shaftesburian ethical quandary (and seeking an alternative to it), I turn to an eighteenth-century author, Swift, who has closer affinities to the aesthetic positions of Hogarth than those of Shaftesbury.27 Swift is acutely aware of the contests that may be staged between ethics and aesthetics (often framed for him in terms of real and imaginary value), and he provides a contemporary context for interrogating the tensions surrounding the aesthetic, whether political, literary, or ethical. At first glance, we find ugliness much more than beauty in Swift. Compare the ideal scene that appeared in Proust with what approximates a satirical version of it in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). In Brobdingnag, the land of the giants, Gulliver sees a horrible version of a milkmaid:

The Nurse to quiet her Babe . . . was forced to apply the last Remedy by giving it suck. I must confess no Object ever disgusted me so much as the Sight of her monstrous Breast, which I cannot tell what to compare with, so as to give the curious Reader an Idea of its Bulk, Shape and Colour. It stood prominent six Foot, and could not be less than sixteen in Circumference. The Nipple was about half the Bigness of my Head, and the Hue both of that and the Dug so varified with Spots, Pimples and Freckles, that nothing could appear more nauseous: For I had a near Sight of her, she sitting down the more conveniently to give Suck, and I standing on the Table.28

This milk bearer is no maid, and her breast, while being nearly large enough to make the simile work, is nothing like the sun. With Marcel, the milkmaid's face produces elaborate similes born of or linked to the desire to prolong contact with the beautiful and renew it in the imagination. Marcel wants to make images for himself more and more like that of the woman, but the Nurse's breast for Gulliver is beyond "compare."

The hermeneutic possibilities here are enormous. We have two images of women laden with milk, one an object of beauty and desire, the other, of loathing and fascination. Ethical complications are readily apparent—issues of objectification, distance, colonization.29 All of these compete for attention, and they come from the combination of aesthetic experiences with other aspects of the mind. Ethical and hermeneutic principles reveal some of the political and psychological implications of this passage as well as of the aesthetic experience that is depicted or that may be produced: but what happens once these strains of inquiry have come into play? The startling thing to realize is that Gulliver's experience of disgust and the experience of reading about it approach an exaggeration of the experience of reading about Marcel's experience of beauty. This is to say, the giant breast is only and can only ever be (in Swift's world) an experience of the imagination, just as with the reader's experience of Marcel's maid. This is at bottom merely a characteristic of the fictional that Swift's scene intensifies. In the aesthetic terms I borrow from Proust, however, this basic characteristic of fiction has more precise implications for aesthetic sensation. Swift pushes us toward a breaking of habit within the mind's eye (a not-quite-realist defamiliarization) to pro-
duce an image without compare. He breaks down the problem Proust identifies, the separation between experience and memory, experience and imagination, to focus simultaneously on the possibility of unique experience and on its eventual repeatability. We may pass from the unique via the pull of desire (to see again, to think again, to feel again), and this rather Hogarthian drive to pursuit can help produce (but never fully account for) the cultural or individual significance of fiction. The transformation from nothing—something unimagined, uncredited, nonexistent—to something one chooses to see again, read again, and feel again is at the heart of aesthetic experience. And whether that leads to justice or not it is one thing that ensures the viability of cultural artifacts.

Swift thus calls on us to think the imagination as a preface to thinking beauty in a way Proust encourages and Hogarth might approve. A Swiftian detour through the ugly may seem like a roundabout way to get at the aesthetics of the beautiful, but it is both appropriate and functional, enabling me to break the habit of metaphorical thinking. What in Swift or Proust, during these moments of stunned apprehension, answers to the call of aesthetic inquiry? What might aesthetic inquiry reveal that no other mode of thought could? First, it should address how aesthetic experience is constructed or prepared by the text: the experience of the beautiful milkmaid’s face in imagination or that of the giant, bloated breast (something Scarry attempts successfully in another recent work, *Dreaming by the Book*). It should inquire how this experience is prepared for in the text, as well: how the responses of Marcel or Gulliver are sketched and structured. In Proust’s example, aesthetic experience is fundamentally timebound, limited in duration and extent, as we read a poem or view a painting and imaginatively return to it. It should also take as a fundamental condition of analysis and interpretation that aesthetic experience constantly evolves in the mind (and sometimes decays), and its power seems a power of substitution, of fixing attention subsequently on each new imaginative iteration—in constant pursuit. Aesthetic experience works in both these instances by using attention (focusing on the sun on the girl’s face, the cavernous surface of the breast) as a tool to create new images and new metaphors, for good and ill. Swift’s example has something else to say: it begins with the ability of the mind to fill itself completely with images that had previously seemed inconsequential or beyond the power of vision. Swift also reveals the potential of aesthetic experience to make the invisible matter by committing emotional response to imaginary creations. Both of these moments are experiences of magnification, where perception is structured so that figments of the imagination are confronted as sensible (but not material) particulars.

In focusing on beauty as an aesthetic event, the inquiry shifts from what we expect aesthetically significant objects to mean, what labor they must do in showing us their significance, to how the aesthetic functions as a process of experience. To take one aspect of the aesthetic, the labor of beauty is not to produce or supplement meaning—this is the work of hermeneutics. The labor of beauty is not to produce justice—this is the work of ethics. Meaning, by comparison, is static; aesthetics is timebound. Justice concerns material conditions, while the result of aesthetic experience is harder to pin down. In an important sense, however, these are all mistaken formulations, for beauty’s labor, if it engages in any, is something different from the labor of aesthetic investigation, and it is on this level that fruitful contrast can be made.
If aesthetic inquiry makes sense, pinning down some core part of aesthetic experience seems necessary; it is not enough to claim that the task is difficult. Hogarth would argue the fact of pursuit is paramount. But the analytic pursuit of beauty as object and experience can invite rather quixotic movements toward the concrete, like the bizarre Burkan determination that beauty can be recognized through the bodily experiences of “sinking, . . . melting, [and] languor,”

Hogarth’s elevation of the pineapple, or the rhapsodic poetry of The Moralists—Shaftesbury’s highly individual attempt to represent the process of aesthetic creation as the best means of approaching aesthetic experience itself. An element of quixotism also appears in Scarry’s recent work. Her postulation that an increase of care and a decentering of the self are the concrete result of experiencing beauty may reveal more about Scarry (and others of like mind) than about aesthetics in general. The problem is that aesthetic inquiry has to fold investigation of objects and experiences together, while keeping track of both and avoiding the pitfalls of introspection.

It is here again that Swift may offer timely aid. Taking the small (and by no means legislative) example of poetry, he gives a sketch of the challenges to careful aesthetic inquiry. Swift always exhorts himself and his readers to look outward, not inward:

Strange to conceive, how the same objects strike
At distant hours the mind with forms so like!
Whether in time, deduction’s broken chain
Meets, and salutes her sister link again;
Or hunted fancy, by a circling flight,
Comes back with joy to his own seat at night;
Or whether dead imagination’s ghost
Oft hovers where alive it haunted most;
Or if thought’s rolling globe her circle run,
Turns up old objects to the soul her sun;
Or loves the muse to walk with conscious pride
O’er the glad scene whence first she rose a bride.

The opening of the palinode Occasioned by Sir William Temple’s Late Illness and Recovery (1693) is a rare attempt in the Swiftian canon to address the problems of the muse. How is it that aesthetic and imaginative experience may be recreated? If emotion and inner vision are ephemeral, how can they ever return, as they seem to do, and how can they ever matter? The poem posits a problem about the continuity of emotional and aesthetic response in the face of frailty, maturity, and loss. The opening phrase is somewhat startling: most of the time, it is not strange to conceive that seeing the same object again and again produces similar sensations and similar associations of ideas. But for Swift, as for Proust, this persistence of the past may be a sign of illness and deception: accidents of perception hold us in their grip without a standard of judgment that could adequately explain any vision, any truth, or any perception of beauty at all. The attempt to ground aesthetic experience in metaphor, in the fictitious body of the muse, for example, is an unsatisfying self-deception, merely putting an outward dress of universality on the quixotic material of the poet’s own mind:
Madness like this no fancy ever seized,
Still to be cheated, never to be pleased;
Since one false beam of joy in sickly minds
Is all the poor content delusion finds.—
There thy enchantment broke, and from this hour
I here renounce thy visionary power;
And since thy essence on my breath depends,
Thus with a puff the whole delusion ends. (ll. 147–54)

The problem is not just that the muse historically has become an awkward fiction, more likely to become Pope’s Goddess of Dulness than the spur of creativity, or that Swift is generally suspicious of the flattery of the imagination. The key here is that imagination can never hold anything in perpetuity, neither beauty nor disgust; even though the image may return, it is new and only “so like” (again, simile, metaphor). Swift sees the contours of the problem of aesthetic inquiry. Aesthetics leads to other things (analogic connections to ethics, shadowy attempts at reliving the past), things whose pursuit may turn attention away from beauty entirely. The metaphors and substitutions that aesthetic experience may promote balance on a cusp of ephemerality and permanence. The final lines of the ode insist on the acceptance of mutability, of self-difference (as the poet’s experience of maturity, mood, illness, recovery), forgetting, and closure in aesthetic experience.

Swift’s poem—as both paean and palinode—has disciplinary echoes. For him, the muse and her temporality are tied up in the instability and precariousness of the poetic career. Attempts in literary study to refocus attention on aesthetics and on why aesthetics matters are also attempts to focus attention on why our discipline matters—why reading texts and teaching others how to read them is significant. But we must be careful to recall how much of an intervention aesthetic inquiry actually is. The sense of seamlessness that emotion is apt to produce—the way that the same objects may strike the mind at distant hours so like—may encourage critics and theorists to forget the changeability of aesthetic experience not just in one person from one hour to the next, but much more broadly, from one culture or time to another. Moreover, it is imperative to keep in mind that what theories accomplish and what their objects produce are two different things. If it is important to bring theory and practice closer together, it is foolhardy to forget that they remain distinct. In seeking to know beauty better, what it does and how it works, critics must be careful not to substitute acts of criticism for the effects of beauty at a given time. Aesthetic inquiry ought always emphasize the tenuous nature of connections between texts and world, no matter how significant those connections may be.

It is useful for critics to remember that literary study and aesthetic inquiry can be important without having all the answers; academics outside of the humanities are certainly recognizing this now. A small but influential group of scientists is interested in the role aesthetics plays in human development and how the aesthetic, as a fundamental characteristic of mental life, can give clues to how the brain works, how we think, and what we choose to pursue. But getting at the significance of the aesthetic in any discipline requires first an awareness of the difference between aesthetic experience and aesthetic inquiry. For those who are
skeptical of the teaching powers of beauty itself as they appear, for example, in Scarry’s On Beauty and Being Just, it is perhaps more clear that inquiry about beauty may teach us a great deal—as Scarry’s work also shows—by offering to increase our knowledge of and dialogue about what matters in our disciplines.

I close with a final look at Hogarth in the hope of suggesting further how beauty may enter disciplinary inquiry. At the heart of The Analysis is Hogarth’s theory of what he calls the serpentine line. He begins with a waving line, a line moving sinuously on two axes, then imagines that line wrapped around a cone so that it curves and winds in all three dimensions (see Hogarth’s plate 1.26). Such a serpentine line invites pursuit, and it does so because it always disappears, passing up and behind and out of sight as it curves away from the eye. This for Hogarth is the foundation upon which the experience of beauty is laid. More than suggesting merely that objects of beauty are fragile, that beauty’s rose (like the rose of the world) may in fact die, Hogarth’s serpentine line suggests that the experience of beauty is predicated on transience. The serpentine line itself will not decay: it is an abstraction that continues into space even when one cannot see it, drawing one on to pursuit. The experience of beauty is a process structured by disappearance. Even in apprehending something as unbreakable (the serpentine line in the mind’s eye), beauty comes into being because we can imagine disappearance and presence together, folding into one another, as we follow the imagined curve of the line away into space. The certainty of disappearance is what leads the mind to pursue the object, and it is that drive to pursue that structures beauty. Perhaps, then, the shift into metaphor or analogy, the exchange of one (sometimes beautiful) object for another, is a kind of homage to beauty’s ineluctable and indispensable disappearance. As beauty dissolves into ethics in Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, or Scarry, it is perhaps just doing what it does best. However, aesthetic experience and aesthetic inquiry involve different demands. Any move to analyze beauty should not wholly reenact the effects of substitution that Proust associates with the beautiful. Aesthetic inquiry can go farther than this, following the traces of beauty as it is transformed and reconfigured, if, as with the Hogarthian pursuit of the serpentine line, querents keep trying to keep beauty in sight.

NOTES

I would like to thank John Guillory, Denis Donoghue, Martin Harries, Christopher R. Miller, Amy King, Erik Bond, Peter Fenves, and Jeffrey Freedman for their careful readings of this essay and helpful suggestions. I would also like to thank Elaine Scarry, whose gifts as a thinker leave me deeply indebted.


4. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 25. It is Eagleton’s thesis that in “the category of the aesthetic [there is] a way of gaining access to certain central questions of modern European thought—to light up, from that particular angle, a range of wider social, political and ethical issues” (1).


6. I focus on the beautiful here, following Scarry. She is quite right to critique the gradual demotion of beauty from its place of Platonic preeminence. Beginning with the late-seventeenth-century revival of Pseudo-Longinus’s *Peri Hypsous*, the sublime gradually displaces beauty at the apex of aesthetic theory. The sublime does not appear as a critical juggernaut until after Burke midcentury. On other aesthetic categories, see Paulson as well as Scott Black, “Addison’s Aesthetics of Novelty,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 30 (2001): 269–88.


8. This is more apparent in the French tradition than in the English: see Charles Barteux’s *Les beaux arts réduit à un même principe*, for example, or the theories of epic poetry of Le Bossu or Rapin. British contributions by Dennis, Roscommon, Buckingham, Pope, and others are also important. Ernst Cassirer, in *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1951), argues that both empiricist and classical models of the aesthetic “fail . . . to account for the peculiar meaning and value of the beautiful; for the standard employed in both cases is on a different plane from that occupied by the pure phenomenon of beauty” (311). For him, Shaftesbury is the first to look to beauty for its own grounding by turning to “the midst of the artistic process” (324). As I have made clear, Shaftesbury also displaces aesthetic grounding onto that of its disciplinary neighbors—if aesthetics is understood primarily not as a factor of creativity but as one of reception. Response can approximate creation in *The Moralists*, where rhapsody emerges as the creative expression of aesthetic pleasure. However, this leaves the same problem; if we back up to the moments preceding articulate response, the grounding of aesthetic pleasure remains blurred with that of ethical community. The independence in Shaftesbury for which Cassirer argues refers to a second-order sense of beauty, one of aesthetic contemplation and not of aesthetic perception: “[F]orm can never be understood and assimilated unless it is distinguished from its mere effect and made an independent object of aesthetic contemplation. The intuition of the beautiful, which is to be distinguished carefully from the mere sensation of the beautiful, arises only from such contemplation, which is . . . the purest sort of activity, namely, the activity peculiar to the soul” (326). This contemplation can only follow perception, and it is there that the problems lie.
9. Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, in *Collected Works of Francis Hutcheson* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1990), 1: vii. Hutcheson argues that the internal sense is constructed in the way it is because of “some Constitution of the AUTHOR of our Nature” (42), so that God’s aesthetic vision ratifies our own.

10. Although Hutcheson can describe the principle, namely, uniformity amid variety, by which the internal sense makes discriminations of beauty, it is a principle much like any other perceptual rule: just as our attention as humans is drawn by motion or we preferentially notice objects whose lighting suddenly shifts, the internal sense is tuned to objects exhibiting variety in uniformity.

11. Most works in early British aesthetics are essentially deist in origin and are loosely but not doxologically linked to Christian ethics and theology (Paulson, *Beautiful, Novel, and Strange*, x); Addison’s belief in God does little for him toward finding a rational or adequate explanation of the aesthetic itself. There are a variety of works that follow the pattern set by Shaftesbury, Addison, and Hutcheson in the first sixty or so years of the century. Many of them may be grouped together in terms of their approach to the question of aesthetic ground. Burke, for example, follows the general pattern of Addison in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990).


13. Emory Elliot’s work on beauty is not yet published but has been presented in talks at the MLA (1999) and elsewhere. He argues that an expanded and refreshed aesthetics, instead of being the ground of exclusion from the canon, can be the ground for including works by women, minority, and queer poets and novelists. Armstrong’s ethical argument is for—or at least works best with—the radical intervention of particular works when confronted in particular ways, not for aesthetic experience in general (which is in no way a fault).


15. Ibid., 90. Cf. Burke: “I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them, . . . they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary” (*A Philosophical Enquiry*, 39).


17. *The Radical Aesthetic*, 59. Armstrong adapts Hegel and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis in her quest for a language suited to analyzing the affective. She theorizes from “the broken middle,” a position that mediates cognition and affect and makes the aesthetic a particular “form” of coming to knowledge.

18. A casual survey of the MLA database in January 2001 produced thirteen hits for Hogarth’s *The Analysis*. Of the greater than one hundred entries for Shaftesbury, over sixty refer to his aesthetic theories, and there are more than sixty entries on Burke’s theories of the sublime.


20. The serpentine line is a two-dimensional waving line that has been twisted so that it spirals into three dimensions. Not all serpentine lines are beautiful; some are clumsy, some fatiguing, just like some problems (33). There is one particular configuration that is essential (41–42). The serpentine line itself is an abstraction from beauty in the world. The line makes sense less as a determinate form than as the physical incarnation of aesthetic desire: it mimics the processes the mind performs in searching for and in apprehending the beautiful. On the ethical question, see Paulson: “W. J. T. Mitchell has asked . . . : ‘Does the Satanic character of the serpentine line suggest that beauty is simply independent of moral status? Or does it suggest that beauty is actively subversive of morality, order, and rationality, and that the ‘curiosity’ aroused by beauty is the same that lured Eve into her wanton, lustful fall?’ The fact that Hogarth raises these questions is probably more important than the answer” (46). For Hogarth, aesthetic operations can work on moral subjects, just as moral operations can work on aesthetic ones (Paulson, introduction to *Analysis*, xxxiii).

reading a poem should be sinuous: “The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward” (14). Hogarth’s serpentine line appears again, divorced from the visual and rendered a mental principle.


23. Paulson argues that Hogarthian “[p]ursuit does not . . . pass beyond the solution of a puzzle, the winning of a game. The chief object, to judge by the metaphors of sexual pursuit and the chase, is a woman or a fox; but when the pursuit passes beyond seduction or capture to possessing or killing, it is no longer within the range of the Beautiful” (Beautiful, Novel, and Strange, 44). This is resonant with Kant’s analysis of aesthetics based on the principle of purposiveness without purpose.


26. Eagleton argues that Burkean politics absorbs aesthetics via a metaphorical principle: “We become human subjects by pleasurably imitating practical forms of social life. . . . To mime is to submit to a law, but one so gratifying that freedom lies in such servitude. Such consensuality is less an artificial social contract . . . than a kind of spontaneous metaphor or perpetual forging of resemblance” (53).

27. Swift is often read as being resistant to the aesthetic and to beauty in particular; see, for example, Carole Fabricant, Swift’s Landscape (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1982). In Jonathan Swift: A Critical Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), Denis Donoghue also argues that for Swift “[b]enevolists like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson” had little appeal (64–65).


29. I here have in mind primarily psychoanalytic and feminist readings of Swift as well as other traditional readings of the Swiftian persona, including Norman Brown, Life against Death; The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959); John Middleton Murry, Jonathan Swift: A Critical Biography (London: Cape, 1954); W. B. Carnochan, Lemuel Gulliver’s Mirror for Man (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968); and revisionist readings of Swift’s relationship to women and attitudes toward femininity by Carol Houlihan Flynn, The Body in Swift and Defoe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990); Felicity Nussbaum, The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660–1750 (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984); Margaret Anne Doody, “Swift among the Women,” Yearbook of English Studies 18 (1988): 68–92; and Ellen Pollak, Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope (Chicago: Univ.of Chicago Press, 1985). Feminist scholars in particular have offered significant ethical readings of Swift’s work that press beyond the traditional view of Swift as fearful misogynist. Although I place ethical or hermeneutic reading in abeyance here, I do not underestimate the complexity of such readings, a complexity summed up by Laura Brown: “The works of Jonathan Swift provide a critical test case for political criticism and a proving ground for the nature of the ‘politics’ of such a criticism. . . . Swift’s texts lend themselves equally to a negative and a positive hermeneutic, and a critic concerned with the political aim of her readings of literary culture might well pause between the exposure of misogyny in the canon and the discovery of an early ally in the struggle against colonialism. Which to choose?” “Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift,” Critical Essays on Jonathan Swift, ed. Frank Palmeri (New York: G. K. Hall, 1993), 121.


31. Jonathan Swift, the Complete Poems, ed. Pat Rogers (New York: Penguin, 1983), 76; subsequent references to Swift’s poetry are to this edition.

33. The poem is usually read as Swift’s youthful farewell to epideictic poetry in favor of satire or as a temporary adieu to fame (or hopes for Temple’s approval). See Jaffe, The Poet Swift, 74; Schakel, The Poetry of Jonathan Swift, 27–28; or Fabricant, who writes that the poem “is a scathing denunciation of the visionary muse, . . . and affirms a resolve to turn away completely from the realm of murky imaginings, of chimeras rather than actualities. . . . The verse ends with a renunciation having profound implications for both the form and the content of Swift’s subsequent poetry, which becomes increasingly more topical and more dependent upon empirically observed detail, as well as increasingly less indulgent of the vagaries of the imagination” (Swift’s Landscape, 58).

34. See Fisher, 52. Fisher argues that she becomes an allegory for religious faith, and she transforms “each human experience . . . [into] an emblem of god’s gracious presence” (Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences, 53). My argument in this paragraph builds on his (49–54).


36. I suggested at the beginning of this essay that new historicism and the new aesthetics are related, that they are both responses to contemporary challenges about the relationship between theory and practice, texts and the world. At best, both of these impulses are pushing toward radical reconceptions of textual practice, but at worst, they assume a predictive and or constitutive relation between unique moments and constructs that overshadow and overpower them.

37. Among these are Patrick Cavanagh, Mark Tramo, and Semir Zeki, neuroscientists interested in perception, just to name a few. See especially Semir Zeki, Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999); a recent volume of the Journal of Consciousness Studies, “Art and the Brain,” 6, nos. 6–7 (1999), with articles by Zeki and V. S. Ramachandran; and Tramo’s recent work on music and the brain in Science, 291, no. 5501 (5 January 2001): 54–56.

38. Cf. Armstrong on Adorno: “[B]eauty is not a thing, an is, or even an ought; it is a want or wanting. Beauty conjures wanting because it is a promise of the as yet unsayable, a fleeting promise of new possibilities, of scarcely envisioned openings in experience emancipated from the world of exchange” (186; italics original). I don’t believe beauty conjures wanting but that “wanting” and beauty define each other reciprocally. Pursuit structures the experience of the beautiful, gives it the shape that is its being.