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## A Case of Well-Concealed Indebtedness: L. N. Tolstoy's Rejection of Kantian Beauty in *What Is Art?*

### I. Introduction

The reception of L. N. Tolstoy's treatise *What Is Art?* (*Čto takoe iskusstvo?*)<sup>1</sup> of 1898 has been marked by controversy from the time of its publication to the present day. Tolstoy was branded as a biased moral content-theorist due to his preference for "religious" content that fosters a spirit of brotherhood, and sharply contradicted in his negative aesthetic judgments on a number of internationally acclaimed works of art. The frequently opinionated tone of his exposé, which dismisses previous endeavours in the field of aesthetics and attacks, if not ridicules, traditionally accepted forms of art, has earned him accusations of pig-headedness, dogmatism and worse. The ensuing debate surrounding the treatise is well-documented in anthologies such as *Tolstoy and the Critics*.<sup>2</sup> In his treatise, Tolstoy makes a rather drastic and provocative move in order to eradicate what he perceives to be an ongoing misconception about art. He attacks the very core of the traditional debate when he rejects the concept of beauty itself as relevant to the aesthetic question. Tolstoy professes to develop his definition of art by eliminating any concept of beauty from his theory. Particularly striking is how he sets the stage for this elimination. Tolstoy defines his aesthetics at least in part against the

- 1 Quotations from this treatise will be provided in Russian from Tolstoy's collected works (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. XXX, marked "PSS") with English translations from Maude 1962 (marked "M").
- 2 Duffield and Bilsky 1965. See also Bates 1977, Edgerton 1978, Scanlan 1978 and Egan and Egan 1979. In the latter reference, the chapter "Art and Aesthetics" provides an excellent overview of critical reactions to *What Is Art?* from the year of its publication to 1978. The treatise was also greeted with mixed feelings in Russia. For instance, the banishment of beauty from Tolstoy's aesthetics was deplored by the poet A. Polonskii in 1948 and the Turgenev expert M. Portugalov in 1922, the latter finding that Tolstoy's views on art exude "religious fanaticism of a medieval ascetic brand" (Lomonov 128; translation mine).

German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who is renowned for determining beauty as the very essence of art and the aesthetic experience.<sup>3</sup> His opposition to Kant with respect to the notion of beauty is all the more curious, since Tolstoy's correspondence with various contemporaries serves as testimony to his high esteem for Kantian philosophy as such and documents the considerable attention he devoted to the study of Kant's key works *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 1788).<sup>4</sup> In the 90-volume edition of Tolstoy's complete works, Kant is cited well over 300 times. And indeed, a closer scrutiny of the criteria developed by Tolstoy in *What Is Art?* reveals a number of unexpected, if not suspicious affinities to Kantian aesthetic principles as developed in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (*Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft*)<sup>5</sup> of 1790. The goal of the present paper is to compare the aesthetic criteria with which the two thinkers perceive art and beauty in an attempt to unmask Tolstoy's supposed opposition to the Kantian notion of beauty as a surface construct, which conceals a significant degree of aesthetic consensus.

While voices critical of Tolstoy's treatise can be found in pre-revolutionary times (Engel'meyer 1898, Tsertev 1898), Soviet-Russian scholarship is reluctant to advance any negative criticism about the great writer. Predictably, many studies specifically embark on an examination of Tolstoy's aesthetics in relation to his socio-ethical views (Silbajoris 1971, Galagan 1981, Hajmady 1985), and even general studies on Tolstoy's aesthetics stress his social considerations with respect to art (Kupreianova 1966, Lomonov 1972, Babaev 1981). Soviet critics are known to jealously defend the Russian heritage against accusations of borrowings from Western sources. Due to the need to present Tolstoy's work as a native and independent cultural treasure, few Russian studies have dealt with Tolstoy in relation to foreign writers and thinkers (Gornaia 1968, Zhdanov 1966). In this spirit, Lomonov suggests that rather than tracing Tolstoy's notion of infectiousness of art to Western thought, one should investigate possible Russian precursors such as V.G. Belinsky, N.G. Chernyshevsky and N.A. Dobrolyubov (Lomonov 54). Russian scholarship has not brought Tolstoy and Kant together beyond cursory references of affinities or common sources (Galagan 76-78;

Lomonov 42-43), sometimes brushing aside commonalities due to a perceived ambivalence of Tolstoy toward Kant. For instance, Galagan points out that Tolstoy did not think highly of the achievements made in the field of philosophy (Galagan 76), while Lomonov argues that after the publication of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, it was mostly artists who contributed to the aesthetic discourse and that Tolstoy preferred their writings to those of strict philosophers. He cites the Soviet expert on German philosophy and aesthetics V.F. Asmus as stating that aesthetic discussions by artists such as Schiller and Goethe offer an insider's view of the matter that has little in common with "Kantian theorizing" (Lomonov 11). Lomonov then proposes that this is also true for Tolstoy's aesthetics, thus effectively closing the door on any comparative research of this nature. While Western scholarship has appreciated Kant's general influence on Tolstoy (see, for instance, Orwin 192-95), comparative criticism in the realm of aesthetics is practically non-existent. Comparative research with respect to Tolstoy's art theory is limited to studies of Tolstoy and R. Wagner (Cockrell 1982), Max Nordau (Leitner 1983), R. Barthes (Krukowski 1990) and A. Schopenhauer (Maertz 1994).

A comparison of Tolstoy's definition of art to Kantian aesthetic principles must be prefaced with an acknowledgement of the vastly different approaches and objectives of the two thinkers. The German philosopher developed his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* as part of a comprehensive critical philosophy with a specific interest in defining the foundation and limits of human judgment and cognition, thus developing a transcendental philosophy which became the life blood of the German and European romantic movement at the end of the eighteenth century. It is in this context that Kant participated in the study of aesthetics by examining the nature of aesthetic judgment as it distinguishes beauty, and formulating the conditions in which it is rooted. By contrast, Tolstoy sought to define a method of distinguishing art from non-art as he understood it and wished it to be. His system is considerably less sophisticated and aimed at supporting his views on social progress. Therefore, this paper by no means intends to suggest an outright congruence of Kantian and Tolstoyan aesthetic theory. Nevertheless, it is Tolstoy himself who draws Kant into the discussion by claiming an opposition to his concept of beauty. The fact that Tolstoy's argument is sometimes crude, frequently dogmatic and pursued with personal objectives rather than inspired by an appetite for pure philosophical inquiry, needs mention, but should not deter the critical reader from subjecting Tolstoy's claim of defining art without beauty (thus opposing Kant) to thorough scrutiny.

3 For discussions on the role of beauty in Kant's aesthetics see, for example, Juchem 1970, Neumann 1973, Barker 1983, Kneller 1986, Dörfinger 1988, Römpf 1989, Palmer 1994 and Dutton 1994.

4 For a discussion of Tolstoy's interest in these works and in Kant in general see, for example, Jahn 1982 and Orwin 1993. Tolstoy frequently discusses his reading of Kant in his correspondence, for example in letters to N.Y. Grot (October 13, 1887) and N.N. Strakhov (October 16, 1887), in both instances defending Kant and arguing that he is underestimated by his critics (Tolstoy, *Tolstoy's Letters*, vol. 2., letters 319 and 321).

5 Quotations from this work will be provided in German from Kant's collected works (*Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5; marked "KGS") with English translations from Pluhar 1987 (marked "p").

## II. Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* and Kant's Aesthetics in Context

*What Is Art?* is the result of fifteen years of studies in the field of aesthetics. Chapters II to IV offer a detailed if not painstaking overview of aesthetic thought since its beginnings. Tolstoy finds most theories on art and beauty to be imprecise, fruitless and not applicable to the existing body of works of art. He therefore wishes to develop a reliable method of distinguishing art from non-art or the "bogus-art," which, in his opinion, high society utilizes as a stage-setting for its own elitism. Tolstoy thus sets his theory in relation to the conventional view of art in society and the aesthetic scholarly tradition. Within this tradition, Kant, for example, defines beauty as the aim of art, which has earned him the title of formalist, because beauty for him is purely defined by formal features (see also Uehling 1971). In comparison to previous attempts at aesthetic definitions by Baumgarten, Sulzer, Mendelssohn, Winkelman, Shaftesbury, Home, Burke and Batteux, to name but a few, Kant's aesthetics were vastly more progressive and liberal, because they distinguished beauty through the response of the beholder and granted unlimited freedom to the artist, who was now at liberty to elicit an aesthetic response by whatever formal means. In many ways, Kant is regarded as a visionary of modern art reception to this day.<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, Kant suggests that the aesthetic response is based on theoretically existing rules present in the object, which can be experienced subjectively by the individual as beauty, but nevertheless elude description. Therefore, ultimately, the essence of beauty itself remains beyond reach.<sup>7</sup>

Even though Tolstoy in fact arrives at a similar conclusion with respect to the indefinable rules underlying artistic creation, he was thoroughly exasperated with the aesthetic scholarly discourse, since it forever seemed to fall short of determining a functional method of distinguishing art reliably and to universal satisfaction:

[V]sia sushchestvuiushaia èstetika sostoit ne v tom, chego možhno zhdat' ot umstvennoi deiatel'nosti, nazyvaiushei sebja naukoj.... (PSS 59)

6 See, for example, Kübler 1983, where Kantian aesthetics are applied to modern art reception, including abstract art.

7 Acknowledging the pioneering role of Kant in aesthetics, German scholarship has examined various writers and thinkers with respect to their indebtedness to Kant. This has led to numerous studies on Kant and Schiller (for example Menzer 1955/56, Rohloff 1963, Rosalewski 1973, Homann 1977, Koopmann 1982, Blum 1988 and Storr 1995) and other thinkers such as A. Schopenhauer (Dobereit-Helmich 1983), J. W. v. Goethe (Hermann 1985) and H. v. Kleist (Greiner 1990). There are also several mostly Russian comparative studies of Kant and Russian figures such as G. Plekhanov (Lebedev/Popiolek 1971), V. Ivanov (West 1986), M. Bulgakov (Levina 1991) and especially F. Dostoevsky (Golosovker 1963, Usnin 1965, Shein 1973, Krugovoy 1992-93).

[T]he whole existing science of aesthetics fails to do what we might expect from it as a mental activity calling itself a science.... (M 114)

Ever the pragmatist, Tolstoy understood scientific accuracy to encompass a set of rules which could be applied convincingly and without exception to any given object of art, thus providing a feasible practical tool. In this context, Tolstoy found that at the hands of generations of aesthetic scholars, the term "beauty" had suffered an inflation of meaning, had become an inaccurate term invested with so many meanings that it *de facto* meant very little, thus spoiling the scientific standard of the discussion. Therefore, he intended to exclude it entirely, even as defined by Kant. Like Kant, Tolstoy focuses on the individual's perception of art, but contrary to Kant, sees this as an opportunity to dispense with the concept of beauty altogether, replacing it with what he considered to be reliable and infallible aesthetic criteria derived from the beholder. This approach was especially suitable for his secondary aim to retrain the public eye to recognize true art (as he saw it) and reject artistic hoax of both the present and the past, thereby creating a new artistic consciousness and dialogue for the moral advancement of society. Keeping this ultimate goal in mind, it is quite remarkable that Tolstoy's definition *proper* of art is formalistic and disregards criteria related to content:

Iskusstvo est' deiatel'nost' chelovecheskaia, sostoiashchaia v tom, chto odin chelovek soznatel'no izvestnymi vneshnimi znakami predaet drugim ispytyvaemye im chuvstva, a drugie ljudi zarazhaiutsia ètimi chuvstvami i perezhivaiut ikh. (PSS 65)

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them. (M 123)

In other words, the artistic *form* ("certain external signs" developed by the artist) elicits a transmission of feeling. The existence itself of this transmission (the fact that others are infected), the interplay between viewer and object, defines what is art. This then is Tolstoy's definition which deserves consideration in the aesthetic discourse. If one thinks of this art essence as the cake, it is usually the moral icing on the cake that is at the centre of critical reviews of *What Is Art?* For Tolstoy argues in a second step that once we have defined art as such, we cannot help but take into account its possible influence on society, and therefore, we should, within art formally defined, prefer a morally enhancing content-matter.<sup>8</sup> But — and this is important — Tolstoy makes it

8 A. Maude's foreword to the English translation used in the present study discusses this aspect very succinctly.

clear that a moral preference would then not be an *aesthetic* distinction of art. And in any case, even art which contains a moral aspect would still have to be characterized by the formal aesthetic features demanded in the definition in order to qualify as art. At the end of chapter XV Tolstoy reflects on his formal definition:

Tak ordeliatsia iskusstvo ot neiskusstva i opredeliatsia dostoinstvo iskusstva, kak iskusstva, nezavisimo ot ego sodержaniia, t.e. nezavisimo ot togo, peredaet li ono khoroshie ili durnye chuvstva. (PSS 151)

Thus is art divided from what is not art, and thus is the quality of art, as art, decided, independently of its subject-matter, that is to say, apart from whether the feelings it transmits are good or bad. (M 230)

But then Tolstoy makes an important transition:

No chem opredeliatsia khoroshee i durnoe po sodержaniu iskusstvo? (PSS 151)

But how are we to define good and bad art with reference to its content or subject-matter? (M 230)

Here he deliberately leaves the territory of aesthetics and steps onto the ground of moral searchings, where he is indeed not known to tread lightly. G.R. Jahn puts it very aptly when discussing the resentment provoked by Tolstoy's dogmatic judgments on existing works of art and his so-called "content-moralism": "Unfortunately, the aesthetic underpinning of *What is Art?* has suffered as well, an apparent victim guilty by association" (Jahn 1975, 64). It is this aesthetic underpinning that becomes important in a comparison to Kant's aesthetic theory.

### III. Summary of Kant's Aesthetic Criteria

Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* contains two sections relevant for the present discussion. The more important one is Book I, entitled "Analytic of the Beautiful" ("Analytik des Schönen"). It develops a definition of beauty through the way in which it is perceived and the type of "liking" (satisfaction; "Wohlgefallen") it evokes in the subject viewing it. According to Kant, it is impossible to determine a set of rules or external features by which objects of beauty could be singled out, but one can establish a lawfulness in a person's judgment and perception of beauty. In Kantian terminology "judgment" simply refers to the ability to recognize or distinguish something as beautiful. Book II, "Analytic of the Sublime" ("Analytik des Erhabenen"), examines

the perception by the individual of overpowering natural spectacles and then weighs the subject's experience of beauty, large natural phenomena and finally art against each other.

Kant's premise for his "Analytic of the Beautiful" is that the faculty of judging the beautiful is an aesthetic judgment (or judgment of taste, "Geschmacksurteil").<sup>9</sup> It operates under the following three conditions: firstly, the aesthetic judgment of the "beautiful" is based on a type of "liking" devoid of all interest ("ohne alles Interesse"). It is different from the liking of the "agreeable" ("das Angenehme") and the "good" ("das Gute"). The liking of the "agreeable" is not aesthetic because it is not derived directly from the object viewed. It does not appreciate the object itself, which is only liked for the effect it has on the beholder (i.e., we like what the object does to us). The "good" pleases by means of reason through mere concept, which is also not an aesthetic liking (we merely like the idea it puts forth). Thus, the liking of the "agreeable" and the "good" are not aesthetic, because they depend upon a secondary interest in the beholder, which rests outside the object itself.<sup>10</sup> The first criterion for the aesthetic experience as discussed by Kant in §1-5 is therefore defined as follows:

*Geschmack* ist das Beurtheilungsvermögen eines Gegenstandes oder einer Vorstellungsart durch ein Wohlgefallen oder Mißfallen *ohne alles Interesse*. Der Gegenstand eines solchen Wohlgefallens heißt *schön*. (KGS 211)

*Taste* is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking *devoid of all interest*. The object of such a liking is called *beautiful*. (P 53)

Secondly, Kant argues that the observer feels quite free in forming his or her sense of aesthetic liking:

[S]o kann er keine Privatbedingungen als Gründe des Wohlgefallens auffinden, an die sich sein Subject allein hänge, und muß es daher als in demjenigen begründet ansehen, was er auch bei jedem anderen voraussetzen kann.... (KGS 211)

[H]e cannot discover, underlying this liking, any private conditions, on which only he might be dependent, so that he must regard it as based on what he can presuppose in everyone else as well. (P 54)

As a result, the second criterion (defined in §7-9) postulates:

<sup>9</sup> For detailed studies on Kant's aesthetic judgment see Köhler 1980 and Fricke 1990.

<sup>10</sup> See Bourgeois 1993 for a study specifically on Kant's concepts of the beautiful and the good.

*Schön* ist das, was ohne Begriff allgemein gefällt. (KGS 219)

*Beautiful* is what, without a concept, is liked universally. (P 64)

In other words, beauty activates an innate human sensor, so that the aesthetic experience becomes accessible to all human beings. This is only true for the beautiful, i.e. aesthetic judgment, not for the "agreeable," since, for example, people will not readily agree on the taste of food. The "good" is based on social convention, education and personal experience and can mean different things to different people; therefore like the "agreeable," it cannot claim any universality. Thirdly, Kant argues that the aesthetic judgment of an object should not depend on any purpose it may have in the external world, outside the aesthetic exchange that takes place between a given object and the beholder. For example, if we look at an antique letter opener, an aesthetic judgment must ignore its function or usefulness and must contemplate the form alone. Therefore, the third definition (developed mainly from §10, 11 and 14) reads as follows:

*Schönheit* ist die Form der *Zweckmäßigkeit* eines Gegenstandes, sofern sie *ohne Vorstellung eines Zwecks* an ihm wahrgenommen wird. (KGS 236)

*Beauty* is an object's form of *purposiveness* insofar as it is perceived in the object *without the presentation of a purpose*. (P 84)

The term "purposiveness" simply refers to the causality of the effect of beauty and the individual's experience, i.e. the purposiveness rests in the fact that its form triggers an aesthetic experience in the beholder. Our aesthetic liking results from being aware only of this purposiveness which seeks to engage us aesthetically.<sup>11</sup>

In Kantian aesthetics, beauty is defined through the beholder's aesthetic experience which must fulfil the three criteria discerned above. The subjective view

11 The "Analytic of the Beautiful" does contain a fourth criterion, which states:

*Schön* ist, was ohne Begriff als Gegenstand eines *notwendigen* Wohlgefallens erkannt wird. (KGS 240)

*Beautiful* is what without a concept is cognized as the object of a *necessary* liking. (P 90)

This simply means that if beauty triggers an innate human sensor, the subject perceives the liking of beauty as necessary for all human beings and expects assent from others for his or her aesthetic judgment. For the purpose of the present study, it can be noted as an addendum to the criterion of universality, but does not represent an additional factor in the comparison to Tolstoy.

point of the individual becomes the yardstick which determines that the object being viewed is indeed beautiful.<sup>12</sup> The "pure" interplay of our perception with the *form* of the beautiful object causes an aesthetic experience. Moral content does not play a role in an aesthetic judgment, since this would entail the liking of a "good" idea. It must be noted further that for Kant art and beauty are *de facto* identical as far as the aesthetic experience they trigger. In this context, Kant observes at the end of the "Analytic of the Sublime":

Denn wir können allgemein sagen, es mag die Natur- oder Kunstschönheit betreffen: *schön ist das, was in der bloßen Beurteilung* (nicht in der Sinneempfindung, noch durch einen Begriff) gefällt. (KGS 306)

[W]hether it concerns beauty in nature or in art: *beautiful is what we like in merely judging it* (rather than either in sensation proper or through a concept). (P 174)

Kant distinguishes the same aesthetic criteria for humanly produced art and naturally occurring beauty. The trigger for pure aesthetic experience is formal beauty, be it in nature or in a work of art.

## IV. Comparison of Aesthetic Criteria

### 4.1. Disinterestedness

Whereas Kant's treatise is organized in concise paragraph form, the reader of Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* has to sift through roughly 200 pages of dense text in order to gather the various elements which comprise his concept of the aesthetic experience. The most effective point of departure for the comparison is perhaps the passage, in which Tolstoy directly rejects the Kantian concept of beauty:

S odnoi storony, krasota ponimaetsia kak nechto misticheskoe i ochen' vozvyshennoe...; ili, s drugoi storony, kak ono i dolzhno byt' priznano, po opredeleniiu Kanta i ego posledovatelei, krasota est' tol'ko poluchaemoe nami osobogo roda beskorysnoe naslazhdenie. Irogda poniatie krasoty, khotia i kazhetsia ochen' iasnym, k sozhaleniiu takzhe netochno, potomu chto rasshiraetsia v druguiu storonu, a imenno – vkluchaet v sebia i naslazhdeniia ot pit'ia, edy, oshchushcheniia neznoi kozhi i t.p.... (PSS 57)

12 For further reading on the aspects of subjectivity, universality and the *a priori* quality of the aesthetic judgment see Baum 1991.

On the one hand beauty is viewed as something mystical and very elevated ...; or on the other hand (as necessarily follows from the definition of Kant and his adherents), beauty is simply a certain kind of disinterested pleasure received by us. And this conception of beauty, although it seems very clear, is unfortunately again inexact; for it widens out on the other side, that is, it includes the pleasure derived from drink, from food, from touching a delicate skin, and so forth.... (M 112)

This statement clearly ignores or misinterprets Kant's very lucid distinction between the "agreeable" and the "beautiful," which are distinguished with two different types of judgments and trigger different types of liking. Kant draws a clear line between, on one hand, self-gratifying pleasure (which includes, for instance, the pleasant taste derived from food), and, on the other hand, "pure aesthetic liking" which holds the monopoly on identifying the beautiful. The taste for food (taste "of sense") is explicitly *not* included in the understanding of beauty in Kant's view:

[E]in jeder hat seinen eigenen Geschmack (der Sinne). Mir dem Schönen ist es ganz anders bewandt. (KGS 212)

*Everyone has his own taste (of sense). It is quite different ... with the beautiful.* (P 55)

Hence, oddly, Tolstoy in fact agrees with Kant by rejecting the appreciation for a good meal as an aesthetic experience. The improper extension of the Kantian beauty concept to sensations received from food is the first trace of misinterpretation, which casts doubt on Tolstoy's professed rejection of Kantian beauty. Similarly, when in the following passage Tolstoy eliminates the notion of enjoyment (naslazhdenie) as marking an aesthetic experience of art, he unceremoniously equates enjoyment with beauty in general:

[S]talo vyrastat' iskusstvo, rastsenivaemoe uzhe ne po tomu, naskol'ko ono vyrazhaet chuvstva, vytekaiushchie iz religioznogo soznaniia liudei, a tol'ko po tomu, naskol'ko ono krasivo; drugim slovami — naskol'ko ono dostavliaet naslazhdenie. (PSS 72-73.)

[T]here grew up an art esteemed not according to its success in expressing men's religious feelings, but in proportion to its beauty — in other words, according to the enjoyment it gave. (M 133)<sup>13</sup>

13 For Tolstoy's understanding of the term "religious" refer to footnote 17.

However, to extend this equation to Kantian beauty is clearly erroneous, as has been demonstrated sufficiently.

Further, Tolstoy postulates that art be defined only by the transmission of feeling that the object (as form) enables and should only be appreciated by the subject as art for this sole reason. This view is illustrated in a passage, in which he criticizes G. Hauptmann's method of evoking pity for the main protagonist in his play *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*, which Tolstoy considers *not* to qualify as art:

Devotchka korchitsia, pishchit, stonet, padaet. Iavliautsia angely i unosiat ee. I publika, ispytyvaia pri etom nekotoroie volenie, vpolne uverena, chto eto-to i est' esteticheskoe chuvstvo. No v volenii etom net nichego esteticheskogo, potomu chto net zarazheniia odnim chelovekom drugogo, a est' tol'ko smeshannoe chuvstvo stradaniia za drugogo i radosti za sebia, chto ia ne stradaiu, — podobnoe tomu, kotoroe my ispytyvaem pri vide kazni ili kotoroe rimliane ispytyvali v svoikh tsirkakh. (PSS 117)

The girl shrinks — screams — groans — and falls. Angels appear and carry her away. And the audience, experiencing some excitement while this is going on, are fully convinced that this is true aesthetic feeling. But there is nothing aesthetic in such excitement, for there is no infection of man by man, but only a mingled feeling of pity for another and of self-congratulation that it is not I who am suffering: it is like what we feel at the sight of an execution, or what the Romans felt in their circuses. (M 188)

Clearly, Tolstoy's aesthetics employ the nature of the beholder's experience as a defining yardstick. In the quoted passage, the audience merely relates what it sees to its own interests and experiences pleasure and relief in the personal safety it presently enjoys. According to Tolstoy, this can hardly be viewed as a pure judgement of an aesthetic nature. The audience is only moved by the spectacle, it is on an emotional merry-go-round, but has not been infected with feeling purely through the formal presentation of the work of art.<sup>14</sup> Kant expresses a similar view in §13 of the "Analytic

14 Tolstoy here condemns the principles of realism in art, arguing that a description of physiological effects in themselves cannot transmit feeling. Hence his advice to Hauptmann to transmit the feeling of pity:

Dlia togo, chto by vyzvat' eto chuvstvo v zritelakh posredstvom iskusstva, avtoru nado by zastavit' odno iz svoikh lits tak vyrazit' eto sostradanie, chto by ono zarazilo vsekh, ili opisat' verno ostchushcheniia devochki. (PSS 117)

To evoke this feeling in the audience by means of art, the author should either make one of the characters express this pity in such a way as to infect every one, or should describe the girl's feelings correctly. (M 187)

of the Beautiful" entitled "A Pure Judgment of Taste Is Independent of Charm and Emotion" ("Das reine Geschmacksurtheil ist von Reiz und Rührung unabhängig"), where he explains:

Alles Interesse verdirbt das Geschmacksurtheil und nimmt ihm seine Unparteilichkeit.... Der Geschmack ist jederzeit noch barbarisch, wo er die Beimischung der Reize und Rührungen zum Wohlgefallen bedarf, ja wohl gar diese zum Maßstab seines Beifalls macht. (KGS 223)

All interest ruins a judgment of taste and deprives it of its impartiality.... Any taste remains barbaric if its liking requires that *charms* and *emotions* be mingled in, let alone if it makes these the standard of its approval. (P 68-69)

Especially the second sentence seems to have a clear affinity with the derogatory comparison Tolstoy draws between many drama productions and the Roman circus. It is the fact of the successful transmission of feeling itself that Tolstoy discerns as the aesthetic experience that defines art. He rejects the type of self-gratifying liking of the "enjoyable" or "agreeable" as an experience of art, the same way Kant does for an aesthetic judgment of beauty. Kant makes his exclusion of enjoyment from aesthetics very clear:

[U]nd zu dem, was auf die lebhafteste Art angenehm ist, gehört so gar kein Urtheil über die Beschaffenheit des Objects, daß diejenigen, welche immer nur auf das Genießen ausgehen (denn das ist das Wort, womit man das Innige des Vergnügens bezeichnet), sich gerne alles Urtheilens überheben. (KGS 207)

Indeed, what is agreeable in the liveliest way requires no judgement at all about the character of the object, as we can see in people who aim at nothing but enjoyment (this is the word we use to mark the intensity of the gratification): they like to dispense with all judging. (P 48)

It is precisely this type of enjoyment that is also thoroughly condemned and dismissed by Tolstoy as non-art.

Hence, similar to Kant, Tolstoy differentiates between aesthetics and enjoyment. Kant also separates the aesthetic process from the intellectual process of ideas and concepts. Once again, Tolstoy follows suit when he argues:

[S]lovom odin chelovek peredaet drugomu svoi mysli, iskusstvo zhe liudi peredaui drug drugu svoi chuvstva. (PSS 64)

[B]y words a man transmits his thoughts to another, by art he transmits his feelings. (M 121)

This observation implies that communication through content and reasoning depends on intellect and may not be understood by all segments of society. By contrast, communication through infection of feeling is accessible to everybody. Consequently, the intellectual thought process should not be a factor in the appreciation of art. Tolstoy's first aesthetic criterion thus eliminates both enjoyment and intellectual concepts from his theory and arrives at a definition of the aesthetic experience which in Kantian terms is "disinterested," indeed to such an extent that the actual fact of the transmission of feeling becomes the decisive aesthetic factor:

Na-dniakh ia shel domoi s progulki v podavlennom sostoianii dukha. Podkhodia k domu, ia uslykhal gromkoe penie bol'shogo khorovoda bab.... V penii etom s krikami i bit'em v kosu vyrazhalos' takoe opredelennoe chuvstvo radosti, bodrosti, ènergii, chto ia sam ne zametil, kak zarazilsia ètim chuvstvom, i bodree poshel k domu i podoshel k nemu sovsem bodyri i veselyi. (PSS 144)

A few days ago I was returning home from a walk feeling depressed, as sometimes happens. On nearing the house I heard the loud singing of a large choir of peasant women.... In this singing, with its cries and clanging of scythes, such a definite feeling of joy, cheerfulness, and energy, was expressed, that without noticing how it infected me I continued my way towards the house in a better mood and reached home smiling and quite in good spirits. (M 221)

Tolstoy explains that he was infected without noticing it. The focus is neither on personal gratification, nor, certainly, on the transmission of an idea or a concept. The listener is merely enjoying his sudden status as a participant in artistic communication. The event of infection directly causes the aesthetic experience, which brings with it a feeling of elation.<sup>15</sup> Tolstoy compares this elevated state of mind with the impression received from a technically demanding piano sonata from Beethoven's later period performed with skill by a trained musician. According to Tolstoy, while it may have been intricate and accomplished, the sonata performance did not allow for a

15 This passage also offers a good sample of Tolstoyan contradiction, since the chorus of peasant women does not consciously transmit the feeling the passer-by received. However, in Tolstoy's definition of art, the conscious transmission of feeling by the artist is a *sine qua non*. It could, however, be argued that the original creator of the song harboured such an intention.

transmission of feeling leading to an emotional elevation comparable to the one caused by the chorus of peasant women:

Kogda zhe ia pozvolil sebe sravnit' vpechatleniye, proizvedennoe na menia peniem bab ...  
s'etoi sonatoi, to ... pesnia bab byla nastoiashchee iskustvo, peredavavshee opredelennoe  
i sil'noe chuvstvo.... (PSS 144-45)

And when I ventured to compare the impression made on me by the singing of the peasant women ... with the effect of this sonata.... the song of the peasant women was real art transmitting a definite and strong feeling.... (M 222-23)

#### 4.2. Universality of the Aesthetic Experience

The example of the peasant song mentioned above illustrates the independence of the aesthetic experience from either cultivated taste or abstract thought in Tolstoy's art theory. Closely connected to this aspect is Tolstoy's insistence on universal accessibility, which comprises a second aesthetic criterion in his thinking. Since Tolstoy sees the aesthetic experience as a result of the effect of the form on the beholder, independent of enjoyment or rational ideas, art is accessible to all people, because no special skills or prerequisite knowledge are required to receive a transmission of feeling. Universal accessibility is a central point in Tolstoy's concept of art, for the writer even defines the basic social merit of art as stemming from a universality which results from the aesthetic effect evoked by its formal presentation. The aesthetic experience, according to Tolstoy, unites all people, thus also levelling the social playing field, because they can experience something together and discover a commonality in their similar response:

Iskustvo, vsiakoe iskustvo samo po sebe, imeet svoistvo soediniat' liudei. Vsiakoe iskustvo delaet to, chto liudi, vosprimaliushchie chuvstvo, peredannoe khudozhnikom, soediniatsia dushoi, vo-pervykh, s khudozhnikom i, vo-vtorykh, so vsemi liud' mi, poluchivshimi to zhe vpechatleniye. (PSS 157)

Art, all art, has this characteristic, that it unites people. Every art causes those to whom the artist's feeling is transmitted to unite in soul with the artist and also with all who receive the same impression. (M 238-39)

The aesthetic form of art itself is inclusive, because it reaches all people, and from this vantage point Tolstoy defines true art as Christian or religious. The purely formal quality of the transmission is in itself already a socially beneficial factor, since it allows

art to be appreciated by everybody regardless of their social background. Herein already lies its fundamental merit — one is tempted to say that this is the beauty of it. Tolstoy concludes that most art productions of contemporary society are non-art, because they remain incomprehensible to the uneducated masses, since they do not transmit a feeling that would be universally recognizable. According to Tolstoy, at the present stage of human evolution the inherent moral demand is to foster human brotherhood, which is in essence equal to a Christian or religious consciousness. It is this consciousness that he assumes to be inherent in all of us. It is expressed and reinforced through art in its aesthetic form. This definition enables Tolstoy to simply deny most current art productions the status of being art on the basis of aesthetic criteria supported by social considerations.

Tolstoy thus establishes a link between universal accessibility, a feeling of commonality and societal benefit. This reveals itself to be an echo of Kant's second criterion. Kant finds that the aesthetic experience has universal validity and that this is connected precisely to the absence of either personal gratification or intellectual concept. He comments on the pure judgment of taste:

Also müssen sie [Geschmacksurteile] ein subjectives Princip haben, welches nur durch Gefühl und nicht durch Begriff, doch aber allgemeingültig bestimme, was gefalle oder mißfalle. (KGS 238)

So they must have a subjective principle, which determines only by feeling rather than by concepts, though nonetheless with universal validity, what is liked or disliked. (P 87)

Kant concludes that such "a principle, however, could only be regarded as a *common sense*" (P 87) or common sensitivity ("Ein solches Princip aber könnte nur als ein Gemeinsinn angesehen werden," KGS 238), in other words must entail some sort of innate human sensor for beauty, which is an integral part of human sensory capabilities. In turn, a common sensitivity to beauty, if we are aware of its existence, will cause people to expect the assent of their fellow human beings on aesthetic judgments made:

Denn das, wovon jemand sich bewußt ist, daß das Wohlgefallen an demselben bei ihm selbst ohne alles Interesse sei, das kann derselbe nicht anders als so beurtheilen, daß es einen Grund des Wohlgefallens für jedermann enthalten müsse...; folglich muß er glauben Grund zu haben, jedermann ein ähnliches Wohlgefallen zuzumuthen.... (KGS 211)

For if someone likes something and is conscious that he himself does so without any interest, then he cannot help judging that it must contain a basis for being liked [that

holds] for everyone. He must believe that he is justified in requiring a similar liking from everyone.... (P 53-54)

Therefore, universality is closely tied to a shared sense of commonality among people exchanging aesthetic assent when faced with an object of beauty. This awareness of commonality unfolds to the detriment of our own egoistical impulse, which Kant underlines in the general comment section of the "Analytic of the Sublime":

Das *Schöne* ... cultivirt, indem es zugleich auf Zweckmäßigkeit im Gefühle der Lust Acht zu haben lehrt. (KGS 266)

The *beautiful*.... also contributes to culture, for it teaches us at the same time to be mindful of purposiveness in the feeling of pleasure. (P 126)

And further on he adds:

Das *Schöne* bereitet uns vor, etwas, selbst die Natur ohne Interesse zu lieben.... (KGS 267)

The beautiful prepares us for loving something, even nature, without interest.... (P 127)

Similarly, for Tolstoy it is the aesthetic experience with art derived from the form that has a unifying effect on people and makes our egos disappear at the same time as our common denominator is revealed to us:

Была, что люди, находясь вместе, если не враздвбны, то чужды друг друга по своим настроениям и чувствам, и вдруг илi рассказ, илi предствление, илi картина ... как электрической искрой, соединяет всех илудей.... (PSS 158)

Sometimes people who are together, if not hostile to one another, are at least estranged in mood and feeling, till perhaps a story, a performance, a picture ... unites them all as by an electric flash.... (M 240)

As a result of this causality, art as provider of a unifying and selfless aesthetic experience supplies the preconditions to achieve a state of human brotherhood. People share the capacity for infection, and the awareness of this commonality unites them. Therefore, the infection as such is already socially beneficial. Kant, in a similar way, argues for a universality of the aesthetic experience due to a common sensor for the form of beauty, which is universal to all people engaged in aesthetic judgment. Both

see rudimentary social, hence also moral values in art as the result of its purely formal presentation.

It would seem that if all human beings can at least theoretically either "judge" beauty (Kant) or receive a transmission of feeling (Tolstoy), the objects that trigger this process must contain a specific set of formal characteristics which activate the innate aesthetic receptor. Tolstoy's position on the nature of a work of art is clear when he concedes that "[t]here is no objective definition of beauty" (M 114) ("Объektivnogo opredeleniia krasoty net," PSS 58). Nevertheless, the artistic approach, while not objectifiable, still exists. In the writer's view the infectiousness is achieved through the formal devices applied by the artist to express a feeling, the indefinable *savoir-faire*, the knack of knowing what formal features will appeal to human perception. At no point does Tolstoy propose an ideal or prescriptive form for art. The closest he comes to describing the nature of the object itself is when he speaks of the element of the *wee bit* (chut'-chut'), a term he borrows from the painter Bryulov:

"Iskusstvo nachinaetsia tam, gde nachinaetsia chut'-chut'," skazal Briulov, vyraziv etimi slovami samuiu kharakternuu chertu iskusstva. (PSS 127)

"Art begins where the *wee bit* begins," replied Bryulov, indicating by these words just what is most characteristic of art. (M 200)

It simply means that a *wee bit* too much or too little of a certain quality, either colour or tone, can make or destroy a work of art. However, nobody, not even artists themselves, can define according to what rules art is created — they are simply guided by their natural genius in applying the right measure of the *wee bit*.

Kant harbours a rather similar concept of genius, who works under certain rules which remain inaccessible to description or categorization. In §46 entitled "Fine Art Is the Art of Genius" ("Schöne Kunst ist Kunst des Genies") Kant states:

Genie ist das Talent (Naturgabe), welches der Kunst die Regeln giebt.... [und ist] ein Talent ... wozu sich keine bestimmte Regel geben läßt, hervorzubringen: nicht Geschicklichkeitsanlage zu dem, was nach irgend einer Regel gelernt werden kann.... (KGS 307)

*Genius* is the talent (or natural endowment) that gives the rule to art.... [and is] a *talent* for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other.... (P 174-75)

This corresponds to Tolstoy's conviction that artistic genius alone knows what form of presentation will infect, but cannot formulate any rules for the choices made. Hence, the only possible yardstick relevant to a distinction of art is the nature of the beholder's experience, the effect of the unknowable artistic principles used by the artist.

#### 4.3. Aesthetic "Purposiveness"

Tolstoy turns the ephemeral nature of artistic creation into a prerequisite, thus categorically rejecting the possibility of obvious formal rules at play in trying to initiate an aesthetic transfer of feeling. More importantly, he also postulates that the artist, while producing a work of art, shall not harbour any ulterior motive for his production. The successful infection of feeling, any feeling, should be the only artistic goal. Therefore, while art is man-made, it must still not reveal any purpose in its presentation. According to Tolstoy, a true work of art is created only when the artist is "impelled by an inner need to express his feeling" (M 229) ("ispytyval vnutrenniyu potrebnost' vyrazit' peredavaemoe im chuvstvo," PSS 150) — and nothing else. Indeed, the aesthetic transfer would cease to be aesthetic, if the artist pursued a purpose other than his goal of infection. Then the resulting experience would be as follows:

S pervykh strok vidish' namerenie, s kotorym pisano [roman].... [Znaesh', chto u avtora nikakogo drugogo chuvstva, krome zhelanii napisat' povest' ili roman, net i ne bylo. I potomu ne poluchaetsia nikakogo khudozhestvennogo vpechatleniia. (PSS 145-46)

From the first lines one sees the intention with which the book is written.... [O]ne knows that the author had no other feeling all the time than a desire to write a story or a novel, and so one receives no artistic impression. (M 224)

Tolstoy contends that such a writer does not write with the intention of transmitting feeling, but for reasons of personal interest, such as money or fame. The existence of a purpose external to the pure interplay of the object and the beholder detracts from and hence spoils the aesthetic experience. Consequently no infection takes place and we are, so Tolstoy, not really dealing with art.

This third criterion in Tolstoy's definition of art emerges as largely analogous to Kant's postulate for a "purposiveness without purpose." Kant discerns a "purposiveness" in the effect of beauty in that its form triggers an aesthetic experience in the beholder. The beholder, in turn, is aware of this causality, which gives him pleasure:

Das Bewußtsein der Causalität einer Vorstellung in Absicht auf den Zustand des Subjects, es in demselben zu erhalten, kann hier im Allgemeinen das bezeichnet werden, was man Lust nennt.... (KGS 220)

Consciousness of a presentation's causality directed at the subject's state so as to keep him in that state, may here designate generally what we call pleasure.... (P 65)

And if no concept of purpose interferes and the pleasure is "disinterested," we are dealing with beauty. The pure interplay of the individual and the work of art is purposive within the aesthetic transfer only: it is an internal causality, to which no external purposive is relevant. As mentioned above, Kant's definition of the aesthetic experiences viz-a-viz beauty and art do not differ greatly. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that art is man-made and, therefore, needs to be defined with reference to the mode of artistic production, genius and artistic communication. While he concedes that art is always made with a certain concept in mind, he insists that it must never reveal this in its presentation, because this would destroy the purity of the aesthetic process:

Also muß die Zweckmäßigkeit im Producte der schönen Kunst, ob sie zwar absichtlich ist, doch nicht absichtlich scheinen, d.i. schöne Kunst muß als Natur *anzusehen* sein, ob man sich ihrer zwar als Kunst bewußt ist. Als Natur aber erscheint ein Product der Kunst dadurch, daß zwar alle *Pünktlichkeit* in der Übereinkunft mit Regeln, nach dessen allein das Product das werden kann, was es sein soll, angetroffen wird; aber ohne *Peinlichkeit*, ohne daß die Schullform durchblickt, d.i. ohne eine Spur zu zeigen, daß die Regel dem Künstler vor Augen geschwebt und seinen Gemüthskräften Fesseln angelegt habe. (KGS 306-07)

Therefore, even though the purposiveness in a product of fine art is intentional, it must still not seem intentional; i.e. fine art must have the *look* of nature, even though we are conscious of it as art. And a product of art appears like nature if, though we find it to agree quite *punctiliously* with the rules that have to be followed for the product to become what it is intended to be, it does not do so *painstakingly*. In other words, the academic form must not show; there must be no hint that the rule was hovering before the artist's eyes and putting fetters on his mental powers. (P 174)

It would appear that Tolstoy's concept of artistic genius closely approximates Kant's statements on the issue. Both Kant and Tolstoy explain the impossibility of defining objective artistic rules by endorsing a certain concept of artistic genius. In most general terms, Tolstoy advocates a "natural" human art, accessible to the simple peasant, a "nature-creature" unspoiled by modern civilization. In a similar fashion, Kant defines

## VI. Evaluation of Findings

In concluding the present discussion, the conditions for the aesthetic experience which Kant defines for beauty and by extension art, and Tolstoy just for art, hold the key to the problem of Tolstoy's aesthetic relation to Kant. Both define similar conditions for the aesthetic experience, but they suggest different results from it in the beholding subject, namely "disinterested satisfaction" (Kant) versus "infection with feeling" (Tolstoy), results which elude verification precisely because, as both thinkers admit, they take place in the individual and cannot be objectified. However, one general result can certainly be observed: in both theories the aesthetic experience, sparking a sense of human kinship, ultimately leads to spiritual elevation. While this entails moral benefits, both Kant and Tolstoy define the aesthetic experience that engenders these benefits as *derived from the form*, which engages the viewer in a pure aesthetic interplay with the object. Of course, the labels for such an object, which according to both thinkers cannot be defined by objective rules anyway, differ: "beauty" or "fine art" or just "art." But since they agree that the object cannot be defined according to objective rules, does the label for that object not become irrelevant, if the process of perceiving it is rather similar? Indeed, Tolstoy's misunderstanding of Kant's concept of beauty may very well be rooted in the problem of labels. He simply does not approve of terms such as "liking," "pleasure" or "agreeable" used by Kant for his concept of beauty and perhaps does not focus sufficiently on what these terms actually designate within the system.

The conclusion of this paper leaves the reader with the unsettling fact that Tolstoy devotes a considerable portion of his treatise on rejecting the concept of beauty for a valid definition of art and yet, at the end, arrives at a theory similar to Kant's concept of beauty without using the term beauty. Both thinkers define the aesthetic experience as caused by the form — and form, it then seems, is nothing else but beauty, a beauty which cannot be explained in the presentation of the object itself. Tolstoy and Kant agree on the criteria they develop to define the aesthetic experience, but Tolstoy insists that these criteria are valid for art only and have nothing to do with beauty. Nevertheless, since his criteria remain strikingly similar to those developed by Kant to define beauty, his insistence seems highly arbitrary.

If one accepts the *de facto* aesthetic consensus reconstructed in the present paper, the consequences could be significant. Firstly, Tolstoy's insistence on rejecting Kantian beauty not only obscures his affinities to Kant's aesthetics, but quite possibly his scholarly indebtedness. This is by no means a novel charge, for, although not with respect to Kant, several Russian contemporaries of Tolstoy have suggested that he may not have given due credit to the sources of some of his ideas (Lomonov 53-54). Secondly, the present findings may give cause to a renewed debate on the traditional

the artist-genius as "nature at work," since "talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature" (P 174) ("[d]a das Talent als angeborenes productives Vermögen des Künstlers selbst zur Natur gehört," KGS 307).

## V. Summary of Comparison

Tolstoy sees art as caused by an infection of feeling that is aesthetic. This means it is neither to be confused with a more frivolous form of enjoyment, nor with a communication of ideas or concepts. Further, it cannot tolerate an external purpose or ulterior motive. With respect to the artist at work, rules are neither objectifiable, nor should they be noticeable if we are really dealing with art. Kant distinguishes similar conditions for an aesthetic experience of beauty and art alike. Not surprisingly, the following summary by Kant on the characterization of *art* (or as he calls it "fine art") contains the same three criteria (disinterested liking, universality, purposiveness without purpose) developed for *beauty*:

Schöne Kunst ... ist eine Vorstellungsart, die für sich selbst zweckmäßig ist und, obgleich ohne Zweck, dennoch die Cultur der Gemüthskräfte zur geselligen Mittheilung befördert. Die allgemeine Mittheilbarkeit einer Lust führt es schon in ihrem Begriffe mit sich, daß diese nicht eine Lust des Genusses aus bloßer Empfindung, sondern der Reflexion sein müsse.... (KGS 306)

Fine art ... is a way of presenting that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even though without a purpose, the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication. The very concept of the universal communicability of a pleasure carries with it [the requirement] that this pleasure must be a pleasure of reflection rather than one of enjoyment arising from mere sensation. (P 173)

This passage also serves as an illustration of how Kant, like Tolstoy, deduces socio-communicative benefits from a process that depends entirely on formal presentation. It must be stressed again that Tolstoy attributes the aesthetic process entirely to the form, its *wee bit* that engages the viewer in an aesthetic experience, i.e. achieves a transmission of feeling. It is quite true that he then prefers this aesthetic experience to be a morally elevating one, thus demanding a social function of art, but his aesthetic underpinning of this art remains essentially Kantian.

juxtaposition of Kant as formalist and Tolstoy as moralist in the field of aesthetics proper. Thirdly, it becomes obvious that Tolstoy's much-discussed allowance for the ugly in art,<sup>16</sup> does not simply place his theory in contraposition to any concept of beauty. Tolstoy himself states that art may depict "negative feelings of indignation and horror at the violation of love" (M 242) ("otritsatel'nye [chuvstva] — negodovaniia, uzhasa pered narusheniem liubvi," PSS 160), and that such art can even be of the highest "religious" kind, because it fosters through the depiction of the ugly side of humanity a consensus on the need for human decency and morality. Nevertheless, such depiction must still be executed with formal mastery to qualify as art. Finally, there remains the dilemma of Tolstoy's ultimate disregard for his own aesthetic theory, when he argues for preference of morally enhancing art, thus transcending, it would seem, the relevance of aesthetics *per se*. Tolstoy was indeed attacked precisely for his gradation within art, for he maintained that the more art encourages a feeling of human kinship the better it is, and distinguished within such "good art" between "religious art which transmits feelings of love of god and one's neighbour, and ... universal art transmitting the very simplest feelings common to all men" (M 240-41)<sup>17</sup> ("iskusstvo, kotoroe peredaet chuvstva liubvi k Bogu i blizhnemu, ... i zhiteiskoe iskusstvo, peredaushchee samye proste, obshchie vsem liudiam, chuvstva," PSS 159). However, in both cases the formal characteristics necessary for art must be present to make it art in the first place.

It remains difficult to embrace the possibility that Tolstoy simply misunderstood Kantian beauty as that which offers enjoyment (naslajzhenie). Certainly, one can observe in *What Is Art?* an urge to begin with a clear slate in order to lay claim to a completely new, all-encompassing theory. There is also a definite desire to settle scores with previous aestheticians and the contemporary art world alike, and therefore, to

16 Ugly art as "art which displeases" is discussed, for instance, by Ducasse 1928, who refers to Tolstoy's aesthetic theory to support his argument.

17 Tolstoy clarifies his understanding of the term "religious" in an essay on Shakespeare and drama: Pod religioznym soderezhaniem iskustva ... ia razumeiu ne vneshnee pouchenie ... kakim-libo religioznym istinam ... a opredelennoe, sootvetstvuiushchee vysshemu v dannoe vremia religioznomu ponimaniu mirovozzrenie, kotoroe, sluzha pobuditel'noi prichinoi sozhnenia dramy, bessoznatel'no dia avtora pronikaet vse ego proizvedenie. (PSS, vol. 35, 267)

By religious content in art ... I do not mean the superficial teaching of some religious truths ... but a specific outlook on life ... corresponding to the highest religious understanding of the times, which was the impelling force to create the drama and which permeates the entire work without the author being aware of it. (translation mine)

By this he means that the creative impetus must be imbued with a concern for human brotherhood and social peace, which he considers to be the essence of a religious outlook in the most general sense.

create an aura of radicalism typical for the Tolstoyan years of crisis. The act of challenging an aesthetic authority of Kant's calibre raises the prospects of an equally significant, if not superior contribution to the aesthetic discussion and perhaps sets the expectations dangerously high. This may account in part for the unpopularity of the treatise particularly among philosophy scholars. Considering that Tolstoy's impetus for writing his treatise is guided with an exasperation of a distinctly polemical hue, it is tempting to conclude that Tolstoy's professed opposition to Kantian beauty is primarily an argumentative pose. The gesture of dethroning Kant in the kingdom of aesthetics certainly achieved rhetorical effectiveness. Undoubtedly, as a rhetorical measure it contributed to the huge splash the treatise made upon publication and helped ignite the type of controversy Tolstoy thrived on. It is difficult to gauge the likelihood of another reason for Tolstoy's delusive opposition to Kant: it is conceivable that Tolstoy, while well-versed in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, did not read all the pertinent sections of Kant's aesthetic treatise, in particular the "Analytic of the Sublime," which in the concluding passages contains valuable addenda on the beauty concept in relation to art. Whatever the reasons, all facts point to an extensive use of Kant's aesthetic criteria for beauty in Tolstoy's definition of art.

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DIANNE CHISHOLM

## Paris, *Mon Amour*, My Catastrophe, or, Flaneries Through Benjaminian Space

Anyway — returning to divan. And lifting heavy volume of B's *Paris, Capitale du XIX<sup>e</sup>*. From turquoise roxy-painted bedside table. Subtitle *Le livre des passages. Passagenwerk* in German. Not yet available in English. Therefore weighing the more delightfully on the wrists. Not a real history. Rather — vast collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century quotes and anecdotes. Initially seeming like a huge pile of detritus. But — on looking closer. More like montage. Possibly assembled using old surrealist trick. Of free association. Opening at contents' list. "A" — *Passages* — glass-roofed arcades, malls. Hawking 19<sup>th</sup> century's new imperial luxury. Juxtaposed on "B" — *Mode* — Each new season. Ironizing time. Next to "C" — *Antique Paris, catacombes, démolitions* — Paris's underpinnings. Pointing to "D" — *L'ennui* — Eternal return. Present tense of dandy. Hovering over "E" — *Hausmannization, combats des barricades* — Hausmann's wide boulevards. Versus the people. Progress's double coin. Segueing into "J" — Poet *Baudelaire*. First modern. Peer of "K" — *Flâneur* — whose initial post-revolutionary languor not ultimately resisting rising capitalist market. "X/Y" — *Marx-realism*. Next to Photography... Social Movements. Dolls. Automatons. A person could wander here for months.

Gail Scott, *My Paris* (18).<sup>1</sup>

Gail Scott's *My Paris* is a radical experiment in metropolitan realism and an exemplary production of queer urban space. Moreover, foregrounding the architectonics of its own construction, the novel is an illuminating demonstration of "New Narrative."<sup>2</sup> A

1 All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

2 "New Narrative" refers to a genre, or movement, of experimental writing that explores and exhibits techniques of "narrativity" in the act (narrative present) of storytelling. The representational function of narrative is supplemented and interrupted by theory-based interrogation of the political economy of writing. Compounding fiction, politics and autobiography, new Narrative plots a construction of the "self" by a language-sensitive narrating subject. The subject — invariably "queer" — is a vehicle of awareness of the big-city dweller's exposure to/ seduction by urban commodity life. The "self" that is created in response to this life is a precarious object of desire and exchange. The core group of New