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Aesthetics of Ugliness

A Critical Edition

Karl Rosenkranz

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Foreword

An aesthetics of ugliness? And why not? Aesthetics has become the collective name for a large group of concepts, which is in turn divisible into three particular classes. The first has to do with the idea of beauty, the second with the notion of its production, that is to say, art, the third with the system of the arts, with the representation of the idea of beauty through art in a specific medium. We tend to gather concepts of the first class under the rubric of the metaphysics of beauty. But if the idea of beauty is to be considered, an investigation of ugliness is inseparable from it. The concept of ugliness, of negative beauty, thus is a part of aesthetics. There is no other science [iv] to which it could be assigned, and so it is right to speak of the aesthetics of ugliness. No one is amazed if biology also concerns itself with the concept of illness, ethics with that of evil, legal science with injustice, or theology with the concept of sin. To say the 'theory of ugliness' would fail to bring out so clearly the scientific genealogy of the word. As for the name, the handling of the subject itself will have to justify it.

I have taken pains to develop the concept of the ugly as the midpoint between that of the beautiful and that of the comical, from its first beginnings to the fullness it gives itself in the form of the satanic. In a way, I reveal the cosmos of ugliness from its first chaotic patches of fog, from shapelessness and asymmetry, to its most intensive formations in the endless multiplicity of disorganizations of beauty that is called caricature. Formlessness, incorrectness, and the deformity of disfiguration¹ are the distinct levels of this self-consistent series of [v] metamorphoses. The attempt has been made to show how ugliness has its positive presupposition in beauty, which it distorts to create the mean² instead of the sublime, the repulsive instead of the pleasant, and instead of the ideal, the caricature. All the arts and all the epochs of art among the most diverse peoples are hereby invoked to clarify the development of the concepts using apposite examples, which should also provide raw material and reference points for future students of this difficult province of aesthetics. Through this work, whose imperfections I believe I know best, I hope to fill a gap that has until now been all too tangible, for the concept of ugliness has until now been handled only in a fragmentary and incidental fashion, or else with great generality, which risks affixing the subject within very one-sided definitions.

The well-meaning reader who really seeks self-instruction may grant all this, and still ask: Should such an unpleasant, disgusting object be so thoroughly

¹ *Verbildung* meant broadly as negative figuration, not narrowly as destruction of faces.

² Rosenkranz's *gemein* is an everyday word with connotations of social status (gross, common, vulgar, coarse, base, vile) and ill will (petty, vicious, the modern use of 'mean'). But it is also a technical term indicating a distortion of the sublime. *Widrig* likewise spans a range of phenomena of resistance, from the abstract (adverse or unfavourable: *widrige Umstände*, unfavourable conditions) to the visceral (repugnant, repellent).

investigated? Undoubtedly, for science has in recent times touched on this problem again and again, and it requires [vi] resolution. Naturally I do not wish to advance a claim to having accomplished this. I am satisfied if here, as in other areas, it is granted that I have at least made a step forward. The individual may well think of this subject³:

—down there it's terrible
And man should not challenge the gods
And desire never, but never, to behold
What they kindly conceal in night and horror!⁴

The individual may think thus and set aside the science of ugliness unread. Science itself, however, follows only its own necessity. It must go forward. Charles Fourier, under the rubric of the division of labour, defined one type that he called the *travaux de dévouement* [works of devotion], to which no one is predisposed by nature, but which men do out of resignation, because they recognize their necessity for the common good.⁵ The attempt to satisfy such a duty is made here as well.

But is this business really so terrifying in practice? Does it not also contain points of light? Does not a positive content also lie in hiding for the philosopher, for the artist? I certainly think so, for ugliness [vii] can only be grasped as the midpoint between beauty and the comical. The comical is impossible without an ingredient of ugliness, which it dissolves and re-forms in the freedom of beauty. This cheering and universal consequence of our investigation will excuse the undoubted pain of some sections.

In the course of the treatise, I excuse myself at one point, in a way, for thinking so much through examples. But it is obvious to me that I did not need to do so; for all aestheticians, among them Winckelmann, Lessing, Kant, Jean Paul, Hegel, Vischer, and even Schiller himself, who recommends the sparing use of examples, proceed in the same manner. Of the material that I have accumulated for this purpose over a span of years, incidentally, I have made use of only a little over a half, and may thus consider myself to have been quite parsimonious in this respect. Through my choice of examples I have only aimed to be many-sided, so as not to impose through examples a limitation on general validity which has plagued the history of every science.

[viii] The way I handle the material might seem old-fashioned and perhaps too precise. Modern writers have invented for themselves a striking method of citation, namely to sprinkle their texts liberally with inverted commas. Where they find the citation remains mysterious. It is a lot for them to add a name. But it seems to them pedantic to then add to the name of an author the name of a book. Doubtless it would

be petty to always want to document generally known or irrelevant things with citations. But those points less common, less often touched upon, more remote, still debated, require, in my opinion, more precision of statement, so that the reader may, should it please him, go to the sources in person, and compare and judge for himself. Elegance can never be the goal of scientific discourse, only the means, and a very subordinate one at that; thoroughness and precision must stand above it.

With trepidation I see, after the printing, that among the examples quite a number have pressed forward out of the recent past, because they were freshest in my memory, [ix] because they occupy me with the same lively interest I take in their authors. Will these authors, among whom I count some friends, take this badly, will they regard me with bitterness? That would be quite painful for me. But the revered will have to ask themselves above all whether what I say is true. If it is, no wrong has been done to them. Then they will see from my mild way of complaining and in other places of praising, when it is earned, that my friendly disposition toward them has not changed. Yes, I even recall having made most of my censures first through letters. They cannot then wonder that I express the same opinion in print. I would leave out this entire observation, did I not know from experience how excitable modern minds are, how little disagreement they can tolerate, how much they wish to be eulogized and not lectured, how sharp they are, but only in critiquing others, and how especially and, above all from critics, they demand only sympathy and devotion, that is to say, admiration.

[x] I believe that my text is also readable to the general public, not just the educated. Only through the nature of the material does this accessibility have certain limits. I have had to touch on abominable things and call things by their true name. As a theoretician I have held myself back from the descent into certain sewers, and have contented myself with suggestion, as in the case of the Sotadic inventions.⁶ As a historian this course would not have been open to me; as a philosopher I was free to decide. And despite my extraordinary caution, some will judge that I need not have been so honest. But then, I may assure you, the investigation ought not to have been done at all, nor could it have been done. It is sad that for us a certain prudery creeps even into science, in that one makes discretion the only criterion for objects of animal nature and of art. And how does one best achieve discretion nowadays? One simply does not discuss certain phenomena. One decrees their non-existence. One secretes them away unscrupulously so as to remain socially acceptable. For example, one publishes [xi] woodcuts—for without woodcut illustrations modern scientificity is not really possible any longer—with microscopic detail in the service of a physiology, a doctrine of life, lectures held before a circle of ladies and gentlemen in a capital city, and one says not a single word about the generative apparatus and above all about

³ The 1853 edition has *Gestande*, which is not a word. We follow the Reclam edition's reading.

⁴ From the ballad, 'Der Taucher' [The Diver, 1797], by Friedrich Schiller, *Gedichte* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1852), 304, with the full stop turned into an exclamation mark.

⁵ See Charles Fourier, *Théorie de l'unité universelle*, vol. 4 (Paris: Société pour la propagation et la réalisation de la théorie de Fourier, 1841), 150, 161. Fourier thinks this a domain for child labour, especially those involving 'répugnances industrielles' (p. 138).

⁶ The word 'inventions' suggests that Rosenkranz is not referring to Sotades of Maronea, a Hellenistic poet writing lewd verse and comedy in Alexandria around 280 BCE (few fragments have survived), but rather to the neo-Latin erotic discourses published by Nicolas Choriier under the pseudonym Aliosia Sigea, *Satyra Sotadica de Arcanis Amoris et Veneris* (Lyons?: 1665?). A French translation of the *Satyra Sotadica* circulated widely as *L'Académie des dames*, and impressed Sade among others. On Choriier, see the recent study by James Turner, *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France, and England, 1534–1685* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 4.

sexual function. Certainly very discreet. Our German literature has already been castrated through this tidying up for girls' boarding academies and finishing schools for noble daughters, all this to bring out for tender virgin and lady souls the beautiful, the sublime, the refreshing, the comfortable, the mellow, the edifying, and all the other catchphrases. An incredible counterfeiting of the history of literature has taken place, going beyond narrow pedagogical considerations to deface opinion; this counterfeiting is supported through extremely one-sided anthologizing of literary masterworks. What luck, that a work like that of Kurz should appear at this moment, which through its independence will force the [literary] factory workers at least once again to touch on other objects, in another sequence, with another judgement [xii] than those found in the ruts they have been treading *ad nauseam*.⁷ Every perceptive reader will understand that I, by all decency, could not write such a consumptive boarding-school style, and that in the present case I may apply Lessing's words:

I do not write for little boys,
That go to school so full of pride,
Carrying the Ovid in their hands,
That their teachers don't understand.⁸

Karl Rosenkranz, Königsberg, April 16, 1853

⁷ Probably Heinrich Kurz, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur mit Proben aus den Werken der vorzüglichsten Schriftsteller*, 3 vols (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1851–1853).

⁸ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'Für wen ich singe' [1751], in *Sämmtliche Schriften*, ed. Karl Lachmann (Berlin: Voss, 1838), 81. Rosenkranz has changed 'sing' to 'write'.

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If illness can even, under certain circumstances, beautify a person, it can so much more become a source of beauty in its disappearance. The gradual return of health gives the gaze a free clarity, the cheeks a gentle ruddiness. The refilling of veins and muscles and the play of strength, which begins to stir again in search of pleasure, convey an exceptionally potent beauty and shower the human form with that ineffable charm, in which the appeal of rejuvenation still has in itself its opposite, infirmity, as life still has [34] death. A convalescent is a sight for the gods!

But we cannot leave spirit just at this point, for there are other ways in which it can generate ugliness than ordinary disease. Namely, it can become ill itself, and as a result express in its outward appearance the contradiction in which it has fallen with itself as spirit. Or more correctly, the disturbance of the soul is in itself true ugliness of spirit, as much as evil is. This inner ugliness can, however, also translate itself into the exterior. Idiocy, folly, insanity, and rage make a person ugly. Drunkenness as an acute, artificially generated self-estrangement of the mind also belongs here. The sobriety with which the self-aware spirit considers all of its relations and knows itself while individual to be simultaneously the general essence of reason: this gives the spirit the needed presence [of mind] and accordingly also the needed sovereignty over its organism. In disturbances of the soul, however, the person loses the generality of his sense of self as an idiot, or he divests himself of it limitedly as a fool, or as madman he feels himself annihilated by the force of a contradiction, and rescues himself from this contradiction only through the fiction of another being or through going berserk. In all these cases, the patient ascribes false values to the real as well as to the imaginary. The idiot sinks more and more into animal apathy, the fool develops a strange look that turns from reality and present things and persons to stray into the undefined, a nauseous grimace, a repulsive animation or rigidity, and even in the insane, who suffer from a deeper raggedness [35] of the mind, one notices in the ceremoniousness of their conduct, in the hollowness and incoherence of their pathos, the betrayal of a broken sense of self.

The Aesthetically Ugly

The realm of ugliness is, as we see, as large as the realm of sensible appearance itself; of sensible appearance, because evil and the unfortunate self-estrangement of the spirit only become aesthetic objects through the mediation of exterior representation. Because ugliness comes only through beauty, it can generate itself as the negation of each of its forms, making use of the necessity of nature just as well as of the freedom of mind. Nature mixes the beautiful and the ugly by chance, or as Aristotle would say, *καταβεβηκώς* [*katabebekós*, going down, descending³³]. The empirical reality of spirit does the same. To thus enjoy the beautiful in and for itself, spirit must first bring it forth and enclose it in a peculiar world for itself. This is how art originates. Outwardly it too

³³ The best-known use of this verb is Pausanias, *Description of Greece* (X.28), to describe a painting in Delphi of Odysseus *καταβεβηκώς* ἐς τὸν Αἴδην, 'descending into Hades'.

links up with human needs, but its one true motive remains the mind's longing for pure, unmixed beauty.

If making beauty is the task of art, must it not appear as the greatest contradiction when we notice that art also produces ugliness?

Should we wish to answer here that art does produce ugliness, but as something beautiful, we would obviously only be adding to the first paradox [36] a second and seemingly greater one, for how is it possible that the ugly should become beautiful?³⁴

Through these questions we see ourselves bogged down in new difficulties. Since they urge themselves on us, one usually defends oneself by repeating the trivial sentence that beauty needs ugliness or can at least make use of it in order to appear more beautiful;—similarly, one makes vice the precondition of virtue. Over against the dark foil of the ugly, the pure image of the beautiful is supposed to show itself all the more clearly.

But can one really rest content with this sentence? Its truth, namely, that compared to the ugly, the beautiful must be felt all the more as beautiful, is only relative. Were it absolute, all beauty would have to wish for the accompaniment of ugliness. Only next to a Thersites would then the beauty of an Achilles be entirely what it ought to be. But such an assertion is clearly incorrect. The beautiful, as the sensibly appearing expression of the idea, is absolute in itself and needs no foothold outside itself, no amplification through its opposite. It will not be more beautiful through the ugly. The presence of the ugly beside the beautiful cannot increase the beautiful as such, but only the stimulus of pleasure, in that, faced with it, we feel the excellence of beauty so much more vividly;—as for instance many painters show Danaë as with sweetly languorous desire she receives the gold rain in her beautiful lap, and beside or behind her, a wrinkly, sharp-chinned old woman.

But, in fact, the beautiful and sublime in general make us wish its exclusive and unmodified presence. [37] It is sufficient in itself to such a degree that not only can it dispense with any foil of ugliness, but any such foil would be found disturbing. Absolute beauty has a calming effect and, for the moment, makes one forget everything beside itself. Why, out of its blessed fullness, be distracted by something else? Why spice up its enjoyment through reflection on its opposite? Beside the statue of the god in the adyton,³⁵ is there room in the temple for a malicious demon? Will the worshipper be satisfied with anything other than the features of the god?

We must then discard the unqualified validity of the thesis that the ugly in art is there for the sake of beauty. In architecture, sculpture, music and lyric poetry, one would be particularly troubled to maintain it. The contrast which art often requires need not be generated through the opposition of ugliness; beauty is sufficiently multifaceted to contrast with its own forms—as, for instance, in Goethe's *Iphigenia* so many beautiful characters appear, or in Raphael's Sistine Madonna only majesty, grace,

³⁴ It is an article of faith of idealist aesthetics from Kant to Bernard Bosanquet that ugly content is somehow rendered beautiful in art. How this is accomplished is not explained.

³⁵ The small rear room of the interior (*cella*) of a Greek temple, where the cult statue was kept. Only temple personnel entered, hence the name (which means 'no entry').

elegance, dignity, gentleness and by no means something ugly can be found, and despite this the work does not lack in contrast, but, as beautiful, produces that endless delight which belongs to the absolute as the flawlessly divine. The teleological interpretation of ugliness thus has no comprehensive justification. In the case of nature, we convinced ourselves that, speaking teleologically, it is concerned essentially with life and only secondarily with beauty. We also saw that for the mind truth and goodness take priority over all aesthetic demands. It is nice³⁶ when the true and the good also seem beautiful [38], only it is not necessary. That from this it does not follow that truth and goodness, if they cannot appear in ideal beauty, must appear ugly, has been stressed. Unselfconscious ugliness has no purpose external to itself, in mind or in nature. Nature warns us of poison in metals, plants, and animals not through frightening form and colour, and the spirit most worthy of love can have the fatal destiny of having to carry out its life with an Aesopian hump, with a Byronic clubfoot.

How can art, whose goal can only be beauty, come to create ugliness? Obviously the reason must lie deeper than in that superficial relation of reflection. It can be found in the essence of the idea itself. Art indeed has of necessity a sensuous element—this is its limitation, against the freedom of the good and the true—but in this element it wants and should express the appearance of the idea in its totality. It belongs to the essence of the idea to leave open the existence of its appearance and thus to allow the possibility of the negative. All forms that can spring from chance and arbitrariness realize their possibility factually as well, and the idea proves its divinity above all through the power with which, in the welter of intersecting phenomena, in the division³⁷ of accident and accident, of drive and drive, of arbitrariness and arbitrariness, of passion and passion, it conserves on the whole the unity of its law. If art then wishes to give more than a merely one-sided experience of the idea, it cannot avoid the ugly. The pure ideals present [39] to us, however, the most important moment of beauty, the positive. But should nature and mind come to be represented in their entire dramatic depth, then natural ugliness, evil and the diabolical cannot be absent. The Greeks, as much as they lived in the ideal, nevertheless offered to the world *Hekatocheires* [hundred-handers], Cyclops, satyrs, *Graiae* [the grey sisters], *Empusas* [blood-drinking female demons], harpies, chimeras, a limping god, and in their tragedies crimes of the most abominable kind (Oedipus, Orestes), madness (Ajax), disgusting illness (Philoctetes's pus-filled foot), and finally in their comedies vice and indignities of every sort. But with Christian religion, which preaches the recognition of evil at its root, and its fundamental overcoming, ugliness has been introduced fully into the world of art.

For this reason of rendering the appearance of the idea in its totality, then, art cannot avoid making ugliness. It would be a superficial understanding of the idea to limit it to what is simply beautiful. But from this integration, it does not follow that the ugly has the same aesthetic rank as the beautiful. The secondary origin of the ugly makes a difference here as well. The beautiful, resting as it does in itself, can be brought

³⁶ *Schön*, literally pretty or beautiful: a wordplay on the casual use of this word in German.

³⁷ *Entweizung*, split or rupture (see below) seems to refer here to the individuation of events, amidst which a Hegelian idea (as objective unity of concept and reality) persists.

forth by art with no connection and without any further background, while the ugly is incapable of this aesthetic self-reliance. Empirically, it is indeed self-evident that the ugly can also appear on its own, but aesthetically speaking, no abstract fixing of the ugly is possible, because aesthetically it must always reflect itself in the beautiful, which is the condition [40] of its existence. We can henceforward take up again the thesis discussed in relation to beauty and say that ugliness, which does not rest in itself, has in beauty its necessary foil. Next to a Danaë we may well enjoy the ugly old woman, but the painter would not have painted her for us alone, unless as a genre picture, wherein the situation constitutes the aesthetic element, or as a portrait, which then falls directly into the category of historical correctness. Now, quite naturally, the dependence of the ugly on the beautiful is in turn not to be understood as the ugly being allowed to take the beautiful as its means. That would be an absurdity. The ugly may thus appear in the vicinity of the beautiful, under its patronage as it were, accidentally;³⁸ it can remind us of the danger to which the beautiful is always exposed through the freedom of its mobility, but it cannot become the direct and exclusive object of art. Only religions can posit the ugly as absolute object, as shown by so many hideous idols of ethnic religions, but also of Christian sects.

In the totality of a worldview, ugliness, like evil and disease, constitutes only a vanishing moment, and in the labyrinthine nature of this great context we not only tolerate it, but it can become interesting for us. Taken out of this context, however, it becomes aesthetically inedible. Gazing, for instance, on van Eyck's *Last Judgement* triptych in Danzig,³⁹ on the wing to one side of the central panel which represents the horrible forms of Hell, the despair of the damned and the mockery of the devils busy with their punishment, it is obvious that the painter showed this sinister knot [41] of repulsive grimaces only in connection to the opposite panel, which contains the entry of the saved into the bright halls of Heaven, and he painted both only in relation to the large central picture, the Judgement itself, which alone explains the extremes of the side wings and marks a passage to them in symmetrical groups and wondrous up-and-down gradations of colour. But Hell alone or even a devil alone he would not have painted. For didactic reasons, we isolate the ugly as well, naturally, but an artist who reproduced it in portrait-like fidelity would never believe that he had created an artwork in the process. The Head of Christ is exhibited everywhere without hesitation; not so the mask of a Mephisto. Such individualization would entitle ugliness to a self-sufficiency inconsistent with its concept, whereas beauty can be isolated in painting all the way down to a still life. For this reason all works of poetry which have taken as subject something simply ugly have been unable to achieve the slightest popularity, whatever the exertion of spirit. No one can take real pleasure in such works. The French possess didactic poems concerning pornography and even syphilis, the Dutch, concerning flatulence and so forth, so that even the owners of such poems are ashamed to have them found in their possession. The Prince of Pallagonia of whom Goethe tells

³⁸ *Accidentell* is not an everyday 'accident' (*Unfall*), but the accident of scholastic logic, an attribute that an individual has contingently rather than necessarily (as its essence).

³⁹ Hans Memling's *Last Judgement*, once in the Marienkirche, now the Nationalmuseum Danzig (*Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku*), was once attributed to Jan van Eyck.

us (* NOTE 13) wanted to render ugliness through art itself, which bristles decisively against its design, to represent it through sculpture in a certain systematic perfection, and managed to produce for all his trouble nothing but a confused, sadly ridiculous [42] curiosity. Only in combination with the beautiful does art allow the ugly its existence; but in this connection it can bring about great effects. Art needs it not only for a complete grasp of the world, but primarily for the transformation of an action into the tragic or the comical.

If art does represent the ugly, then, it seems against the very concept to beautify it, for in that case the ugly would no longer be ugly, quite independent of the question whether an attempt to beautify the ugly, the sophistic dressing up of an aesthetic lie, does not in fact produce one more piece of ugliness through the inner contradiction of making out the ugly, which is the negation of the beautiful, to be beautiful, thus passing it off as something positive, which is against its nature and in the end gives rise to a caricature of the ugly itself, a contradiction of the contradiction. So it seems, to repeat, though it is true that art must also idealize ugliness, that is, must treat it according to the general laws of beauty, which it transgresses through its very existence; not as if art should hide, disguise, falsify the ugly, decorating it with finery alien to it, but rather that it should form it, its truth intact, according to the parameters of its aesthetic significance. This is necessary because it is how art deals with all reality. The nature art shows to us is real nature and yet not ordinary empirical nature. It is nature as it could be if its finitude permitted it such perfection. Likewise, the history which art gives us is real history and yet not ordinary empirical history. It is history according to its [43] essence, according to its truth, as idea. In ordinary reality there is never a lack of the most looming and most repugnant forms of ugliness; art cannot take these up without further ado. It must show us ugliness in the full compass of its mischief, but it must do this nevertheless with the ideality with which it handles the beautiful. There art dispenses with everything in the content that belongs only to its contingent existence. It emphasizes the significant in a phenomenon, erasing in it the inessential features. It must do the same with ugliness. It must display just those conditions and forms that make the ugly ugly, but it must remove from it all that intrudes into its existence only accidentally, weakening or confusing what is characteristic in it. This purification of the ugly through removal of the undefined, accidental, characterless, is an act of idealization which does not consist of adding to the ugly an alien beauty, but in a pithy dredging up of those elements which stamp it as the opposite of beauty, and where, so to speak, its originality lies, that of aesthetic contradiction. The Greeks, however, reached in this idealization at times a point wherein the ugly is cancelled and turned into the positively beautiful, as in the *Eumenides* and the Medusa (* NOTE 14). For if one has so often imagined that the Greeks sought ideal beauty primarily in cheerful calm, and avoided the mobility and intensity of expression as ugly, this is far too narrow a conception of their art based on a few sculptures. Concerning poetry, one will admit this promptly enough on reflection; [44] concerning sculpture, Anselm Feuerbach in his fine work on the Vatican Apollo has proved that they did not shy from the terrible and from dramatic vitality (* NOTE 15); concerning painting, we learn this not only from deeper penetration in the wall painting of Herculaneum and Pompeii, but also from the description of Polygnotos's paintings in the *Leschen* at Delphi and Athens, as Goethe

feels compelled to emphasize in his discussion of them, despite being himself an admirer of good cheer, calm, and restrained liveliness (* NOTE 16).

The ugly therefore must be freed through art of all its heterogeneous excess and disturbing accident, and once again submit to the general laws of the beautiful. For this very reason, an isolated representation of the ugly would contradict the concept of art, for it should appear through art as an end in itself. Art must make the secondary nature of ugliness visible and remind us that it does not exist originally through itself, but only in and out of beauty as its negation. Even if it is brought into view in this accidental position, still it must be given all the consideration due to it as a moment in a harmonious totality. It cannot be idle, but must prove itself necessary. It must group itself properly and subordinate itself to all the laws of symmetry and harmony that it violates in its own form; it may not pull itself out of the proportions allowed by its context, and it must possess a force of individual expression which makes its meaning unmistakable.

[45] Taking up, for example, visual art, the appearance of a person defecating or vomiting is certainly disgusting. Nevertheless, painters have not balked at presenting such things in the context of great feasts. It is after all the way of the world, that people, when something tastes particularly good to them, overeat. In the interest of completeness of description, the artist did not wish to leave out this moment, he has only aesthetically softened it through his form of representation. Paul Veronese has famously painted the Wedding at Cana thus.⁴⁰ In the foreground he painted a small boy pissing in childish innocence. A child in this situation is tolerable in the foreground, the more so as he shows his dainty calves and haunches, lifting his robe with a smile. The adult who vomits, however, a man who had enjoyed too much good food and drink, is placed in the background, leaning his wine-heavy head against a wall.

Dissonance, taken musically, is the destruction of music, non-music. The musician may not introduce it arbitrarily, but only there, where its entry has been prepared, where it is necessary, where through the dissolution of the discord, it is the basis of the triumph of a higher harmony.

The poet who presents us with a Caliban does this on an island in the ocean, ruled by a wizard; a context in which his presence loses its oddness. He is the original barbaric inhabitant of the wild island, over whom the educated intruder has made himself master—the fate of all primitive peoples who come into contact with civilized peoples.⁴¹

[46] Caliban thus has against Prospero an original claim of ownership, and knows this too. He is thus no simple monstrosity, but expresses a world-historical idea. But there is more. As aesthetic compensation Shakespeare appended to him Ariel, who, on one hand, makes the oafish and brutish side of the untamed monster more clearly evident,

⁴⁰ Paolo Veronese's 1563 painting, taken from Santa Maria Maggiore in Venice in 1797 by Napoleon, must have been seen by Rosenkranz in the Louvre on his 1846 Paris visit.

⁴¹ A Caliban reminiscent of postcolonial interpretations. The opposition *Culturvolk* and *Naturvolk* (the latter coined by Herder, according to the Grimms, the former probably derived from his theory of *Culturen*) is flexible around 1850, especially applied to the past. For example, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Land und Leute* (Stuttgart & Augsburg: Cotta, 1856), 129: 'The frequently mixed German (*deutsch*) cultured people of the Franks still stands opposed in the North to the Germanic (*germanisch*) primitive people of the Saxons ...'

and, on the other, makes us feel lifted above his clumsy bulk through the contrast of the delicate air spirit.

Architecture might raise a particular question here through its ruins. The demolition of a building leads us to expect ugliness; only, whether this is the case depends in part on the building, in part on the mode of its destruction. A beautiful building, namely, will still show as a ruin the grandeur of its plan, the boldness of its proportions, the richness and elegance of its execution, and our fantasy will involuntarily try to produce the whole out of these suggestions. The ugly building can benefit from demolition; its fragments may be thrown fantastically together, quite apart from the fact that destruction of the ugly affords us aesthetic satisfaction. Surely it also matters how the ruin is produced, how the fragments are thrown together, what remains are left over. A diminutive pile of stones, a few bare walls, provide as yet no picturesque perspective. The ruins of a barn or a cattle stall would not interest us even in the moonlight; a palace on the other hand, a cloister, a knight's castle will seem romantic. That a ruin can appear beautiful, finally, is not determined alone by the original proportions of the [47] building and the mode of its destruction, but also according to whether the work of architecture grows together with surrounding nature and takes on itself the character of a work of nature. In that roof and windows and doors hang open, in that all seclusion ceases, in that moss makes the stones green, plants take root between them, birds build their nests and the fox peeks through the broken window, the building becomes sort of a production of nature, often coming very close to its basalt formations.

Ugliness in Relation to the Individual Arts

For the general possibility of falling into ugliness, the arts are in the same position. Each can produce it, and indeed to the point where we can no longer bear it. Despite this, the qualitative temperament of this general possibility depends on the peculiarities of each art. According to its nature, the content, extent, and modality of each art differ. We may see the various arts as a path to aesthetic self-liberation of the spirit, upon which, in poetry, it finally and fully reaches itself. The passage through the varied materials of realization of the beautiful represents for us the particular steps of this liberation. In matter, in space, in experience, that is, in visual art, spirit is still outside itself. With sound, with time, with feeling, that is, in music, spirit steps into itself. With the word, with consciousness, with [48] image and thought, in the art of poetry, spirit reaches perfect inwardness and the full ideality of form. In this progress, with increasing freedom, greater ease and acute effortlessness of representation, there grows also the possibility of ugliness.

In architecture at any rate one can build abominably, which is shown not just by countless buildings that spring out of limited needs, but also many public buildings, indeed, buildings that are meant to be architectonic marvels. But it is difficult in the art of building to be entirely hideous. When Goethe said that mistakes should not be built, because through their size and durability they offend the aesthetic sense too painfully, he hinted that the works of architecture are too serious and valuable to be taken in any

way lightly. Through its material, that of massive matter, building always provokes deliberation. It must at the least provide safety and somewhat fulfil its purpose. These two motives of utility always bring of themselves a certain eurhythmy in the work. A building is that much more beautiful, the more it pronounces outwardly the solidity of its proportions in a reassuring manner, the more it already symbolically announces in its form the purpose to which it is dedicated. Some houses, particularly those built in the first half of the eighteenth century, indeed look as if someone had first provisionally built four walls, then by necessity a roof, and finally, as is the case with Schöppenstedt's City Hall,⁴² carved out windows large and small without any symmetry from the inside outward according to whim. A larger building will, however, always betray some reflection, [49] and a mishmash of incompatible building styles belonging to distinct centuries will not make so much an ugly as a fantastically imposing impression.

Sculpture also limits ugliness exceptionally through the brittleness and preciousness of its material. To be sure, as the most lurid facts can make themselves felt, even the most miserable statues can be carved or cast, but at least the sumptuousness of the material and the tedium of the work will always rein in its productive flippancy. A block of Carrara marble or even old gunmetal for a statue is not to be had so inexpensively. Only very slowly does the block give in to thousands of hammer blows; only in a very involved procedure, often requiring years, does the ore get poured into the cast, and then it is still chiselled month after month. This is why there is no art in which tradition is so powerful as in sculpture. The new risks its appearance seldom, for in the case of failure there is too much at stake. A mistake carved in stone or cast in bronze is far more obvious in its plastic reality than if it were merely drawn or painted. The result is that, thanks to the ideality forced on it by the persistence of its forms, there is no other art that has so little the disposition to represent the negative in disease, pain, and wickedness.

Painting, on the other hand, among the visual arts falls victim most easily to ugliness, for it has to simulate individual animation as well as the appearance of perspective. Sculpture can make individual mistakes, small or great, in the making of a statue, mistakes in form, position, and drapery, and still offer something entirely worthy of respect. [50] But painting can through the affordability of its materials and the ease of its production much more easily be tempted to bungling. The extent of its possibility is already infinitely greater than sculpture's: landscape, the animal, the person; nothing that can be visibly perceived is closed to it. At the same time, it is determined from many sides: the contours of the shapes, the palette, the perspective—what a multitude one has to take into account, if it is to appear as a unity! For this reason, incorrectness of drawing, untrue colour, false perspective creep in so quickly. A foreshortening, how quickly it is botched! A hue, how quickly missed! A shadow or a highlight, how quickly forgotten! And so there are doubtlessly far more bad paintings than statues, even if one does not exclude the Indian and Egyptian, which are ugly according to religious principle.

⁴² The medieval German town of Schöppenstedt, located in Lower Saxony near Wolfenbüttel, has a distinctive *Rathaus*, equipped also with a tower with a pointed pyramidal roof.

With music the ease of production grows, and with it, as with the distinctive subjective inwardness of this art, the possibility of ugliness. Though this art in its abstract form, in measure and rhythm, is founded in arithmetic, yet in melody, which first makes it the true, soulful expression of the idea, it is exposed to the greatest vagueness and contingency, and a judgement of what is and is not beautiful in it is often infinitely difficult. Thus, due to the ethereal, volatile, mysterious, symbolic nature of sound, and due to the uncertainty of criticism, ugliness gains even more ground here than in painting.

Finally, in the most free of arts, in poetry, the possibility of ugliness, through the freedom of spirit, and [51] the word with its utter ease of speaking and writing as medium of representation, reaches its pinnacle. To do justice truly to the idea, poetry is the most difficult art, because it can least of all imitate the empirically given directly, and must much rather work it out, condense it, out of the depth of the spirit. Once it is there, however, once it has won a literary existence, once it has worked out a poetical technique for itself, there is no other art that is so easily misused as poetry, because then, according to the well-known judgement of a great poet, language already writes and thinks for us.⁴³ In epic, in lyric, in drama and didactic poetry, the same material undergoes a superficial modification, in content as in form, but the material's structure only seems to change. It is then up to a taste that is educated and enriched through many-sided experience, and made tranquil through deep knowledge, to discover ugliness. To this must be added the interest that can be taken in poetry in a tendentious vein, so that it is not poetic value, but revolutionary or conservative, rationalistic or pietistic pathos that decides a poem's fate, as our epoch proves only too often. For us, party ideals often overshadow the divine ideal, if they do not make it disappear altogether. In poetry one can sin most easily and imperceptibly, and surely in it the greatest proportion of ugliness is produced.

[52] The Pleasure in Ugliness

That ugliness might produce pleasure seems as absurd as the claim that illness or evil might. Despite this, it is possible, in healthy as well as pathological ways.

In a healthy way, when the ugly justifies itself as a relative necessity in the totality of an artwork and is cancelled out by the counteraction of the beautiful. Not the ugly as such causes our pleasure then, but the beautiful overcoming its apostasy, which also appears. We have already discussed this above.

In a pathological way, when an era is physically and morally depraved, powerless to register true but simple beauty, still wishing to enjoy in art what is piquant in frivolous corruption. Such an era loves mixed sensations that have a contradiction as their content. To tickle dulled nerves, one assembles the most unheard-of, the most disparate,

⁴³ Friedrich Schiller, in the couplet 'Dilettant' [1797], wrote: 'If a verse comes off true, in a sophisticated language / that writes and thinks for you, do you think you're a poet?'

the most repulsive things. The torn spirits feed on ugliness, since it becomes for them in a way the ideal of their negative state. Animal baiting, gladiatorial games, lewd *symplegmas*, caricatures, sensually effeminate melodies, colossal instrumentation, in literature a poetry of faeces and blood (*de boue et de sang*, as Marmier said⁴⁴) are peculiar to such periods.

[53] Division of the Work

Turning our attention, after the solution of these preliminary questions, to the development of a classification of the concept of ugliness, we have already above given its general place in the metaphysics of beauty. We have said that it constitutes the negative middle between the concept of the beautiful in itself and that of the comical. This position differs from that which does not see the ugly as any particular moment of the idea of beauty, but treats it only as a subordinate determination of the sublime in the form of the frightful and terrible, or of the comic in the form of the farcical and low comedy. Many of today's aestheticians, namely, take the comical as the opposite of the sublime and would like to see absolute beauty regarded as the union of the sublime and the comical. The comical, however, does not simply stand opposed to the sublime, it is opposed to the beautiful in general, or more correctly, it does not stand opposed to it, but is the cheering up of the ugly into the beautiful. Ugliness stands opposed to beauty; it contradicts it, whereas the comical can at the same time be beautiful, beautiful not in the sense of simple positive beauty, but certainly in the sense of aesthetic harmony, the return out of contradiction into unity.⁴⁵ In the comical something ugly is co-posed as the negation of the beautiful, which it in turn negates. Without a contradiction that is resolved through an appearance, since it is itself only an appearance, the comical cannot be thought. Aristotle and after him Cicero have already presented the matter thus (* NOTE 16b). The concept of the sublime is also not to [54] be separated from that of the beautiful, but rather to be seen as a peculiar form of the same. Since the ugly is nothing absolute, but much rather only something relative, its conceptual definition requires a return to the idea of the beautiful, which gives it its condition.

The beautiful in general, we have presupposed here, where only the ugly concerns us, is the sensible appearance of natural and intellectual freedom in harmonious totality.

The first condition of beauty is therefore manifestly the need for a limit; it must posit itself as unity, and its differences as organic moments of the same. This concept of the abstract fixity of form constitutes in a way the logic of the beautiful, in that it still

⁴⁴ Xavier Marmier, *Lettres sur l'Amérique*, vol. 1 (Ixelles: Delevigne et Callewaert, 1851), 165: the actual phrase is in reverse order, 'cet homme couvert de sang et de boue ...' Marmier's Chapter 9, on Niagara, may have inspired Rosenkranz's use of the example (R 179).

⁴⁵ The relation between beauty, ugliness, and the comical might be said to be a circular one for Rosenkranz, with ugliness lying between the other two (as he had written often before writing this passage), and the comical being in turn closer to beauty than non-comical ugliness.