## Chapter Six: Teleology and the New Aesthetic

The New Aesthetic is a presage of a new time for inquiry skewed towards specific formal structures that are self-fulfilling generators of seemingly self-evident conclusions. We may have entered an era when a new type of real-time, self-generating investigative activities have emerged with increasing strength, situated at the intersection of the conventional academic approach and movements in popular culture that are often based on informal communication and information exchange models enhanced by ICT technologies within a practice of acceptable modal fallacies. To put it another way, the appearance of New Aesthetic objects have increasingly driven the way we observe, analyze, dissect and value not only digital objects specifically but the world generally; we are increasingly being driven by the priviledging of digitized results to the point that digital objects acquire an authority they wouldn’t have had until recently. It’s clear that an interactionist position negates any potential for a viable perpetuated opacity. Try as we might to treat New Aesthetic objects as singular, self-contained and non-affective ­– to keep them at arm’s length not only so our own biases don’t corrupt our observations but also so that our observations don’t corrupt our methodologies – as soon as we start to analyze them then their specific conditions bleeds into our own approaches and transforms the way we interact with them. Affecting more than just scientific research, this New Aesthetic effect extends to a dramatic diminishment of efforts to freely group and summate disparate cultural products or enact curatorial practices in an impassioned manner without the taint of a digitized horizon serving as a preordained end result.[[1]](#footnote-2) In a way, valuation has been irrevocably altered.

Recent years have produced an increased interest in the practice of curation. It’s amusing to think that the origins of the word are specifically found in British religious orders where the curate was typically an assistant to a vicar charged or entrusted with the souls of the parish, as if the very act of curating carries with it religious authority over the eternal heavenly existence of individuals. In a contemporary context, what we’re interested in can be described quite simply: the mania for lists of ‘best beaches in 2015 to be seen at’ or ‘top 10 driving applications for the iPhone’ and the like have become a dominant part of our newsfeed that seemingly give us options but, at the same time, have become unforeseen and perverse mnemonic devices driven by our own delusional fantasies. Every day it seems like we are increasingly bombarded with messages in our browsers and smartphones promoting thinly-disguised advertisements as actual information that would improve our lives: if only we clicked through and provided a small fee to the advertising companies that paid for those messages on pages we visit; if only we fulfilled, in our digital complacency, the purposes of big data and various profiling algorithms; if only we contributed further to their effect, we would be able to remember how amazing we always have been. We can be better people, have happier lives, if only we made sure to download each and every one of those top 10 driving applications. Miya Tokumitsu notes:

Blogs are curated. So are holiday gift guides. So are cliques, play lists, and restaurant menus. “Curated,” a word that barely existed forty years ago, has somehow come to qualify everything in our lives. When I tried that glib parlor game of typing a word into Google to see how it would autocomplete the search phrase, the first suggestion for “curated” was “content.” In other words, almost nothing escapes curation, or at least the possibility of being curated. How did our world become a venue for curation? And how did curating, a highly specialized line of museum work involving the care, accessioning, and exhibition of artworks, come to mean, as cultural policy scholar Amanda Coles puts it, “just picking stuff?”[[2]](#footnote-3)

Tokumitsu’s article is an interesting perspective on what has become a dominant part of our connected culture; providing lists of options to improve our lives in myriad ways gives readers a sense of freedom and superiority, a misguided notion that they’ve been given exclusive access to secreted knowledge. However, this is easily understood in a politicized fashion as feeding the need for personalization and creativity. There is definitely an ironic situation here; the search for guided authenticity invariably is a subsumption of one’s choices to algorithms formulated to generate income for the curators. Lists of the greatest examples of art, for example, used to be created by art and cultural historians with broad and deep knowledge of the history of art and with a refined sense of taste as illustrations of their erudition, but now any sense of expertise disappears behind one’s browser search history or is no more than the product of Google hits and poorly conceived Amazon or iTunes sales figures through the ‘personalized’ search results of the filter bubble. In the end it’s increasingly apparent that the act of curating, traditionally justified by years of attenuation, customization and the development of perceptive assessment skills with the goal of being able to make justified and valuable judgments, is being driven by algorithms that rely on little if any human input except for the need to fill our lives with content. Content creation at the level of digital media, in the programmed formation of discursive structures, is now less an adjudicated process and more a function of data structures whose purpose is not informing, entertaining or elevating the consumers of curatorial processes but self-substantiating and sustaining their functional presence.

Perhaps this is cause for alarm and dismay. Perhaps we should regret the effect that the digital engines have while they feed us unanticipated and unexpected content and search results personally ‘tailored’ for us, seemingly embodying our unknown dreams and desires and creating the content that we didn’t know existed in our lives. Maybe we should regret the lists of ‘You Won’t Believe These Celebs Real Names’ and ‘75 Celebrities You Will Never Look At The Same Way Again’? Or perhaps we should regret the results of the Genius Playlist feature of iTunes rather than embracing its role in exposing us to music that existed in our collection but that we’ve never listened to? We would be the first to admit that we’ve purchased apps for our iPhones, because an article promised us that it would improve our lives, only to quickly discover that its functions were merely variations of the graphic interface found in the default software and that the app failed to live up to its promise (especially when the company’s server would be compromised or discontinued). We can rail against this insidious digital permeation into our sense of discernment, reject the hijacking of our critical faculties, but we would be dishonest if we didn’t admit our own hypocrisy; the beginnings of the New Aesthetic itself lie in this new form of curation, and we’ve certainly benefitted from it.

Instead of ascending to sanctimonious heights of criticism while railing against the depths that culture has fallen to, we’re instead interested in the specific means that brought us here. Our focus in this chapter turns to questioning the very nature of what drives curating itself, what drives these lists and collections in their digital form to have a functioning effect, and what commonalities are relatedly detectable. To this end, we propose that the digital algorithms that generate bodies of curated facts, regardless of their value or lack thereof, need to be identified as teleological processes. In fact, it is specifically the teleological nature of the programs and objects which we would describe as the New Aesthetic, because it is our contention that being autonomous and teleological is one of the defining means differentiating digital, postdigital and New Aesthetic objects. To this end we would like to borrow positions from three philosophers whose work might seem inapplicable but which we believe offer instructive positions to open up new interpretative models. This chapter isn’t so much an analysis of how digital curation exists outside of users’ control but an analysis of how the autonomous nature of the programs and digital objects can be teleologically judged as they go about creating that content. We’ve been exploring exactly how to differentiate between postdigital objects and the New Aesthetic objects, and it’s here that we reach a stricter means of identification based on process, function and effect.

A persistent question – even, perhaps, a persistent problem at a fundamental level – is how to distinguish between digital objects, art objects that are digital, and genuine examples of objects of the New Aesthetic and New Aesthetic art. It would be strikingly disingenuous if we asserted that this question hasn’t persisted throughout the book. Really, you’ve probably been asking, when are they going to get around to actually defining what New Aesthetic art is in such a fashion that it’s clear, precise, and useful when talking about art? One important instance has been the glitch, which is a persistent and necessary presence; as necessary as the presence of the glitch is, though, it should be perceived as more of a symptom than as a fundamental aspect of a New Aesthetic object. In short, we’ve arrived at a question that’s just as much about taxonomy as it is about aesthetic value, with two different but related approaches. Our first is the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Our second, and more important approach, is based on Immanuel Kant’s often dismissed discussion of teleology in the *Critique of Judgment* and Ernst Mayr’s notion of biological teleology, organisms and biological evolution.

### Schopenhauer and the New Aesthetic

Schopenhauer’s philosophy has received little serious interest for quite some time, except from those interested in the history of German idealism, but his understanding of aesthetics and art has been very influential. Through his description of representation and will as the fundamental metaphysical manifesting and substantiating forces of existence, Schopenhauer described a means of characterizing all phenomena in a manner that gives each a sense of singularity, presence and autonomous, self-determining purpose. To put it simply, Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy asserts that we only experience the representation of objects generated by their will, which is an internal force with greater or lesser strength and capability, and that all objects through their representations are in conflict with all other objects via their representations in order to make their wills ascendant over other wills. If this sounds somewhat familiar to our description of New Aesthetic objects, then you can understand why we would begin with Schopenhauer as a baseline for a digital taxonomy.

The first time we began to think about Schopenhauer’s philosophy was in relationship to Dmitriy Krotevich’s image manipulation software PixelDrifter (2014).[[3]](#footnote-4) In describing the effect of the software, Krotevich notes:

“By default, each pixel tries to find the ‘weakest’ pixel among its closest neighbors and if one is found, they swap their positions […] Also pixels with a higher ‘power’ value can do more ‘swaps.’” Put differently, the pixels are imbued with enough intelligence to behave autonomously, although Krotevich says, “an experienced user can predict a result”.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The function of PixelDrifter is driven by pixels themselves, with the inherent strength of each one allowed to be a part of determining its representative force. This is very much in contrast to the normal way we think of pixels; if we think about them at all – except in the context of misinformed purchasing decisions when we’re buying digital cameras – we think of each one not only as entirely equal to each other one without any pictorial hierarchical relationship but also as subservient to the overall unified digital image. Given a normative perception of pixels, stuck at a superficial level that doesn’t actually recognize their presence except in the case of glitches, we are only examining the digital object as a representation in the sense that Schopenhauer describes representations as simply a construction. At the same time, these pixels as individual representations of themselves, governed by a will to exist, in conflict with other wills, are more than the normal directionless instances of will Schopenhauer normally ascribes to inorganic objects. To put it another way, a number of commentators have described the result of PixelDrifter as an example of pixels acquiring a level of autonomy and life. This interpretation is furthered when Krotevich notes:

Also, PxD uses a different approach […] It doesn’t simply sort pixels – it’s more like a scientific visualization/artificial intelligence program that “breathes life” into pixels, making them decide where to travel […] It’s not quite Turing Test AI, but the pixels do react like they’re autonomous creatures.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Is Krotevich perhaps being a little too coy with his use of quotation marks? We think he might be. In so many respects, Krotevich seems to be describing pixels as autonomous, independent and functioning entities that are let loose with a limited form of artificial intelligence, a bit like glitches that, in effect, become self-sustaining. From the perspective of the New Aesthetic, why not simply concede that pixels do have a functional autonomy? That they have a life of their own in a way that’s not merely metaphorical. Schopenhauer provides us with some insight when he stresses that ‘the remoteness, in fact the appearance of a complete difference between the phenomena of inorganic nature and the will, perceived by us as the inner reality of our own being, arises principally from the contrast between the wholly determined conformity to law in one species of phenomenon, and the apparently irregular arbitrariness the other’.[[6]](#footnote-7) The key here is that the representations of the pixels, their presented presence to us, is not necessarily determined by a conformity to laws but is also more than just set a random occurrences that is perceivable as a group of independent entities interacting with each other and ourselves. Could it even be said that Krotevich’s pixels strive to assert their superiority over each other and their relationship to us? What began as a glitch, as an apparent irregularity, now begins to function as a means of self-determinism.

What’s really interesting for us is that Schopenhauer’s philosophy posits all wills, organic and inorganic, as teleological in nature; everything has a purpose or a goal, even if it’s simply to continue to exist in the face of the opposing wills of other things. Damion Scott makes a really interesting point when he notes:

This is [Schopenhauer’s] identification of the Will with inorganic nature, consisting of, he claims, individual discrete wills and the natural forces which objectify or manifest, general or universal will. Biological beings, many psychological beings, and artifacts have teleological properties. They have functions that are aimed at or strive towards a particular goal or particular goals […] even if unconscious and non-intentional. Inorganic entities simply do not seem to have proper functions nor strive towards the fulfillment of real goals. In short, inorganic entities do not seem to manifest will.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Scott’s interpretation of Schopenhauer at this point is that there seems to be an assertion of a difference between organic and inorganic objects, but this depends on the weak notion of ‘seems’. This problem is, quite simply, that organic objects have a will (because their will acts) while inorganic objects do not have a will (because their will doesn’t act). But as Scott points out, Schopenhauer himself contradicts this limitation when he writes:

Finally, we feel directly and immediately how a burden, which hampers our body by its gravitation towards the earth, incessantly presses and squeezes this body in pursuit of its one tendency. If we observe all this, it will not cost us a great effort of the imagination to recognize once more our own inner nature, even at so great a distance. It is that which in us pursues its ends by the light of knowledge, but here, in the feeblest of its phenomena, only strives blindly in a dull, one-sided, and unalterable manner. Yet, because it is everywhere one and the same-just as the first morning dawn shares the name of sunlight with the rays of the full midday sun-it must in either case bear the name of will.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Schopenhauer’s use of active verbs makes it clear that he conceives of all things as having active wills, even inorganic objects, and that these wills are substantiating forces asserting their existence and the singularities of their beings in conflict with other beings. Looking back on many of the examples of the New Aesthetic that we’ve discussed, each and every one of them has this quality, something that is given an even more fundamental presence at an almost atomistic level by Krotevich’s PixelDrifter; one of the defining qualities of a New Aesthetic object is its will, its presence, its forceful relationship with the user and the user’s environment. Schopenhauer’s philosophy is as good as any for describing the underpinnings of an ‘Internet of Things’ wherein all objects digitally interact with each other not simply because they are programmed to but because they are teleologically driven to assert the singularity and autonomy of their being, their will, in relationship to other digital objects. The amusing paradox of the idea of the ‘Internet of Things’ is precisely that most people aren’t talking about physical objects but the representation by those objects of themselves to other objects; the digital world of objects is a world of will and representation. Or, to put it another way: ‘Teleology, [Schopenhauer] argued […] is not the result of the accumulation of small selected adaptations, neither is it the result of intelligent foresight, as supposed by the rationalist and theist, but the inevitable showing forth of the underlying unity of the “will to live.”’[[9]](#footnote-10) If one is to draw out a teleology of wills from Schopenhauer’s philosophy, a purpose to their existence, it is simply to sustain their existence in conflict with other things and, even, to overcome their opposition.

The teleology of Schopenhauer’s description of wills is bound within a continuous assertion of their autonomy, but this description has its limits for our purposes precisely because his aesthetics is predicated on his metaphysical assertion that there is a potential escape from this constant conflict; part of the appeal of Schopenhauer to artists is his notion that art is the means of achieving a state of non-conflict or equilibrium with the wills of the world, and this is obviously not the case with digital objects as they increasingly dominate the character of our lives. Schopenhauer’s philosophy is a starting point to think about New Aesthetic objects as teleological, but far more interesting than his perspective is Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, particularly Kant’s description of teleological judgments.

### Kant, the New Aesthetic, and Beauty

Our interest in Kant lies less in his assertions than in trying to develop an applicable understanding of the *Critique of Judgment* based on regularities to objects of the New Aesthetic. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes: ‘By nature, in the empirical sense, we understand the connection of appearances as regards their existence according to necessary rules, that is, according to laws.’[[10]](#footnote-11) If this is the case, is there a degree of regularity involved with postdigital and New Aesthetic objects?

Our first response was to think of digital objects as available for a pure aesthetic judgment, as objects that can be considered beautiful. Beauty is, for Kant, the central topic of Part I of the *Critique of Judgment* as a mediating link between nature and freedom in a transitory sense, meaning that it didn’t serve as a transcendental substantiation of any metaphysics but as a subjective assertion of the free play of our rational capacities. However, because beauty is more of a capacity and lacks self-sufficiency, existing as a mediation between the appearance of nature and the opportunity for freedom, Kant avoids a discussion of what nature is and focuses on our ability to judge nature as beautiful. Yet, shouldn’t we have to ask what nature is? In a way, couldn’t we ask: what happens when we remove theoretical and practical reason and are left only with nature itself? More importantly, what happens when the opportunity to make a judgment of taste eludes us or, even more poignantly, is an impossibility?

For Kant beauty is only for humans.[[11]](#footnote-12) This is a crucially important part of Kant’s examination of judgments because judgment is always subjectively reflective, regardless of whether it’s aesthetic or teleological, and is distinct from epistemic claims or moral certitude because it generates a sense of pleasure in the individual making the judgment in the case of the aesthetic. For many, this is a problem with Kantian aesthetics when Kant then goes on to claim that the source of pleasure in any aesthetic experience lies in individual judgments made in a state of disinterestedness and then extended to other individuals with a demand of agreement; going beyond the merely agreeable, Kant proposes a description of an experience of an object as aesthetically pleasing that involves a representation of the purposiveness in the object, in a sense that the object exists with the purpose of being experienceable as aesthetically pleasing precisely in the free play of the faculties which is then presented as true to others for their assumed agreement. To put it another way, Kant is proposing the idea that the reason we find beauty in our experiences of objects is because those objects appear to agree with our capability of identifying beauty as we think about our response to our experience of them and they are confirmed as beautiful because other people apparently agree with our judgments; more radically than the first two critical projects, the *Critique of Judgment* is an attempt to overcome the dichotomy between our subjective responses to the world and our desire to objectively know facts about the world, to give a sense of certainty to our feelings about the world, and to justifiably represent that certainty to others.

New Aesthetic objects could be subject to a Kantian aesthetic judgment; with disinterestedness as the criterion for a valid assessment of the beauty of an object, New Aesthetic objects by their very nature could be processed through a disinterested perspective and, for all of the talk of the appealing design of hardware and software objects, their relatable tangibility could possibly be ignored in favor of a dispassionate aesthetic assessment. It’s conceivable, for instance, to imagine that disucssions of the design of hardware and software take place in a rarified state of objectivity, and that the debate between Apple fans and their PC loyalist detractors take place on the merits of their respective GUIs alone. At the same time this is a little far-fetched for a number of reasons. The recognizably pervasive nature of the presence and function of digital objects and the intuitive means by which we understand and use them makes it nearly impossible to conceive of a fully disinterested engagement. Furthermore, the inseparable functionality of digital objects, or at least the unavoidable perception of an imminent functionality, is never far away once we start to interact with any digital object in an invested fashion; we have, after all, often spent a lot of money of these digital devices. Is it possible to be disinterested in an app on our smartphone, to disregard its efficaciousness as a means of presenting information, to disregard the manner in which it ‘enhances’ our lives or alerts us to information about ourselves that we could not have known otherwise? Is it possible to neither love nor hate our iPhones but disinterestedly appreciate them, especially when they don’t ‘just work’? Regardless of the debate about the functional beauty of artworks,[[12]](#footnote-13) the functionality of New Aesthetic objects makes it impossible to assess their aesthetic quality as beautiful in a Kantian sense because the presentations of their functional and aesthetic natures are frequently intertwined and inseparable. This extends beyond the hardware and the appearance of software to the information provided to the user. In some ways, digital curation has even increasingly undermined the potential for a disinterested perspective as our apps tell us what we need to know; the methods of presenting New Aesthetic objects through Tumblr and other social media websites, for example, mean they are not ‘curated’ in the traditional sense of the word but are collections reflecting their authors’ subjective response to the patterns of their navigation through various forms of digital content that are guided by search results algorithmically constructed in response to previous search histories and terms.

This exploration of ‘curated’ lists and the GUI designs of smartphone might not seem important but it is in that they are the means to return to the original context in a consideration of the receptive use of the New Aesthetic objects; most online presentations of objects are done with their links intact, as if the very act of directing is almost a forceful way of saying ‘you cannot look at it through my eyes, you must be directed to look at it as it should be seen’. From our perspective, this means that the very nature of New Aesthetic objects plays a fundamental, determinative role in the formation of critical (and uncritical) discourse engaging with their existence or simply their use; disinterestedness fails here again not just because the users are interested in the use of New Aesthetic objects but because New Aesthetic objects are ‘interested’ in how they will be used. This means that the New Aesthetic produces objects that all by themselves resist a Kantian intuition of beauty, not so much because they can’t be described as beautiful but because they apparently will themselves to be described as beautiful. Kant writes: ‘For a judgment of taste consists precisely in this, that it calls a thing beautiful only by virtue of that characteristic in which it adapts itself to the way we apprehend it.’[[13]](#footnote-14) This means that the appearance of objects will seemingly change so as to be in accordance with our capacity to judge them as beautiful, but Kant certainly didn’t mean that the objects would actually change. New Aesthetic objects, however, do change in a responsive fashion through their use; it isn’t simply that applications on our smartphones are updated, it’s that the appearance of many of these apps change in response to data and use so as to make them appear more valuable or useful to the user. Equally so, New Aesthetic objects resist the Kantian notion that they must be lacking purpose in order to be universally posited as beautiful simply because their form, with its radical presentation of its digital origins, is its purpose. This is a strange conundrum to consider, one that takes us away from Kant while retaining his ideas in the background: it’s as if an aesthetic object cannot be purposeful, precisely because that would deny a potentially disinterested evaluative position, while at the same time the pleasure in the free play of the faculties is teleological and, therefore, purpose-fulfilling, precisely because a successful evaluation of its aesthetic presentation to the faculties necessarily produces pleasure.

New Aesthetic art further counters Kant’s ideas of aesthetics as they relate to beauty when it resists intuition and abrogates any mediation between itself and the subject. Strangely, we might even propose at this point that New Aesthetic objects should be regarded as unsuitable and purposeless for any type of aesthetic judgment in part because of Kant’s priviledging of nature over art when it comes to a sense of certainty in aesthetic judgments. For Kant nature is best represented to the faculties in such a manner that the likeness of its particular determinations agrees at least with the possibility of purposes at work in it according to laws of freedom; if there is no opportunity for the free play of imagination in its relation to intuition then there is no available freedom and a ‘dialectic of aesthetic judgment’ is unavailable. The possibility of the free play of faculties is lessened in the instance of art in comparison to nature. [[14]](#footnote-15)In the case of New Aesthetic objects, however, what we arrive at is almost an indeterminate indeterminacy. Taste enables a move to freedom, from indeterminate theory to determined but freely created response; objects which exist within the realm of the New Aesthetic not only resist being opportunities of taste but are antithetical to taste itself, they resist a unity of the supersensible. Kant’s assertion that imagination and understanding can be reconciled into each other is well known, one simple objection however is that the ‘dilemma […] is [that either] the free play of the faculties is involved in all cognitive perceptual experience, or it is not. If it is, then it would seem, counterintuitively, that every object should be perceived as beautiful.’[[15]](#footnote-16) In the case of New Aesthetic objects what can be intuited about their intention is, at best, the nature of their origins; this, however, is entirely alien to our nature, as they derive their existence from self-sufficient algorithms that are impossible to submit to reflective judgment. In short, objects and art objects of the New Aesthetic cannot be viably judged within Kant’s parameters as beautiful. But could they be judged as having a purpose? Kant writes: ‘For if we want to investigate the organized products of nature by continued observation, we find it completely unavoidable to apply to nature the concept of intention, so that even for our empirical use of reason this concept is an absolutely necessary maxim.’[[16]](#footnote-17)

Objects of the New Aesthetic do exist for aesthetic and, therefore, reflective judgment. Furthermore, New Aesthetic objects do exist as a representation of their unity. Here’s a dilemma in a way, but it’s precisely this dilemma that’s the reason we’re interested in thinking through Kant in order to discuss New Aesthetic objects and art. It’s at this point that we make a crucial transition out of our use of Kantian aesthetics to Kant’s conception of teleological judgments.

### Kant, the New Aesthetic, and the Critique of Teleology

While Kant’s ideas on teleology are, at most, complicated and primarily a niche interest, it can be asserted that ‘teleology serves a useful, if not indispensable, role in our understanding of the living objects and phenomena in nature’.[[17]](#footnote-18) For Kant, a teleological judgment of an object is a judgment as *understanding* of its intrinsic purpose, a purpose to which the object embodies its realization. Teleological judgments are primarily concerned with a theoretical analysis of the nature of an object fulfilling its purpose, meaning that Kant’s focus is on biological organisms rather than more abstract ideas like beauty; this means that a teleological judgment is still disinterested but not directed towards purposeless results such as delight in the free play of the faculties but towards an analysis of the degree to which the object fulfills its purpose. This is a crucially important aspect of our application of Kant’s ideas; what needs to be kept in mind is that ‘in the *Critique of Teleological Judgement* Kant is concerned with particular material objects of experience, and not with the concept of matter as it can be “constructed” in pure intuition. In order to explain the former we thus require laws that go beyond and are more specific than the a priori laws of pure science.’[[18]](#footnote-19) While a teleological judgment may reveal a sense of the purpose of the object, perhaps even more valuable is that the identification of that purpose reveals the object as a self-organizing organism; it’s not just that we figure out what an object should be doing but also that this purpose says a lot about that object by making it real, distinct, functional and independent of ourselves. This can be considerably extended by the notion that, for Kant, this understanding of objects as organisms may be articulated in the antinomy based on the following two principles:

The first maxim of the power of judgement is the thesis: All generation of material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.

The second maxim is the antithesis: Some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws (judging them requires an entirely different law of causality, namely that of final causes).[[19]](#footnote-20)

What emerges is a dialectic that describes these organisms, subject to teleological judgment, as both things that are restricted to the limitations of their physical state as well as existing for themselves. In short, Kant formulates here the basis for a very specific and, at the time, radical form of teleological judgment.

The key aspect of our employment of Kantian teleological judgments is as a means of revealing the intrinsic purpose in the very existence of objects as independent and autonomous continuations and, ultimately, of New Aesthetic objects as continuations of their existence in our experience of them. In §64, ‘On the Character Peculiar to Things as Natural Purposes’, Kant writes:

If […] we cognize something as a natural product and yet are to judge it to be a purpose, and hence a *natural purpose* – unless perhaps the very [thought] is contradictory – then we need more. I would say, provisionally, that a thing exists as a natural purpose if it is *both cause and effect of itself* (although in two different senses). For this involves a concept of a nature without regarding nature as acting from a purpose; and even then, though we can think this causality, we cannot grasp it.[[20]](#footnote-21)

What Kant means by this is that a natural object will both be itself, exist as it is, while equally be available for judgment as to the purpose for which it exists. An apple tree, for instance, can be judged as to how well it fulfills its purpose, which is to produce apples that are the means of propogating its species. Or a specific species of animal – a camel, for instance, adapted to live in the desert – can be judged as to how well it evolved to meets its purpose. Both of these examples were chosen to make a point, in that apples are judged by how well they taste and camels are judged as pack animals, but in both cases such judgments are aesthetic not teleological. Kant didn’t intend teleological judgments to be similar to aesthetic judgments, even though both are reflective, but more of a means of identifying an opportunity for further scientific study with a very specific aim in mind. Many interpretations of Kant’s teleology take it simply as that – as the means to identify things which are worth scientific investigation – but Kant’s discussion of the principle of teleological judgments of nature as to their self-purposiveness is going farther. Within the context of his critical system, Kant argues that any effort to judge the natural purpose of a thing, its *Naturzweck*, based on its intrinsic form, is dependent on its natural form as *Naturwerk*; when an object appears to our experience to be efficaciously purposive, initially understood as related to art[[21]](#footnote-22) but extended to all things that ground a causality to a purpose, it is because it appears to be a means by which a purpose is achieved as an intrinsic quality of the object, such that ‘[…] we arrive at no categorical [but only a hypothetical] purpose if we disregard the internal form and organization [of a blade of grass], and consider instead extrinsic purposive relations as to what use other natural beings make of the grass […] this condition (namely, the existence of a thing as a final purpose) is unconditioned and hence lies wholly outside a physicoteleological consideration of the world’.[[22]](#footnote-23) To put it another way, Kant’s idea of a teleological judgment depends on ignoring our aesthetic response (the tastiness of an apple, for example) in favor of seeing different purposes to the parts of the organism that sustain the overall purpose of the object (the continued existence of the apple tree and its species).

A teleological judgment regards an object only in terms of its efficient presentation of its purpose, what Kant refers to as its ‘intrinsic purpose’.[[23]](#footnote-24) While this is problematic – as a number of commentators point out this is both paradoxical to human thought and appears opposed to scientific thinking – Kant argues that it is a necessary judgment in order not to explain objects but simply to be able to cite their existence. While the extrinsic purposes of an objects are the easiest to asses, wherein an object is a means towards an end in a causal connection that is real, far more interesting are the intrinsic purposes, wherein an object is organized to reveal itself as itself in a causal connection that is ideal, an organism is ‘both cause and effect of itself’.[[24]](#footnote-25)

Kant is quite upfront about this being inapplicable to art, writing: ‘Now in order for a thing to be a natural purpose, it must meet two requirements. *First*, the possibility of its parts (as concerns both their existence and their form) must depend on their relation to the whole. For since the thing itself is a purpose, it is covered by a concept or idea that must determine a priori everything that the thing is to contain. But if we think of a thing as possible only in *that* way then it is merely a work of art’.[[25]](#footnote-26) This is where Lou’s *Color Field* serves as a differentiating boundary point; quite clearly, the work doesn’t serve a natural purpose and its teleological nature is neither self-sufficient nor autonomous. While there is a telos involved – the process that Lou focuses on and its recognition by the viewer being the primary concern of the artist – this purpose is not a priori related to the final object as a whole but is a secondary quality. In a way, this is precisely the nature of many art objects, in that there is often an irresolvable imbalance between first and second qualities of process and intent, between construction of intent and the realized effect of the intent. In this sense, Kant’s insistence that the parts relate to the whole is dependent on the active nature of that relationship, which is only revealed over the course of time as a part of the process of experiencing the art.

Yet, there are other objects that impose a second requirement on themselves in order for them to be teleologically judged, in part dependent on the restrictions of the human condition. These are natural objects that are organisms. Wherein the parts are subsumed as the means of sustaining the continuation of the whole.

A *second* requirement must be met if a thing that is a product of nature is yet to have, within itself and its inner possibility, reference to purposes, i.e., if it is to be possible only as a natural purpose, without the causality of concepts, which rational beings outside it have. This second requirement is that the parts of the thing combine into the unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form. For only in this way is it possible that the idea of the whole should conversely (reciprocally) determine the form and combination of all the parts, not as cause – for then the whole would be a product of art – but as the basis on which someone judging this whole cognizes the systematic unity in the form and combination of all the manifold contained in the given matter.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Normally this second condition is not available to inanimate objects but only to living organisms because the parts of the whole do not generate each other – all of the parts of an organism are needed not only to sustain the life of that organism in the present but to continue to grow and develop that organism in the future – but do self-sufficient non-natural objects not exist as organisms? Here we start to break from Kant. Whereas the first requirement leads us towards a relation of the object to a causality of ends, the second is purely reflective and leads us towards a causality of self-evidence. Lou’s *Color Field*, as magnificent as it is, is not self-evidently a presentation of its intended effect nor is it a purely reflective reference to its formal unity. As always, this is not a criticism of this amazing work but simply a means of distinguishing it from New Aesthetic objects and art objects, which are self-evidently a presentation of their intended effect and a pure reflection of their unity. Where we end up is with this maxim: ‘Everything in the world is good for something or other; nothing in it is gratuitous; and the example that nature offers us in its organic products justifies us, indeed calls upon us, to expect nothing from it and its laws except what is purposive in [relation to] the whole’.[[27]](#footnote-28) As a reflective judgment, and not as a determinative judgment, this allows us to reflect on objects of our experience and to transcend the specificities of the object. In short, we can begin to teleologically judge non-natural objects in a manner similar to natural objects. Kant even proposes that we are ‘entitled’ to go beyond the specific purposiveness of an object to a consideration of a ‘unity of supersensible principle’[[28]](#footnote-29) whereby the entirety of nature as a system is considered and judged as a whole. This allows us, in a way, to understand the frequent biological metaphors used to describe digital ecologies.

What if the object presented to our intuition is incapable of being understood as purposive precisely because it resists neatly falling into either aesthetic or teleological judgment? This is at the center of Kant’s problem – trying to determine how it is possible to identify an object as both natural and purposeful – that ends up being very difficult to resolve. Every time we think about an organism in terms of its mechanical nature it becomes difficult to think of it as having a purpose unless we resort (as is hinted by Kant) to some divine power. Kant wants to avoid this, and so do we. ‘A teleological principle for explaining the inner possibility of certain natural forms leaves it undetermined whether their purposiveness is intentional or unintentional.’[[29]](#footnote-30) This dialectic between intention and driven necessity complicates the intrinsic causal relations of the object but it’s in that complexity that the teleological judgment has the most force. Kant writes: ‘we would find no distinction between a natural mechanism and a technique of nature, i.e., a connection to ends in it, if our understanding were not of the sort that must go from the universal to the particular’.[[30]](#footnote-31) This gets to a central point of the matter. For Kant, an identification of the

apparent internal purposiveness – as presented in the phenomena of self-regulation, regeneration, and reproduction – can be made intelligible only by investigating organisms in accordance with the vitalistic notion of absolute purposiveness, as if they were natural purposes exhibiting a real, internal purposiveness having its source in a nonhuman, intelligent causality analogous to our own practical causality […] which provides us with an intelligible estimation (*Beurteilung*) of organic nature.[[31]](#footnote-32)

What’s taking place here is crucial. *Naturwerke*, natural organisms, appear to have *Naturzwecke*, natural ends, but are they programmed or self-generated? Kant’s trying to avoid the necessity of conceding the origins of an organism’s purpose to a divine power, and we’re trying to avoid the origins of a digital object’s purpose to a programmer. What if, then, we were to encounter objects in our experience that exhibit natural mechanisms, direct our assessment from the universal to the particular, present self-regulating purposes with a concordant sense of absolute purposiveness, and which organically operate in response to our experience of them? What if we were to encounter little programs on our smartphone that do all those things? Would we start to call them organisms?

This goes beyond what Paul Fishwick has described as the aesthetic products of embodied cognition[[32]](#footnote-33) in that it describes a set of aesthetic forms that are the products of cognitive organisms that are the result of programming but function independently of the intentions of their programming. Ralf Baecker’s art illustrates this very well, especially when described his work *Order+Noise (Interface I)* (2016) in an interview after it was installed at the NOME art gallery in Berlin.

what underlines the aesthetic experience is the materiality by which action produces knowledge, transforming data space into real space. As observers take in the rules, operations and parameters of the work, they gain insight into their perception. The installation’s mechanical workings and network of strings allow us to explore the poetic potential of technology via its materiality, so that *Interface I* sits on the boundary between an imaginary field and an epistemological condition […] Beside this material stack I am interested in the mathematical foundations of these technologies. A closer look reveals a fully closed deterministic system, that is the result of separating mathematics from the world and our experience of it, in order to create a pure formal system.[[33]](#footnote-34)

Our focus on objects of the New Aesthetic ends up there. What if we were to take Kant’s solution to the problem and run with it? Kant would certainly disagree with where we are heading but, for Kant, a reconciliation between the mechanistic character of the first requirement and the natural self-sufficiency of the second requirement can happen if the mechanistic becomes subordinate to the teleology while remaining autonomous and independent.[[34]](#footnote-35) We want to avoid intentional purposes because those make it difficult to avoid thinking about whose intentions we’re looking at. We want to only discuss natural purposes as natural ends. And what are natural purposes ultimately? To continue life as *Naturwerk*, natural works, sustained through their *Naturzwecke*, their own closed, unique and self-determinating organizational principals.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Any reflective judgment must discover *a priori* the purposiveness of nature revealed in teleological judgments while simultaneously engaging with their aesthetic nature. This is not necessarily paradoxical even if it feels contrary to human experience; nature reveals itself essentially as a revelation of itself for human intuition and understanding, and art objects reveal themselves as revelations of the free play of human reflexive judgment, but objects that might be considered New Aesthetic participate in both processes in a way that ends up being surprisingly unsatisfactory. In this sense, though, nature is not available in a free and harmonious fashion but as teleologically driven, and freedom is only available to our understanding; for the objects of the New Aesthetic such freedom is difficult to intuit and, therefore, even more difficult to understand; equally, although the free play of the aesthetic is available, because there is a teleological purposiveness to the regarded objects we are left with an interested position that denies the possibility of the aesthetic in favor of a recognition of their objective material purposiveness as apparent natural purpose. The separateness and the distinctiveness are the crucial parts of our teleological judgment of New Aesthetic objects. Kant may write that ‘[…] the concept of a purposiveness of nature (as a technical purposiveness, which is essentially distinct from a practical purposiveness), if it is not to be a merely superstitious substitution of *what we make out of nature* for what *nature is*, is a concept separate from all dogmatic philosophy’[[36]](#footnote-37) but we arrive at a different conclusion regarding these technologically based objects. Obviously New Aesthetic objects are not actually biological organisms, but we would argue that the degree to which they are analogous to *Naturwerk*e is increasingly apparent. As *Naturwerke*, as a type of organisms, New Aesthetic objects are firstly available to aesthetic judgment but not in accordance with Kant’s restrictive description of the conditions of a valid aesthetic judgment; they are also examples of Kant’s antinomy that objects are subject to teleological judgments if their material forms function according to universal mechanical laws and yet also are assessable with disregard to universal mechanical laws; seemingly both cause and effect of themselves with their own specific ends; they are seemingly self-purposive, creating an intrinsic purpose to their very existence as they continue to exist; and a presentation of the unity of the whole object itself as an amalgamation of its parts while simultaneously a presentation of itself supporting the unity of the object. Or, to throw out a quick example, any iteration of the Facebook application fits in Kant’s notion of teleological judgments.

### Biological Evolution and Teleology

While Kant’s consideration of teleology is, obviously, focused on judgments, the concept of teleology itself has been divided since Kant’s time into an entirely second set of considerations: biological evolution. Since Charles Darwin’s description of the evolution of species, there has been some considerable debate about the nature of evolution itself, with the philosophy of science debating whether evolution is teleological or not. Because teleology was directly associated with a pre-Darwinian description of the world, often part of the argument for creationism and sometimes labeled cosmic teleology, the description of evolution as teleological has been rightly debated; philosophers of science are divided between reluctantly accepting a description of evolution as teleological, because it’s the most effective analogy to evolutionary processes, or derisively denying evolution’s nature as teleological, because it’s an unnecessary obfuscation of the emphasis of naturalism on the relationship of function to design. What does this have to do with the New Aesthetic? We propose that New Aesthetic objects may be analyzed in biological terms as well as aesthetic terms, but to get there requires further consideration of the problem of biological teleology itself.

Taking this biological perspective, we’re particularly indebted to Marcel Quarfood’s articulation of the role teleology plays in understanding evolution and biological processes. He writes:

Teleology is said to be indispensable for conceptualizing organized beings, yet it is merely a regulative principle, subjectively valid for reflecting on such beings but not objectively valid for determining their properties. The difficulty lies in balancing the claimed indispensability of teleology with its regulative status. Too heavy stress on the necessity of teleological considerations for the understanding of organisms would seem to lead to the conclusion that teleology is a constitutive condition for the possibility of biology, and thus not regulative.[[37]](#footnote-38)

Quarfood’s point is clear and aligned with Kant’s: we can, we do, and we are even driven to make teleological judgments about organisms. While these appear to be guidelines that reveal certain ‘laws’ of nature they are also highly subjective and necessarily subject to a skeptical or critical perspective; the only genuine conclusion we can reach out of a teleological judgment is that there regulative processes appear to be inherent to the existence of objects. Quarfood continues:

A regulative principle involves an idea of reason that transcends the scope of the understanding, so that judgments based on the principle cannot determine objects constitutively, even though it may be appropriate “for the human point of view” of the reflecting employment of the power of judgment (cf. CJ 403). Though Kant consistently reserves the term “constitutive” for principles provided a priori by the understanding which make experience possible, one could also consider a regulative principle enabling a level of special experience to be constitutive for that experience, provided that this constitutivity is understood as relative to this level and to the “human point of view”, rather than as prescriptive for objects in general.[[38]](#footnote-39)

The point here is similar to Kant’s in that teleological judgments provide only a human perspective for human experience; every time we believe we see a pattern, a natural law, etc. in the constitutive nature and functions of an object we are seeing those patterns only as they exist in human understanding. For Quarfood, a teleological judgment is the means by which an organism is first identified as an organism, as a *Naturweck*, in that it is being what it should be because the relationship between the parts and the whole are interdependent and substantiating as a fulfillment of its natural purpose which is to produce itself. This means that while it’s impossible to use teleology at an intrinsic level, it is possible to explain why an object that is subject to teleological judgment is being what it should be as a fulfillment of our understanding’s need to provide for itself explanations as to the purpose of things. Actually, we apparently can’t help it, with Quarfood noting that ‘In § 68, Kant tells us that concerning “empirical laws of natural purposes in organized beings it is not merely permissible but even unavoidable to use the teleological way of judging as the principle of the theory of nature with regard to a special class of its objects” (CJ 382).’[[39]](#footnote-40) Organized beings are necessarily recognized as organized – we can’t avoid seeing patterns, regulative processes and purposiveness in organisms even if they aren’t there – even if Kant himself would go on to say that such recognitions are inexplicable and only serve as a rough, failing guide to describing mechanistic explanations.[[40]](#footnote-41)

Quarfood’s point is neatly applicable if one reverses it and then extends it far beyond his philosophical position: it’s not just that we can’t help but make teleological judgments about organisms, it’s also that organisms necessitate teleological judgments. An organism, especially a biological object that is an organism, by its very nature as an organism appearing in our experience forces us to make a teleological judgment. Therefore, if we’re making teleological judgments about objects then those objects must surely be organisms. And, since we’ve been making or implying teleological judgments about objects of the New Aesthetic throughout this chapter, our position is hopefully clear: New Aesthetic objects are a type of organism, albeit a non-biological type.

This has being sounding problematic, we know, but on some levels it makes a certain sense. Stating the problem of teleology and its applicability quite neatly, Ernst Mayr, one of the great evolutionary biologists of the 20th century, in his discussion of the use of teleology as a concept in the philosophy of science, points out:

The reasons for the unsatisfactory state of the teleology analyses in the philosophical literature are now evident. Indeed, one can go so far as to say that the treatment of the problems of teleology in this literature shows how not to do the philosophy of science. For at least fifty years a considerable number of philosophers have written on teleology basing their analyses on the methods of logic and physicalism, “known to be the best” or at least the only reliable methods for such analyses. These philosophers have ignored the findings of the biologists, even though teleology concerns mostly or entirely the world of life.[[41]](#footnote-42)

What’s interesting about this statement, written before the explosion of the increasingly pervasive presence of the internet, is its dependency on physicalism, on the belief that everything is necessarily physical in nature. Taking a perspective that attempts to preserve teleological descriptions from a conflation with the biological, Mayr asserts that it is precisely in the biological that we can see the teleological in action. Equally rejecting the anthropomorphism often associated with teleology, Mayr disassociates the notion that a teleological description is oriented towards finality and instead moves it beyond functional-associations. As Mayr notes: ‘the principal endeavor of the traditional philosopher was to eliminate teleological language from all descriptions and analyses’[[42]](#footnote-43) because it got wrapped up into excessive speculation that resulted in terminating descriptions of history such as Hegel’s own efforts. For Mayr, though, teleology still has a role in biology because it emphasizes the self-preservative drive of organisms, the unity of their parts, and a sense of their role within an ecology. In a way, we would push for a position that defends a return to teleological considerations, particularly in light of the biological analogies of New Aesthetic objects in accordance with Mayr’s ideas. Teleology is, thus, one means of identifying purposeful organisms that exist within a digital ecology.

Our appropriation of Mayr’s ideas depends on how Mayr moved the discussion of teleology beyond its functional associations towards a description of the self-sustaining properties of organisms. The first part consisted of Mayr rejecting the association of teleomatic processes with teleology; for Mayr, teleomatic processes, those that are simply governed by natural laws, are passive in their adherence and automatic in their end result (in that they are invariably successful unless interfered with). Teleomatic processes are, simply, the adherence of all objects to the laws of physics. For Mayr, if an organism seems to simply be affected by everyday things like gravity, heat, etc. then it’s not adhering to a teleological purpose. Second, Mayr pushes teleology’s usefulness by rejection the association of teleonomic processes with teleology; for Mayr, teleonomic processes are non-anthropomorphic programmed processes that are dependent on a preordained structure of end results which can be both closed (restricted to the original programming without modification from additional data) or open (modifiable through the introduction of additional data) but are still limited to an unwavering pre-set goal with an apparent but illusionary purposefulness. An easy example of a teleonomic process is animal migrations, which are seemingly programmed but subject to variable conditions and which respond to those variables. For Mayr, neither teleomatic nor teleonomic processes are adequate, however, in describing a genuine sense of the teleological, regardless of some debates concerning their conceptual similarity to teleology[[43]](#footnote-44) and especially in light of the tendency to conflate teleonomy with a theist notion of teleology; for Mayr, teleology is more than just adherence to laws or the realization of goals, it is the manifestation of goals that is less a product of adaptiveness (which Mayr identifies as Kant’s *Zweckmässigkeit*)[[44]](#footnote-45) and more a product of goal-orientation capability. In a way, this is similar to Mayr’s notion of what a species is, in response to the species problem present in Charles Darwin’s ideas; for Mayr, a species is not just a group of similar individuals but an exclusive group of individuals that can only breed amongst themselves, meaning that the development of a species is the development of teleological governed individuals. For Mayr, to identify teleological processes in organisms is to do far more than just observe how they are affected by physical processes but requires going beyond seeing how they act on instinct to a sense of seeing the full complexity of organisms as individuals. This is easiest to see in (though not at all exclusive to) higher order organisms, such as canines, cetacea and primates where play, courtship and other forms of social interaction are an important part of the organism’s continuing existence in ways that are not immediately purposive but which are clearly endemic and intrinsic to the organism’s species; dogs, dolphins and chimpanzees act in ways that assert their complex individual identities into their environment while retaining their broader identity as a member of a species of animals. But is it possible with less complex organisms? Is it possible to see that there is a complexity to digital objects that is more than just analogous to biological organisms?

In a way, many instances of digital objects fit easily into Mayr’s description of what he believes are true examples of teleology, especially in the case of New Aesthetic objects. Mayr used three terms to describe successive evolutionary stages of processes as they govern objects and organisms and how we might assess them: teleomatic, teleonomic and teleological. Teleomatic processes are simply causal in nature, governed by the laws of physics. In this sense we can describe the earliest forms of digital art as instances of a teleomatic nature, in that the output was entirely dictated by restricted programming regardless of the unjustifiable claims of programmers and artists that the work was being ‘created’ by the computer. Teleonomic processes involve a more dynamic set of responses to circumstances but are still restricted towards a specific goal. We can also describe programs and later examples of digital art as teleonomic, in that an increasing amount of creativity and variability beyond the control of the programmers was introduced that was still largely dependent on user input and restricted programming; we would even describe the first phases of digital art that lay the groundwork for New Aesthetic art as specifically teleonomic, particularly if Quarfood’s ideas are used to identify individual organisms. Finally, genuinely teleological processes is genuinely evolutionary, in that organisms’ responses to their environment are dynamic and goal-oriented but are also intrinsically directed towards maintaining the existence of organisms and bettering the survival chances of their species. We would claim that New Aesthetic objects and art are teleological in the sense that Mayr used the term, in that they can be described as fully autonomous and self-sufficient upon their full realization with the further goal of spreading throughout the digital ecology and having of a life of their own. A simple example illustrates our point: the Facebook application on one person’s smartphone is not the same as on another’s, each having acquired an unique identity through extensive development and evolution that relates in a singular fashion to an entire digital ecology, all the while acting as a species of individual organisms. In the case of art, Mayr’s notion of teleology is readily in accordance with the idea of art having a ‘life’ of its own.

A very recent example of art embodies so many of these ideas. In January 2016, the Argentinian Amalia Ulman, living in Los Angeles after studies at the Central Saint Martins art school in London, announced to the world that her Instagram feed had been an extended example of performance art *Excellences & Perfections* {Fig. 116} that had concluded that month and has been, after its reveal, favorably compared to the art of Cindy Sherman and Yves Klein. In a post on Facebook referencing a review published in the British Newspaper *The Telegraph*,[[45]](#footnote-46) Nicolas Bourriaud described Ulman’s project as an example of post-internet art, then quickly declared that to be an incorrect appellation.[[46]](#footnote-47) Bourriaud’s rejection of the term is ensconced in his critical perspective of relational aesthetics, but his willingness to reconsider Ulman’s work based on the review is fascinating. Sean O’Hagan, writing in *The Guardian*, notes:

We now live in a time when social media has revealed the full extent of the public’s fascination with the everyday lives of both the famous and the ordinary […] [Amalia Ulman’s] fake Instagram feed, Excellences & Perfections, was read by many as an actual record of her attempts to become a somebody in Los Angeles. Like a would-be Kim Kardashian, she recorded her shopping expeditions and pole-dancing classes, attracting the inevitable “haters”, but also about 90,000 followers.[[47]](#footnote-48)

Ulman’s work is about gender, celebrity, identity construction and an exploration of an engagement with social media. At the same time, in a teleological way, it’s a perfect instance of New Aesthetic art. Why is Ulman’s work part of the New Aesthetic? Like some of the artists mentioned earlier, New Aesthetic art isn’t necessarily digital even if it’s form is fundamentally digital; *Excellences & Perfections* couldn’t have existed without Instagram, meaning not only that Ulman interacted with the programming of Instagram but that the program actively changed the parameters and methods of production of Ulman’s work and guided the aesthetic process. Herein it seems like this work is governed by a tautology-inducing condition, but the real aesthetic value is in its negotiation of the teleological conditions of the technology. Though the work appears on Instagram, an inherently digital medium, it nevertheless is driven by the digitality of Instagram phenomena at the level of interaction. Instagram itself is purposed with creating art work like this and Ulman’s Instagram account and its associated applications functioned as an assertion of their complex identity in a larger digital ecology. The teleological nature lies in the fact that the work emerged necessarily out of its context, emerged as a *Naturwerk* in an autonomously self-sufficiently fashion driven by it natural purpose, making it as much a part of the New Aesthetic as glitch photography, precisely because its appearance before the reveal was entirely as an organism within the Instagram ecology. We normally find it unthinkable to agree with such a conservative newspaper as *The Telegraph*, but perhaps they are right that this is the first Instagram masterpiece.

Where do we get to, after all this? Teleological judgment can’t be easily applied to artificial objects, especially art, and that might make it hard to apply it to New Aesthetic objects; Kant writes (§64): ‘all our art finds itself infinitely outdistanced if it tries to reconstruct those products of the vegetable kingdom from the elements we obtain by dissecting them, or for that matter from the material that nature supplies for their nourishment’.[[48]](#footnote-49) We hope that this chapter hasn’t been read as a slavishly devoted appropriation of Schopenhauer’s and Kant’s ideas, influential as they are. Instead, we’ve thought of their ideas, and those of other theorists mentioned throughout the book, as part of a pattern that reveals the functioning present of a new type of objects that are part of the digital world and which have a profound effect on our experience. We arrive at an identification of a new set of objects that can be aesthetically and teleologically judged in their functioning autonomy, that are an opportunity to assess their beauty and design while at the same time an opportunity to assess the degree to which they fulfill their objective material purposiveness in a manner independent of our existence. At the same time we believe we’ve created a framework for an appreciation of their artistic appeal that is available vis-à-vis the degree to which these objects are autonomously teleological in that they are self-determinative and independent; they have a will, they present themselves for aesthetic consideration, but on terms that are an intrinsic aspect of their existence. At this point, what are New Aesthetic art objects? A new species or form of aesthetically appreciable objects in the same manner as painting and sculpture, and very much akin to the recent developments of conceptual, performance and installation art in their flexible capacity to utilize different methods of production normally ascribed to more traditional forms. New Aesthetic objects are not bound to the digital but postdigital in nature, a development out of digital objects and processes, noticeable at first in glitches, but no longer necessarily digital, and in that respect genuinely new. Borrowing the term from Kant and taking on both Quarfood’s and Mayr’s understanding of teleology as it is applicable to biology, objects of the New Aesthetic are manufactured objects but at the same time are *Naturwerke* in that they are both indistinguishable from manufactured, digital artifacts on one level and indistinguishable on another, functional level from biological organisms.

1. Again, as always, the irony doesn’t escape us. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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3. Dmitriy Krotevich, ‘PixelDrifter’, *Internet Archive*, 11 May 2014, https://archive.org/details/pixeldrifter. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Margaret Rhodes, ‘This Glitch Art Is Made of Pixels Powered by Their Own AI’, *Wired.com*, 7 August 2014, http://www.wired.com/2014/08/this-glitch-art-is-made-of-pixels-powered-by-their-own-ai/. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. DJ Pangburn, ‘Here’s What Artificially Intelligent Pixel Bending Looks Like ‘, *The Creators Project*, 28 July 2014, http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/heres-what-artificially-intelligent-pixel-bending-looks-like. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne. Dover Publications, New York: 1966, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Damion Scott, ‘Functional Analysis and Schopenhauer’s Theory of the Will’ (*The World as Will and Representation*, Volume I, Sections 17-29), <https://www.academia.edu/2576175/Functional_Analysis_and_Schopenhauers_Theory_of_the_Will>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. DeWitt H. Parker, ‘Introduction’, *Schopenhauer Selections*, New York: Scribner, 1928. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A216/B263 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. KU 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Stephen Davies, ‘Aesthetic Judgements, Artworks and Functional Beauty’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 223 (April, 2006): 224-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Immanuel Kant*, The Critique of Judgment*, trans. Pluhar, Werner, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987, p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Hannah Ginsborg, ‘Kant’s Aesthetics and Teleology’, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kant-aesthetics/. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 280 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Shidan Lofti, ‘The ‘Purposiveness’ of Life: Kant’s Critique of Natural Teleology’, *The Monist*, January 2010, 93:1, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Angela Breitenbach, ‘Two views on nature: A solution to Kant’s antinomy of mechanism and teleology’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 16:2, 2008: 351-369. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, (*KdU*), §70, AAV: 387. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. KU §10 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. ‘[I]f a thing is a natural product but yet we are to cognize it as possible only as a natural purpose, then it must have this character: it must relate to itself in such a way that it is both cause and effect of itself.’ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Immanuel Kant, *KdU*, AAV: 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. A.C. Genova, ‘Review of *Kant’s Concept of Teleology* by J.D. McFarland’, *Ethics*, University of Chicago Press, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Jan., 1971): 186-189. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Paul Fishwick, ‘Aesthetic Computing’, Mads Soegaard and Rikke Friis Dam (eds.) *The Encyclopedia of Human-Computer Interaction*, Aarhus: The Interactive Design Foundation, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Régine Debatty, ‘Order+Noise, a tug of war for motors, strings and rubber bands’, We Make Money Not Art blog, 29 April 2016, http://we-make-money-not-art.com/ordernoise-a-tug-of-war-for-motors-strings-and-rubber-bands/. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. In a strange but related aside, the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl wrote ‘Naturwerk und Kunstwerk I’, in Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Augsburg-Wien: Benno Filser Verlag, 1928, 64; Alois Riegl, ‘Naturwerk und Kunstwerk II’, 67, 70, proposing a similar sense of an internally driven necessity to art forms. See also Diana Graham Reynolds, *Alois Riegl and the Politics of Art History. Intellectual Traditions and Austrian Identity in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, San Diego: University of California, 1997. We wonder what Riegl would have made of New Aesthetic objects. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Pluhar, p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Marcel Quarfood, ‘Kant on Biological Teleology: Towards a Two-level Interpretation’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, vol. 37, 2006: 735-747. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Marcel Quarfood, ‘Kant on Biological Teleology’. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Quarfood, ‘Kant on Biological Teleology’, quoting Kant. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. James Kreines, ‘The Inexplicability of Kant’s Naturzweck: Kant on Teleology, Explanation and Biology’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 87 (3: 2005): 270-311. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
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42. Mayr, ‘The Idea of Teleology’, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
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48. Kant, *CJ*, p. 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)