1. Introduction

What is the point of talking about the arts and aesthetics in terms of rules? Is not art the playground for us adults where freedom is the name of the game and the notion of a mistake does not have a ready application? And is not aesthetics first and foremost a matter of exercising our quite natural, if cultivable, ability to respond to beautiful things by spontaneous feelings of approbation–feelings that are precisely not responsible to a standard, law, or rule prescribed for them by an external authority, be that the Union of the Soviet Composers, propositional content wanting an artistic outlet, or a moral or political agenda in need of expression? What could be a possible motivation for bringing rules into this picture? In this paper, I will argue for what, in my view, is the strongest case for incorporating rules into our account of aesthetics. I will do so by reconsidering the arguments offered by two formalists, Kant and Wittgenstein. Both acknowledge the subjective core of aesthetic judgment and yet make a connection between aesthetics and rules.

According to Kant, pure judgments of taste are indeed founded upon a subjective response to something particular. One cannot make a pure judgment of taste by applying a general conceptual rule, for a judgment of taste is grounded in a subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure.
Nevertheless, Kant claims with equal ardor that in spite of its subjective foundation a pure judgment of taste is offered ‘as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce’ (CPJ 5: 237). Interestingly, we find the same puzzling combination of commitments in Wittgenstein’s work. On the one hand, Wittgenstein claims that “Perhaps the most important thing in connection to aesthetics is what may be called aesthetic reactions, e.g., discontent, discomfort, disgust” (LC II: 10). These are personal responses to particular features of artworks, and what elicits my discontent may not invite the same response in you. And yet, just like Kant, Wittgenstein connects aesthetic judgment to rules. He says: “If I hadn’t learnt the rules I wouldn’t be able to make the aesthetic judgment” (LC I: 15).

In the following, I will address the tension between the two seemingly contradictory claims about rules in art and aesthetics, namely, the “objectivist” claim evoking aesthetic norms or rules and the “subjectivist” claim about a personal response as a sine qua non of aesthetic judgment. I will do so by discussing Kant’s and Wittgenstein’s respective accounts, trying to tease out their motivations for endorsing the two seemingly contradictory commitments. Ultimately, my goal is to defend a view of aesthetic judgment that combines both the objective and the subjective poles of the judgment. These two poles may be seen as parallel to the conditions for the possibility of art having communicable content on the one hand and for leaving room for artistic freedom on the other.

2. Kant & the Rule I cannot produce

Background

Kant’s critical project was to draw the limits of different types of judgment, determined by their respective sets of rules, principles, or laws. Indeed for Kant, in order for there to be an intelligible domain of reality at all, it must be governed by rules. In Kant’s account, the paradigm example of a rule is a concept (like “horse”). Such conceptual rules are, in ordinary cognitive judgments, applied
to particulars derived from sensibility. Without a conceptual rule, the judgment about the sensible particular remains blind, as Kant famously states (CPR A 51). Moreover, we can, not just comprehend, but come to agreement on matters of empirical fact, because we all share the same mental architecture of conceptual categories of understanding, which is defined by Kant as the faculty of rules (CPR A 132). Similarly, every rational action is governed by a maxim that may, in turn, be tested against a formal principle (the Categorical Imperative). The specific twist of Kant’s position, transcendental idealism, lies in the fact that we ourselves are the relevant lawgivers. The pure concepts of understanding are not given to us by God or by nature, but originate in the structure of our own faculties. And this just means that the relevant rules are not regulative rules dictated from an external standpoint, but constitutive of the very possibility of thought. “We cannot think, we cannot use our understanding, except according to certain rules”, Kant writes (Jäsche Logic, 12).

But Kant’s project is not restricted to cognitive and moral judgments. In addition to what he calls determining judgments that subsume particulars under general conceptual rules, Kant argues that the possibility of objective thought involves agreement also on reflective judgments. These are judgments of beauty and teleological judgments about the purposiveness of nature that do not begin from a given conceptual rule. Rather, in its reflective use, the power of judgment proceeds “bottom-up” from the sensible particular, presented by the imagination as a challenge to understanding. For Kant, a judgment of beauty is the paradigm example of a reflective judgment, because it is by definition not grounded in a concept, nor leads to a concept. In the reflective judgment, the understanding seeks to find a concept that would match the sensible particular provided by the imagination. However, as Kant famously argues, in a judgment of beauty the pursuit for a conceptual rule always fails, leaving the understanding and the imagination in a pleasurable state of play triggered by the concrete sensible particular. (CPJ 5: 169.) As argued by such scholars as Henry Allison, David Bell, and Beatrice Longuenesse, even empirical judgments
rely in the end on reflective judgments.¹ This is because – as Kant observes – the application of a general conceptual rule to a particular case cannot be justified by appealing to yet other rules without entering into an infinite regress (CPR A 133). Hence, as stated beautifully by David Bell, “That the regressive infinity of judgments on judgments, on rules for the following of rules, can be stopped, without thereby making a mystery of my ability to judge at all, is due to the fact that at certain point I am directly aware of an intrinsic coherence, or unity, or significance in my experience”.² This awareness of intrinsic coherence or unity is provided by reflective judgment epitomized by a judgment of beauty.

The Two Poles of the Judgment of Beauty

So, for Kant, judgments of beauty are based on the subject’s feelings of pleasure in the contemplation of the form of the object as purposive. And this means that they cannot be conceptually justified. Nor do they lead to conceptual generalizations. However, Kant’s overall goal is to show that, in spite of this principled impossibility to give it a conceptual justification, the subjectively based judgment of beauty may nonetheless be treated as universally valid. By contrast to pathologically subjective judgments about the agreeableness of wine and coffee that simply reflect empirical laws of nature, a pure judgment of taste demands agreement from others (CPJ 5: 215–216, 5: 239). Put in other words by Kant: “the universal communicability of the sensation is postulated by the judgment of taste” (5:219). Kant argues that, in making a judgment of beauty, I claim that the relation between the form of the representation of the object and my subjectively felt pleasure is necessary (CPJ 5: 236–237). However, given that the necessity cannot rest on a conceptual principle, the type of necessity in question is of a specific kind. Kant calls it exemplary

¹ Longuenesse 1998, 163–166; Allison 2001, 20–30, 144–159; Ginsborg 1997; see also CPJ 1st Intro IV-VI & CPJ § 21 & 35.
² Bell 1987, 226.
This is subjective necessity, which however, is represented as objective under the assumption that we all share the same faculties of imagination and understanding (CPJ 5: 237).

This is to say that, for Kant, the language of beauty, unlike the language of the agreeable, is inherently normative.³ By contrast to judgments about the agreeableness of tastes or smells, which are merely subjective as they are empirically conditioned, judgments of beauty make a claim to necessity (CPJ 5: 212). And as always in Kant’s system, what grounds the normative force of a judgment is an a priori principle. In this case, it is the a priori principle of the power of judgment, which Kant describes as the “principle of purposiveness for our cognitive faculties”, the principle of “purposiveness without purpose”, the “principle of formal purposiveness”, or the principle of the “lawfulness of the contingent as such” (CPJ 5: 181–186, 20: 217). Unlike the a priori concepts of understanding, this principle does not attribute anything to its object, but simply governs the power of judgment itself in its reflective use (CPJ 5: 183). This is what Kant means by stating that while cognitive judgments and moral judgments each have a domain, i.e. nature and freedom respectively, reflective judgments do not have a domain at all (CPJ 5: 174, 5: 177). The principle of formal purposiveness simply presents the way in which we must approach certain objects for them to be intelligible for us. We have to approach them as purposive, as if they contained a lawlike unity, even if we cannot establish such unity from the conceptual perspective of the understanding.

It is here, in the notion of purposiveness, that we find the connection that Kant makes between reflective judgment and the notion of a rule. Kant writes: “An object or a state of mind, or even an action … even if its possibility does not necessarily presuppose the representation of an end, is called purposive merely because its possibility can only be explained and conceived by us insofar as we assume as its ground a causality in accordance with ends; i.e. a will that has arranged it so in accordance with a representation of a certain rule” (CPJ 5: 220). In a judgment of beauty we have no subjective or objective end or purpose in sight, but we still have the form of purposiveness,

³ Allison 2001, 103–104.
which we judge to be universally communicable even in the absence of a concept that would capture the purpose. Hence, we offer the judgment of beauty “as an example of a universal rule which one cannot produce”. Indeed, Kant defines the aesthetic power of judgment both as a faculty for judging formal purposiveness and as a “special faculty for judging things in accordance with a rule but not in accordance with concepts” (CPJ 5: 193, 194).

We find Kant’s own formulation of the tension between the nonconceptuality of pure judgments of taste and their reliance on a principle in the Antinomy of Taste. The two seemingly contradictory claims that make up the antinomy are, first, the Thesis, namely, “The judgment of taste is not based on concepts, for otherwise it would be possible to dispute about it (decide it by proofs)”; and second, the Antithesis, namely, “The judgment of taste is based on concepts, for otherwise, despite its variety, it would not even be possible to argue about it (to lay claim to the necessary assent of others to this judgment)” (CPJ 5: 338). The point is, once again, while we cannot prove a judgment of taste by appeal to conceptual rules, we nevertheless treat them as having normative force different from mere judgments about the agreeable, which seems to require some sort of principle.

According to Kant, the resolution to the seeming contradiction requires showing that the notion of a concept is used in different sense in the two theses. He claims that while the pure judgment of taste is indeed related to a concept, “it need not on that account be demonstrable from a concept, because a concept can be either determinable or else in itself indeterminate and also indeterminable” (CPJ 5: 339). As is to be expected, for Kant, the concept involved in a pure judgment of taste falls into the latter category: the relevant concept is one which is “in itself indeterminate and also indeterminable”. What Kant means by this difficult characterization of the concept involved in a pure judgment of taste is that the relevant concept is not like the concepts of understanding (like that of a horse) that have a ready application in the domain of nature. Instead, the concept is similar to the “transcendental concept of the supersensible”. Such a concept is a pure
rational concept: it derives solely from the form of our own cognitive faculties and has no application in the world of appearances.

Henry Allison argues that the concept with which we are dealing here is the concept of the beautiful. This concept is not just indeterminate but indeterminable. Given that the judgment of beauty cannot by definition be grounded on a concept (for otherwise it would be a determining judgment), the possibility for the concept to be determinable is ruled out in principle. To determine the concept would mean to show what the definite purpose of the object is, but this is precisely what Kant has denied for judgments of beauty. Yet, the concept is such that it provides a rule for deciding whether something rightly falls under it. In Allison’s reading, then, the best candidate for such concept is beauty understood by reference to Kant’s definition given at the end of third moment of the analytic: “beauty is an object’s form of purposiveness insofar as it is perceived in the object without the representation of a purpose” (CPJ 5: 236). The form of purposiveness allows for the disagreements about what is beautiful, as there are no clear standards to what counts as formally purposive. Nevertheless, when I judge something to be formally purposive, I do so with right derived from the a priori principle of the power of judgment. Moreover, the form of purposiveness is intimately tied to the notion of the supersensible, to which Kant perplexingly refers in his resolution of the antinomy. This is because the notion of purposiveness brings with it the idea, necessary for our ability to think of an artefact or a natural organism as possible, of a will that has designed that something in accordance with a rule even when we cannot state what that rule is (CPJ 5: 220). In short, then, the judgment of beauty is indeed related to a rule or a concept, but the concept in question differs radically from the concepts of understanding by remaining indeterminable.

The main thrust of these brief remarks on reflective judgments and on pure judgments of taste in particular is this. While a pure judgment of taste does not have a conceptual rule as its

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ground, it nevertheless makes a claim to necessity. In making a judgment of beauty I claim that the relation between the representation of the form of the object (contemplated in a disinterested manner) and my subjectively felt pleasure (which is nothing other than the felt interplay between my cognitive faculties of understanding and imagination) is necessary (CPJ 5: 237). I thus claim that you too ought to feel this pleasure if you contemplated disinterestedly the form of the representation of the object. Now, a claim to necessity cannot be empirically founded. Instead, it must have a transcendental ground. This ground is the principle of the power of judgment, the principle of formal purposiveness given by the power of judgment to itself in its reflective use. But this just means that there is kind of a rule or principle involved in the judgment of beauty after all. For without the principle of formal purposiveness the aesthetic judgment (a judgment based on a subjective feeling) remains a mere judgment about the agreeable. It is just that this principle cannot be conceptual.

*Kant on Rules and Freedom in Art*

The two poles of rule-governedness and freedom from rules, familiar from Kant’s account of a judgment of beauty are echoed in his treatment of the arts. Kant writes: “In a product of art one must be aware of it as art, and not nature; yet the purposiveness of its form must still seem to be as free from all constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a mere product of nature” (CPJ 5:306). To be perceived as a work of art, an object must be seen as the result of rational consideration and in this sense *as if* designed in accordance with the representation of a certain (indeterminable) rule. Hence, according to Kant, “every art presupposes rules which first lay down the foundation by means of which a product that is to be called artistic is first represented as possible” (CPJ 5:307). Interestingly enough, it is rational consideration, i.e., the ability of the human will to escape determination caused by external stimuli and act on the basis of a representation of a rule, which
establishes art’s connection to freedom (see G 4: 413). In Kant’s words, ‘[b]y right, only production through freedom, i.e., through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason, should be called art’ (CPJ 5:303). But to see art as the result of intentional action is to see it as manifesting a rule. Indeed, Kant claims that rules are necessary for the very possibility of art: “without a preceding rule a product can never be called art” (CPJ 5:307). But again, for the work of art to be an object of a judgment of taste, the rules in question cannot be conceptual. If they were, the autonomy of art and the corresponding purity of the judgment of taste would be jeopardized. So if the rules of art cannot be based on concepts, then what are they like?

Again in line with his discussion of a judgment of taste that manifests exemplary necessity, Kant describes the kinds of rules involved in the great products of art produced by a genius as exemplary. Just like one cannot make a judgment of beauty by imitating others, one cannot learn how to write inspired poetry by imitation others or by consulting a manual. Not even the artist himself can explain to others how his works have come about. And yet, just like the judgment of beauty is offered as an example of a rule that one cannot state, so too the rule of art is meant to serve “as a standard or rule for judging” (CPJ 5:308). The rule of art, Kant writes, “cannot be couched in a formula to serve as a precept […] rather, the rule must be abstracted from the deed” (CPJ 5: 309). Hence, according to Kant, the rule of art must be abstracted from the products of a genius, that is, from the works of art. One way to understand this is to take the rule of art to be constitutive for the possibility of the work to be a work of art, but not responsible to a standard external to itself. Understood as such, the rule of art is the mode of “cohesive unification” of the aesthetic attributes of the work, the “organic unity” of the work, to borrow Allison’s way of putting it. This is to say that while the work of art does not convey a determinate conceptual thought, it still meets the “requirements of the understanding for coherence and communicability”. And it meets them precisely because it manifests formal purposiveness. The work of art thus manifests features

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that allow for the judgment of beauty: it is capable of triggering the kind of interplay between understanding and imagination that is felt as pleasure that we claim others ought to feel too.

In addition to the exemplary “rule of art”, Kant also mentions the rules of art in plural, speaking of “academic correctness” and “training”, necessary for the elaboration of the raw material provided by the genius. In this context, then, it is safe to assume that by the rules of art in the plural he means the conventions of a given field of art, presumably open to conceptualization as well. He writes, “There is no beautiful art in which something mechanical, which can be grasped and followed according to rule, and thus something academically correct, does not constitute the essential condition for art. For something in it must be thought of as an end, otherwise one cannot ascribe its product to any art at all; it would be a mere product of chance” (CPJ 5:310). This is to say that even Kant acknowledges the artworks rely on a tradition of rules, even if they should do that “without the academic form showing through” (CPJ 5:307).

Finally, the relation between Kant’s analysis of a pure judgment of taste and his account of art is not merely one of parallel treatment. According to Kant, genius is required for the production of art, taste for judging beauty. And both genius and taste are abilities that involve the interplay between imagination and understanding. In fact, genius (or spirit) just is “nature in the subject by means of the disposition of its faculties” (CPJ 5: 307), a certain “happy” relation between imagination and understanding (CPJ 5: 316–317). While involved in ordinary cognition, the imagination is constrained by the conceptual rules of understanding. However, in artistic production the roles of the faculties are turned upside down, and the imagination is rendered free from the conceptual bounds of understanding and given the chance to challenge the understanding by putting forth “that which is unnameable” (CPJ 5: 317). In this way, the genius or spirit may animate the work of art by presenting aesthetic ideas, i.e., representations of the imagination that occasion “much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible” (CPJ 5: 314).
However, as Kant observes, in concrete samples of artworks, both genius (vis-à-vis imagination) and taste (vis-à-vis the power of judgment) are involved. There are a number of artworks that fulfill the requirements of taste by being, for example, “pretty and elegant”, but nevertheless are, as Kant says, “without spirit” (CPJ 5: 313). But since the products of a genius may become “original nonsense” without the guidance of taste, Kant takes the latter to be an indispensable condition for of art as beautiful art (CPJ 5: 319). Hence, if need be, genius must be sacrificed for taste in order for the artistic products to remain within the bounds of formal purposiveness and as such communicable.

3. Wittgenstein & Justification by Description

Background: the Limits of Conceptual Justification

In accordance with Kant’s overall project to determine the limits of different types of judgments marked by their respective sets of rules, Wittgenstein claims in the Tractatus that “only connexions that are subject to law are thinkable” (TLP 6.3361). For the early Wittgenstein, the relevant laws are grounded in the logical form shared by language and reality, known to the subject a priori as the form of her thought (TLP 3.03, TLP 5.473–5.4733). While the later Wittgenstein famously rejects the Tractarian view of the immutable and universal logical form, he nevertheless continues to treat grammar as the shared foundation for communication (PI § 242). Without the interconnections provided by the rules of a language game, an expression may be anything or nothing at all (PI §§ 6, 371). Accordingly, the understanding of language requires the speaker’s familiarity with the rules of grammar, shown in her ability to justify her linguistic usages by appeal to those rules.

Now, like Kant, Wittgenstein extends his emphasis on rules in language to his treatment of the arts. If I did not know harmony and counterpoint, he says, I would not be able to understand
music, but would be like a dog wagging its tale when hearing music (LC I: 15, 17). In other words, my response to music would be “pathological” in the Kantian sense of being merely empirically conditioned. At the same time it is clear that like Kant Wittgenstein does not mean that the rules of art are conceptually formulated prescriptions for artistic production. In fact, Wittgenstein questions the availability of such fixed rule-formulations in the case of language as well (e.g. PI §§ 201, 211, 217). He writes: “How am I to follow a rule?” – If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my acting in this way in complying with the rule. Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’” (PI § 217.) The point is that the while I can justify my application of a rule to a concrete case by evoking a rule-formulation (a conceptual reformulation of the rule), such justifications lead to an infinite regress of rule-formulations and hence only take us so far (PI § 201). Hence, Wittgenstein states, once I have exhausted the available justifications offered by conceptual reformulations, “I follow the rule blindly” (PI § 219). As argued by Bell, Wittgenstein’s reference to blindness may be read as an allusion to Kant’s famous dictum about intuitions being blind without concepts and yet finding their own principle of guidance in the a priori principle of the power of judgment. And indeed, in his lectures at the beginning of the 1930s, Wittgenstein claims explicitly that we may approach grammar either ‘discursively’, as a calculus that may be taught to another, or ‘intuitively, taking in the grammatical system ‘as a whole’ (M 8:58). The latter approach, while clearly still connected to the rule-governed structure of the grammatical system, does not allow for a conceptual analysis of that structure, but focuses instead on its overall coherence.

7 Bell 1987, 226.
8 In Philosophical Remarks, discussing mathematical proofs, Wittgenstein aligns intuitive with self-evident and contrasts it with provable (PR pp. 195, 287). In Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology II we read: “For words have meaning only in the stream of life. I am sure, sure, that he isn't pretending; but someone else isn't. Can I convince him? And if not--do I say that he can't think? (The conviction could be called "intuitive").) Instinct comes first, reasoning second. Not until there is a language-game are there reasons.” (RPP II §§ 687–689.)
Interestingly enough, like Kant, Wittgenstein too connects the point at which one cannot produce a new rule-formulation to justify one’s application of the grammatical rule to aesthetics. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, he distinguishes between two ways of understanding of sentence, where the first is manifest in the speaker’s ability to provide another sentence which says the same, but the second is more like the understanding of a musical theme which cannot be replaced by any other (PI § 531). Yet, the inherently normative notion of understanding, which presupposes the possibility of distinguishing between correct and incorrect, between understanding and misunderstanding, applies to the second case as well (PI § 532). What is particularly interesting for the purposes of this paper is Wittgenstein’s understanding of aesthetics, as it incorporates certain key assumptions from Kant’s account summarized above.

*Rules in Aesthetics*

The first point of connection between Kant and Wittgenstein is their shared focus of investigation, namely, the nature and conditions of aesthetic judgments. The central themes of Wittgenstein’s discussion, present from the beginning of the 30s are aesthetic understanding, aesthetic investigation, aesthetics puzzles and their answers, and the reasons given for them. All these are fairly characterized by the general term “aesthetic judgment”, and indeed, in 1938, we find Wittgenstein using the term frequently (LC I:8, I:15, I:17, I:25). This focus of investigation is underscored by the examples Wittgenstein uses to illustrate his topic. In the lectures, he does not really discuss specific works of art, that is, isolated entities which we try to interpret by giving a kind of a translation of what we take to be the conceptual or emotional content of that work (cf. PI § 201). Rather, and particularly in the early 1930s, in the lectures recorded by G. E. Moore, Wittgenstein talks about entire “aesthetic systems”, such as those we find in sculpture, architecture, poetry, and music, perhaps the most systemic of all arts (M 9:40–9:41). Wittgenstein does not limit
his stock of examples to the arts either, but the phenomena open to aesthetic investigation include natural beauty, human faces, clothing, furniture, and even the “choosing [of] a suitable wall-paper” (M 9:20, see 9:16; LC I: 12–13, 19–22). These are the kinds of examples Kant uses, and has been ridiculed for doing so, most notably for his choice of wall-paper as an example of free beauty. But if the starting point of investigation is the aesthetic judgment rather than its object, then there is nothing odd about such examples. If anything, the seemingly arbitrary set of examples serves to turn the focus on the judgment itself rather than its atomistically understood object in need of definition or interpretation by reference to a realm of explanans outside of its own features.

Now, the later Wittgenstein is famous for stressing that the understanding of language is more than mere mechanical reaction, because it commits the speaker to using her words consistently (PI §§ 149–150). This is why Wittgenstein cashes out his later view on understanding in terms of rules and the speaker’s ability to follow a rule (PI § 217). But it would be a grave mistake to understand Wittgenstein’s appeal to rules as evoking an idea of regulative principles to be found in a manual dictating how to apply words and sentences. Instead, for Wittgenstein, the rules of language are constitutive of the ways in which we actually use language just like the rules of chess are constitutive of chess moves: one could not play a game of chess unless by applying those rules (PI §§ 33, 197, 205). Hence, the rules may have blurred boundaries, they may change over time, and they are best conveyed by means of practice and examples (PI §§ 31, 68, 71, 83, 100–101, 208).

Similar considerations may be found in Wittgenstein’s discussion of aesthetics. Just as in the case of language, we hold the speaker accountable for her aesthetic judgments. For just like language, which should not be likened to a drug mechanically producing certain effects, the aesthetically relevant is not reducible to mere feelings of pleasure (M 4:7, 9:29, BB 178). To be sure, Wittgenstein stresses the role of “aesthetic reactions” in aesthetics. These are immediate and subjective responses to particular features of artworks and other phenomena subjected to aesthetic
investigations. By contrast to Kant, who takes pleasure to be the subjective feeling that I may experience in the disinterested contemplation of the form of the object, Wittgenstein focuses mostly on negative reactions, such as “discontent, disgust, discomfort” (LC II: 10). These responses arise out of a dissatisfaction in the face of a particular aesthetic choice. For example, if I see a door in front of me as part of the design of a house, I may respond by discontent: “This door is too low. Make it higher” (LC II: 11). Or if I hear a jazz trio performing, I may experience discomfort: “Does this harmonize? No. The bass is not quite loud enough. Here I just want something different…” (LC I: 19). An assumption underlying these examples is the contextuality of the aesthetic phenomena in question. Indeed, Wittgenstein calls aesthetic problems puzzles: they have many pieces that may or may not “click”, and the feeling of discomfort arises from the pieces not quite clicking together (LC III: 1–5). We are thus looking for something that makes the aesthetic system (of the door as part of the general design in our example) hang or fit together. And what makes it hang together is not a standard to be found outside of the system, but rather, the intrinsic coherence of the aesthetic phenomenon under investigation.

But importantly, for Wittgenstein aesthetic judgments are not reducible to the aesthetic reactions. Like Kant, who distinguishes a judgment of beauty from mere liking by insisting on the exemplary necessity of the former, Wittgenstein insists that aesthetic explanations cannot be mere causal explanations of certain stimuli producing certain effects (LC III: 11). He says: by “beautiful” we do not mean “giving me stomach-ache/pleasure”, for if we did, aesthetics would be a merely experiential matter of producing certain effects (M 9:18). He states: “If ever we come to this: I like this; I don’t, there is an end of Aesthetics; & then comes psychology” (M 9:27). In 1933, Wittgenstein makes this point by appealing to the Kantian distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable (M 9:18–9:29). Characterizing the agreeable, in line with Kant, as that which pertains to smells, tastes, and causally induced feelings of liking, Wittgenstein states: “If this were all,

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9 “The idea of psychology explaining Aesthetic experiences I once had myself, & made useless experiments on rhythm in the laboratory” (M 9: 40).
Aesthetics would be a matter of taste” (M 9:26, see LC II: 2–3). So is not aesthetics a matter of taste, then? For the British Empiricists, aesthetics was first and foremost a matter of taste, of our natural if cultivable ability to respond to aesthetic objects by proper sentiments. But Wittgenstein’s remark becomes understandable if it is read against the background of Kant’s account. If judgments of beauty were merely a matter of subjective liking, there would be no difference between the agreeable and the beautiful. However, like Kant who started from what he took to be self-evident, namely, that language of beauty is inherently normative, so too Wittgenstein describes aesthetic language as normative.\footnote{On Kant’s argument as an argument from linguistic usage, see Allison 2001, 103–104.} We use words like “correct” and “right”, as he famously states (LC I: 8).

In Moore’s lecture notes we find an elaboration of this view. Wittgenstein says: “When I say ‘This bass moves too much’ I don’t merely mean ‘It gives me such & such an impression’, because If I did I should have to be content with the answer ‘It doesn’t give me that impression” (M 9:28). But we are not content with that. While we do not generally ask people to justify their preferences regarding roast-beef or coffee, in aesthetics we ask for reasons (M 9:20, LC II: 2). We ask for a justification for the aesthetic judgment.

What does it mean to justify an aesthetic judgment then? What does it mean to give reasons for it? Aesthetic words, like any words, are used within a context. And the immediate context of justification suggested by Wittgenstein’s discussion is the context provided by an “aesthetic system”, within which an “aesthetic puzzle” may arise. These puzzles are like puzzles about language. Wittgenstein says: “why do we have this word in this place rather than that; this musical phrase rather than that” (M 9:30, see 8:71)? Why is this chord “correct”, “right”, or even “necessary” (M 9:19, 9:21, 9:30)? What makes a chord correct or necessary within a given system? The question is closely related to another, brought up by Wittgenstein. He says: “What sort of thing is not understanding a church mode? & therefore ‘understanding’” (M 9:41)? Where is the standard of correctness that differentiates a mere reaction from understanding? As in the case of language,
where the meaning of a word is its role in the grammatical system and the relevant criteria of understanding arise from the grammatical rules constitutive of that system, so too in the aesthetic case Wittgenstein directs the attention to the aesthetic system. He says: “I was looking for utterances inside an aesthetic system” (M 9:40).

As systems, i.e. as limited organized wholes, aesthetic systems are structured by their own sets of rules. These are as arbitrary as the rules of grammar: they are not responsible to anything but rules (M 7:2). Hence, also the understanding of an aesthetic puzzle rests upon one’s mastery of the rules constitutive of the aesthetic system in question. Again, Wittgenstein distinguishes between two approaches with respect to the rules. The first concerns rules in the conventional sense, rules that one has to learn in order to be literate in the art form in question. Speaking of tailoring, Wittgenstein says “he is drilled – as in music you are drilled in harmony and counterpoint” (LC I: 15). It is possible to appeal to the rules of harmony as justification for such aesthetic proto-judgments as “No. It is right. It is according to the rules” (LC I: 15). However, the second approach mentioned by Wittgenstein makes the case more complicated, indicating the limits of musical grammar thus understood and showing the locus of the judging subject’s personal contribution to the judgment not any longer expressible by reference to the intersubjective conventions. Wittgenstein says: “I develop a feeling for the rules. I interpret the rules. I might say ‘No. It isn’t right. It isn’t according to the rules.’ Here I would be making an aesthetic judgment about the thing which is according to the rules in sense (1).” (LC I: 15). On the one hand, then, familiarity with the rules of an art form is a condition for the possibility to make aesthetic judgments. But on the other hand, learning those rules refines and changes one’s judgments. So much so that one may reject certain rules that have been part of the idiom as incapable of contributing to aesthetic value any more.

Indeed, the role of rules constitutive of an aesthetic system is more poignant in the case of music than anywhere else and may in part explain Wittgenstein’s frequent references to music. In
Moore’s lecture notes, we find numerous references to the rules of harmony and rhythm as criteria of correctness. We read: “In a book of harmony, you find no trace of psychology. It says: you mustn’t make this transition, etc.” (M 9:14). Wittgenstein even brings up an aesthetic puzzle with a possible answer, familiar to every student of counterpoint: “‘Why is this note absolutely necessary?’ Explanation would look like this: If you wrote out the tune in chords, you would see to which chord the note belongs. I.e. it hints at placing side by side with the tune a certain chorale.” (M 9:39.) But this is a curious justification, for it does not evoke a clearly formulated standard or rule as an explanation of the necessity of the note. Instead, it aims at illustrating the entire context of the note as an explanation. And indeed, Wittgenstein claims, that aesthetic explanations are in nature of further descriptions within the system (M 9:31). He says: “all Aesthetics is of nature of giving a paraphrase” (M 9:37).

By contrast to scientific, e.g. statistical or mechanistic explanations, aesthetics aims at providing an overview, a “synoptic glance”, as Wittgenstein calls it, of the aesthetic system in question. In Moore’s lecture notes Wittgenstein draws a sharp distinction between the two types of perspectives, and calls the first “discursive” and the second “intuitive”. While the discursive perspective looks at the meaning of a word or a chord as a place has in a calculus that can be taught to another, the “intuitive” perspective “takes something in as a whole at a glance” (M 8:58). And only this latter, intuitive perspective satisfies our “aesthetic craving”, he says (M 9:38–9:39). The satisfaction arises from the recognition of the system as an organized whole, from the “clicking” of the pieces of the puzzle when they fall into place (M 9:34, 9:40, LC III: 1–5). Here I find it difficult not to think of Kant’s distinction between determining and reflective judgments. For Kant too, the determining perspective shows its object as one placed in a mechanism of conceptually expressible rules that may be taught to another, whereas the reflective perspective shows the very same object as a unified, purposive whole. Moreover, Kant claims, the latter perspective does not warrant scientific explanation by means of determining judgments that would subsume the particular under.
a general conceptual rule. Instead, the reflective perspective only allows for description. (CPJ 5: 417.) Not surprisingly, then, we find Kant’s notion of purposiveness without purpose echoed in Wittgenstein’s words: “Suppose you find a bass too heavy – that it moves too much; you aren’t saying: If it moves less, it will be more agreeable to me. That it should be quieter is an end in itself, not a means to an end.” (M 9:20, see LC I: 19.)

I want to conclude by returning to the “immediate pleasure” that arises from seeing the synoptic view that satisfies our “aesthetic craving” (M 9:38–9:39). Recall the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful which, I have argued, Wittgenstein adopts from Kantian aesthetics. Pure judgments of taste differ from judgments of the agreeable in their normative force. But the two types of judgments have something in common too, namely, the subject’s personal reaction to a sensible particular. Also this feature of aesthetic judgments surfaces in Wittgenstein’s discussion. While the (limited) availability of reasons differentiates aesthetic investigation from a psychological investigation, you may not be satisfied by the reasons I offer for my judgment (M 9:30–9:31, 9:39). You may not see the connections that I see within the system, you may not feel the ending of a church mode as an ending (see PI § 535). And while I can always reformulate my original reason, point to new connections within the aesthetic system, and evoke further comparisons, in the end you must make the judgment for yourself. Wittgenstein says: “A solution must speak for itself. If when I’ve made you see what I see, it doesn’t appeal to you, there is an end” (M 9:31, see MS 137 17a, CV 79). In this way, Wittgenstein makes room for the subjective freedom that is a key feature of a pure judgment of taste as it is understood in the Kantian tradition: given that the reflective judgments does not begin from a conceptual rule but requires my personal, subjective response to something particular, no-one can make the judgment for me or force one on me. Nevertheless, the aesthetic judgment is connected to the rules constitutive of the aesthetic system and presented with a normative force that the very notion of a rule is meant to capture.
4. Conclusion

So what is at stake here? What do we lose if we give up the notion of a rule as essential for aesthetics and art? According to the story just told, we lose the normativity of the language of beauty. And more, if Kant and Wittgenstein are right, in losing that normativity we also lose communicability. If there is no common standard – not even one as formal and empty of empirical content as the principle of purposiveness without purpose – then our responses to works of art are no more than random likes or dislikes in the newsfeed of social media. And the works of art, they may be “anything or nothing at all” (cf. PI § 6).
Bibliography


