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Art Beyond Aesthetics
Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art

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In 1965, as part of his response to a series of 'Charges to the Art Critic' from the directors of a seminar in Art Education at Pennsylvania State University, and in studied contrast to the growing formalism of the dominant but declining modernist criticism of Clement Greenberg and his associates, the North American art critic Harold Rosenberg declared:

'Art criticism today *is* art history, though not necessarily the art history of the art historian'.¹

This assertion appears remarkable today, nearly forty years later; and not just because of its insistence upon the historical dimension of a practice that has become ever more preoccupied with synchronic relations – in particular, between art and other cultural forms. It is remarkable because, in asserting the independence of the historical dimension of criticism from the discipline of art history, it raises the more fundamental issue (which Rosenberg himself made no attempt to address) of precisely *what kind* of art history art criticism is (or should

be), and what its relations to the art history of the art historian might be. This is a question that goes to the heart of thinking about contemporary art, the privileged object of art criticism; not least, because it concerns the historical, rather than the merely chronological, determination of contemporaneity.

In the Euro-American context, art criticism and art history have both changed significantly since 1965. There are less grounds for the condescension of the critic towards the historian today, more grounds for a reversal of the relation. But the question of the specific character of that art history which art criticism is, or might be, has not merely remained unanswered, it has become obscured from view. Art criticism and art history has each had its own problems to deal with. Intellectually serious art criticism – nowadays, for the most part, little more than a dream – has fallen prey to a seemingly permanent (or at least, constantly renewed) crisis. This crisis is cultural-economic or 'institutional' in origin (contingent upon transformations in the social character of art institutions during the 1980s and 1990s, and their diminishing need for the mediations of a historically oriented criticism), but it is nonetheless intellectual for that. Where it thrives as a cultural force, art criticism concentrates on literary aspects of journalistic presentation and often treats its object as little more than an occasion for communications of a more general kind.ⁱⁱ Meanwhile, art history has been transformed as a part of wider changes in the disciplines of the humanities in Anglo-American academies, in a manner that *Art History* exemplifies.

Yet successive broadenings of the intellectual scope of the discipline – via the new social history of art, feminism, semiotics, psychoanalysis and post-colonial studies, towards the euphoric horizon of studies in 'visual culture' – have not brought it any closer to specifically art-critical forms of judgement; although they have produced a network of discursive affinities between the new art history and contemporary art itself, at the level of that art's thematic concerns. (This is, in part, a result of convergent trends in art-historical and art education). Studies in visual culture thus often *appear* closer to art-critical discourse than their art-historical predecessors – indeed, they increasingly occupy what were once institutional spaces of criticism – despite their common distance from questions of art-judgement. This appearance covers over and hence helps to sustain the absence of criticism.ⁱⁱⁱ For the general theories of representation, both epistemological and political, which predominate in studies of visual culture – usually, if unwittingly, semiotic culturalist variants of the liberal pluralism of US political science – are singularly ill-suited to grasping the specific and deeply problematic character of the experience of contemporary art. This situation is exacerbated, rather than mitigated, by the covert visual essentialism that has inadvertently, but inevitably, accompanied the formation of the new proto-discipline, in an ironic reprise of the terms of its original adversary, formalist modernism. For the supplement of 'the visual' restores to cultural analysis an aesthetic idealism of vision, at the very historical moment in which art's

visuality, however pronounced, is perhaps its least distinguishing trait. The categorial exclusion of 'aesthetic' from Saussurean semiotics has motivated its unreconstructed return, in an antinomic dualism of sign and affect, whereby, today, the work of Deleuze functions as an unwitting medium for the restoration of traditional aesthetics.^{iv}

When art criticism and art history have come together, most notably in recent works by T.J. Clark and Michael Fried,^v it has been in order to develop a criticism through and within art history – a criticism of now 'historical' art – rather than vice versa (that is, to develop the historical aspect of criticism of contemporary art, to which Rosenberg was referring). Under these conditions, it is useful to approach the questions implicit in Rosenberg's declaration – namely, *what kind* of art history art criticism (ideally) is and what its relations to 'the art history of the art historian' might be – from the standpoint of philosophy. For as Rosenberg himself suggested, '[b]oth art criticism and art history need to scan more thoroughly their philosophical substructures'^{vi} if they are to acquire a more adequate sense of their mutual relations. And in fact, surprisingly in many respects, there has been a resurgence of interest in explicitly philosophical discourses about art over the last decade as part of the recomposition and diversification of discourses about art which has accompanied the crisis of criticism in its established forms.

What follows has three parts: the first is contextual and positional; the second is historico-philosophical; the third is art-theoretical. Section One considers the character and critical function of the recent revival of interest in explicitly philosophical discourses about art. It identifies a central deficiency in these discourses – a conflation of art and aesthetic – which, it argues, makes them peculiarly unsuited to the comprehension of contemporary art. The second section turns to the historico-philosophical roots of the confusion between art and aesthetic, in the transition between Kant and Jena Romanticism, in order to clarify the differences between the terms. Section Three returns these terms to the present, in the presentation of contemporary art as 'post-conceptual' art and of Romantic philosophy of art as the conceptual ground for contemporary art criticism.

There is no critically relevant aesthetics of contemporary art, it is argued, because contemporary art is not an aesthetic art, in any philosophically significant sense of the term. Rather, as a post-conceptual art, contemporary art actualizes the idea of the work of art to be found in the Jena Romantic philosophy of art, under new historical conditions. The art history that 'art criticism [ideally] *is*' is thus the art history of a historically reflective Romantic philosophy of art. This was the legacy bequeathed, in an earlier period, to Adorno by Walter Benjamin. It is bequeathed to us today, developed and transformed (mediated by the subsequent history of modernism), by Adorno's

Aesthetic Theory. One task of contemporary criticism is to renew this legacy and develop it further, transforming it again, through critical engagement with the concrete manifestations of an increasingly transnationalized contemporary, post-conceptual art. To do so would be to restore to art criticism its central role in constituting the history of art; not simply at the level of its canon, but in its contribution to the constitution of the historical temporality of art itself.^{vii}

1. Art Criticism and Philosophy

The recent resurgence of interest in explicitly philosophical discourses about art has taken place in the context of a crisis of criticism that is part of what Jean-Marie Schaeffer has described as a wider 'legitimation crisis' in contemporary art.^{viii} No doubt, recourse to the established cultural authority of philosophy has played a role in its revival in this context. But its intellectual contribution has been more than ideological. For contrary to the protestations of Schaeffer's own belated positivism, it is perhaps less true now than it has ever been that (in Schaeffer's words) 'art itself ... will get along very well on its own' – that is, without critical discourse. The 'artistic act' may indeed be 'irreducible to the way it legitimates itself', but this means neither that it is non-discursive, nor that the discourses from which it draws its resources are necessarily non-philosophical.^{ix} Conceptual art, surely, put paid to any enduring illusions about that – whatever else one may think about it. Indeed, it is precisely the acknowledgement of the

immanently philosophical character of contemporary art that has led to the revival of the claim, by Arthur Danto among others, that art has ended.^x Yet this claim could be read as little more than an inverted (disavowed) acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the prevailing philosophical discourse on art (namely, 'aesthetics') to the distinctive character of contemporary art: an implicit acknowledgement of inadequacy turned aggressively outwards into a judgement against its cause, against the claim of such art to the hallowed signifier 'art', in its previously received dominant historico-philosophical sense. Hence Danto's coinage of the term 'post-historical' art.

Schaeffer returns this claim to its original historical context, the early 19th century, when he argues that what he calls 'the speculative tradition' (which runs from Jena Romanticism to Heidegger) misunderstood art from the outset. For Schaeffer, the legitimation crisis of contemporary art is the delayed effect of art's philosophical sacralization by Romanticism at the end of the 18th century. His solution is a philosophical 'de-sacralization' of art, or what we might call metaphysical disinvestment. This aetiology is, I think, broadly correct; yet the diagnosis and treatment proposed are precisely wrong. For the legitimation crisis of art is a sign of the continuing, if problematic criticality of contemporary art. It is a sign of the fact that art's authority and critical function remains a *problem* within contemporary culture, a problem for which art's continuing if uncertain metaphysical dimension is a conceptual condition.

Danto and Schaeffer represent alternative variants of one, primarily negative way in which philosophy currently contributes to art-critical discourse. They are both positivists, of different kinds – a Hegelian positivist and a logical positivist, respectively. However, in the wake of Anglo-American art-critical enthusiasm for 'post-structuralism' (already a categorial curiosity in a philosophical context), there has also been a more affirmative turn towards the conceptual resources of the post-Kantian European tradition. In the British context, this has been marked by a deepening and increasingly contested reception of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.^{xi} But it is much wider than this and includes Heideggerian, Merleau-Pontean and post-phenomenological approaches – Lyotard, Derrida and Deleuze, in particular. This has revived interest in the place of art within the German idealist philosophies of the 18th and 19th centuries – Kant, Hegel and the Romantics, but also Schelling, and to a lesser degree, Schopenhauer – which has provided the context of reception for the English-language edition of Schaeffer's anti-Romantic polemic.

Now, there is little doubt that the return to this tradition has been, in part, a culturally conservative phenomenon: 'against cultural studies' and against certain kinds of *both* 'difficult' and 'popular' contemporary art. But it has also performed a critical function by raising theoretical issues associated with the idea of art, in its distinction from other cultural forms of representation – issues that are literally dissolved by the semiotic reductionism and sociologism of most

cultural-theoretical approaches. These are issues that need to be addressed if the dearth of theoretically serious critical writing about contemporary art is to be overcome. However, and this is my concern here, this turn to the European philosophical tradition as a resource for art-critical discourse has as yet failed to achieve a convincing theoretical purchase on *contemporary* art, because it has failed to come to terms with the decisive historical transformation in the ontology of the artwork represented by this work, changes which are constitutive of its very contemporaneity. If one considers the works exhibited at the growing number of international *biennali*, for example, or Documenta – events which in large part constitute the extensive definition of contemporary art – one will find little that most philosophers who write about art are able to engage with concretely, at least, in a manner that also engages, however critically, the discourses and concerns of the artworld itself. (Although the growing aestheticization of some recent video art is one point of convergence.) Hence the reactive, self-justifying and ultimately self-defeating revival of a philosophical discourse of the 'end of art', which it is hard to see as much more than a form of philosophical *résentiment* against art and, ultimately, against contemporaneity itself.

Thus, while these philosophical discourses on art pose a theoretical challenge to most contemporary art writing, by raising questions about 'aesthetic', about judgement, and about the ontology of the artwork, which the

semiotic discourses of cultural theory are unable to ask, they have largely been unable to respond to their own questions other than in terms of the art of the past. The most they are able to offer – when not declaring art at an end – is thus a conservative recoding of the values of contemporary art. Writings by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have played a central role here in the last decade and have even begun to influence some forms of art production.

The reason for this, this inability to grasp contemporary art philosophically in its contemporaneity and hence its decisive difference from art of the past, is, I think, two-fold. First, there is a longstanding confusion (at worst, a straightforward identification) between the terms of the two main philosophical discourses about art that were established at the end of the 18th century: *art as 'aesthetic'* and *art as 'ontology'* (art as an ontologically distinct object of experience – specifically, the site of an autonomous production of meaning and a distinctive modality of truth). Second, there is an inability to think the concept of art at once philosophically and historically, especially with any kind of futurity.

The first of these reasons, the conflation of art and aesthetic, so thoroughly pervades both philosophical and popular discourses about art that the term 'aesthetics' (*Ästhetik*) has long been used, and continues to be used, as the very name for the philosophical discourse on art – a practice that was already so commonplace in Germany by the 1820s than even Hegel succumbed to it, despite his explicit recognition of its inappropriateness, at the beginning of his

Lectures on the topic. A further hundred and eighty years of misuse has served to bury the slippage almost completely from view.^{xii} The second reason – the inability to think the concept of art at once philosophically and historically with any kind of futurity – derives, in part, from the de-historicizing function of 'aesthetic', and in part from a more general failure to attend to the futural performative dimension of the temporal logic of historical totalization, a dimension that is inextricable from the *critical act* of judgement.^{xiii} It is here, in the difference between the qualitative historical temporality of critical judgement (judgements of art that are at the same time judgements of contemporaneity) and the chronological temporality of historicism (comparativism) that we find the decisive difference between 'the art history that art criticism (ideally) is' and the art history of the (traditional) art historian, for whom the concept of art is not itself critically at stake.

First, though, we need to consider the modern concept of art, in its difference from aesthetic, philosophically, as the ground of the fields of art criticism and art history alike. To do this, we need to return to the relationship between Kant's thought and that of Jena Romanticism. For it is only a critical discourse grounded in an early Romantic philosophy of art (rather than Kantianism, Heideggerianism or semiotics), I shall argue, that can get a conceptual grasp of contemporary art in its primary historical determination as post-conceptual art, an art of the reflective mediation of concepts and affects.

2. Art Against Aesthetics (or, Romanticism contra Kant)

So, what is wrong with thinking about art, philosophically, as 'aesthetic'? What is wrong with identifying 'aesthetics' with the philosophy of art? The problem first appears, in an exemplary formulation, in the fortieth of Friedrich Schlegel's *Critical Fragments* (1798):

In the sense in which it has been defined and used in Germany, aesthetic is a word which notoriously reveals an equally perfect ignorance of the thing and of the language. Why is it still used?^{xiv}

What is this 'equally perfect ignorance' of both the language and the thing?

Nothing less, it would seem, than that which Kant himself derided in his much-quoted footnote to the Transcendental Aesthetic of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781): namely, its use by '[t]he Germans ... to designate that which others call the critique of taste'. Schlegel's fragment is an ironic citation or re-writing of this passage. Its reference to 'ignorance of the language' cannot but evoke Kant's advice to 'desist' from the use of the word 'aesthetic' to designate the critique of taste, in order 'to save it for that doctrine which is true science (whereby one would come closer to the language and the sense of the ancients, among whom the division of cognition into *aisthéta* and *noéta* [things of sensibility and things of the mind] was very well known).^{xv} The doctrine to which Kant is referring is his own Transcendental Aesthetic, the first part of the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements [of knowledge] in the *Critique of Pure*

Reason, within which the passage in question is located. It is dedicated, not to taste, but to the exposition of space and time as pure forms of intuition, conditioning the possibility of objects of knowledge in general.

Schlegel's rewriting is ironic, in part because Kant himself equally famously subsequently appeared to go against his own advice when, nine years later, in 1790, the first part of his *Critique of Judgement-Power*, 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgement-Power', contained an extensive analysis of aesthetic judgements understood as, precisely, judgements of taste. The idea that 'aesthetics' is a philosophical discourse about art is in large part the fatal legacy of the reception of this text, with its apparent confirmation of the legitimacy of drawing together the three (originally independent) discourses of *beauty*, *sensibility* and *art* into an integral philosophical whole.^{xvi} Schlegel may be read as referring his readers back to Kant's earlier text in the context of Kant's own apparent subsequent concession to Baumgarten's usage. He is being sarcastic about the first *Critique*, and hence about Kant's self-understanding; at the very least, he is drawing attention to Kant's inconsistency or change of mind.^{xvii} Schlegel is crowing over the triumph of the 'German' use of 'aesthetic' – a terminological triumph which, in the Romantic philosophy of art, was in the process of becoming a philosophical victory of a different and higher order: a triumph of art over philosophy within metaphysics itself.

However, discursively, this triumph of art within metaphysics is a triumph of art criticism over systematic philosophy; it is not a triumph of aesthetic, as Kant understood it in *Critique of Judgement*. In the transition within metaphysics from systematic philosophy to Romantic art criticism 'aesthetics' is a vanishing mediator. In order to understand the disjunction between aesthetics and art criticism that is produced here, it is necessary to examine the apparent inconsistency between Kant's two meanings of 'aesthetic' in more detail.

The inconsistency in question is that between an insistence upon restricting the term aesthetic to its 'original' meaning, denoting the sensible element in knowledge, and its extended use to refer to judgements of taste. The error of the extension, from the standpoint of Kant's first *Critique*, derives from what Kant describes there as the 'failed hope' of 'bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason, and elevating its rules to a science'; that is, from the aspiration to a *rational doctrine* of the beautiful, to an 'aesthetics', in the disciplinary sense. It was this aspiration that led Baumgarten to subsume the philosophical treatment of beauty under the sign of a doctrine of sensible knowledge. And it is the 'futility' of this aspiration that led Kant to judge the usage inappropriate, since, he claimed, 'the putative rules or criteria are merely empirical as far as their sources are concerned'. It is not – note – the connection between beauty and sensibility to which Kant objects in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but the idea that the field of their connection (judgements of

taste) might be governed by '*a priori* rules'.^{xviii} For Kant, then, the term 'aesthetic' was from the outset a term of philosophical art, part of the *doctrine* (*Lehre*) of knowledge. And it is for this reason that it should not have been used to refer to taste: not because beauty is not 'sensible', but precisely because of the fact that it *is*, and hence, its judgements are merely empirical. So what led Kant to change his mind?

The fact is that he did not; at least, not on this particular point. For there is a rarely acknowledged underlying consistency to Kant's position, despite the change in his usage. When he subsequently himself adopted the supposedly inappropriate, extended usage, Kant never went upon his initial reason for rejecting Baumgarten's extended use of 'aesthetic'. In *Critique of Judgement-Power*, Kant maintains, in fact he emphasizes, this point: 'there is no science [*Wissenschaft*] of the beautiful, but only critique'. He writes it twice: first in section 44, 'On Fine Art', and then again in section 60, the Appendix, 'On Methodology Concerning Taste', where it becomes more emphatically, 'there neither is, *nor can be*, a science of the beautiful'.^{xix} That is, there neither is, nor can be, a *philosophical* aesthetics. Rather, the change in Kant's position concerns a clarification of the methodological status of 'critique'. Critique appears here no longer in association with doctrine (*Lehre*), but as a conceptually self-sufficient term, distinct from both 'science' (qua doctrine) and 'the empirical'. 'Criticism of taste' is no longer conceived in terms of the application of *a priori* rules to

particular cases, or the judgement of such rules *by* particular cases (Kant's earlier focus), but in terms of the immanent notion of transcendental critique which governed the project of the *Critique of Pure Reason* from the outset. It is a part of 'critique of reason by reason alone': in this instance, critique of aesthetic judgement-*power* (*Urteils**kraft***) by transcendental reflection; critique of a particular power of the faculty of judgement, not criticism of particular judgements. Philosophically, where judgements of the beautiful are concerned, there is only critique, transcendental critique, of the structure (but not the content) of what are always *singular* (that is, *radically* empirical) judgements.

This distinctively Kantian idea of philosophy as a critical standpoint beyond positive 'criteria', or positive knowledge, that is nonetheless no longer metaphysically self-sufficient as rational doctrine, but purely reflective, was crucially formative for Romanticism. It is the other side of the more familiar Kantian idea of the 'limits' to reason, which Karl Ameriks has recently emphasized as the basis for the construction of a common 'Kantian-Romantic position'.^{xx} Famously, the method of immanently transcendental critique allowed Kant to stray *beyond* the cognitive limits of reason, legitimately, as a 'standpoint' but never a doctrine. The critique of aesthetic judgement-*power* concretizes this standpoint, subjectively, as the feeling of pleasure accompanying a reflective awareness of the unity of subjectivity. It was precisely this 'straying beyond' that

the Romantics seized upon and elaborated further, in a new post-critical metaphysics of art.

However, this formal consistency in Kant's position does not appear sufficient to meet his own earlier objection to that use of 'aesthetic' which strays too far from 'the language and sense of the ancients'. For the standpoint of a transcendental critique of the structure of judgement abstracts from all *concretely* sensuous particularity (that is, it *conceptualizes* sensuous particularity in terms of its *logical* singularity). It is thus not actually 'aesthetic', in Kant's original sense of 'things of sensibility'. (The pure forms of intuition, on the other hand – space and time – being also 'pure intuitions' are themselves aesthetic.) Transcendental critique of taste – as the critique of a specific type of judgement-power, rather than the critical estimation of sensuous representations – is *not* 'aesthetic' in the sense in which the 'things of sensibility' may be distinguished from the 'things of the mind'. Rather, it is decisively 'of the mind', or, better, it is 'of the mind' and 'of sensibility' at the same time: in pure aesthetic judgements of taste, the ontological distinction between *aisthéta* and *noéta* collapses.

This is precisely the point of Kant's transcendental analysis of judgements of taste in terms of the reflective relations between cognitive faculties – linguistic niceties apart, which at this point begin to appear pedantic and (as Hegel treated them) 'a mere name'?^{xxi} Kant's *Third Critique* transformed the meaning of 'aesthetic' by extending it beyond the sensible (spatial and temporal)

apprehension of the objects of 'outer' and 'inner' intuition to include reference to the feelings accompanying the relations of reflection constitutive of the internal cognitive structure of subjectivity itself. What is this but a *Romanticization* of aesthetic? Surely the ancient distinction between *aisthéta* and *noéta*, to which Kant initially appealed, is but the linguistic register of a dualistic rationalism that Kant has here, finally, managed to move beyond. Human sensibility is irreducibly judgmental and furthermore (contra Aristotle – who thought each sense judged discretely) *internally relationally* so. This is a new philosophical account of the ontological specificity of human subjectivity – the main philosophical source of the early Heidegger's existentialism, in fact. Kant's linguistic innovation – to extend the range of 'aesthetic' to embrace the paradoxical pure '*self-affection*' of the self-relation of human subjectivity^{xxii} – registers this conceptual novelty. Philologically speaking, this is hardly 'ignorance'.

But what of 'the thing', critique of taste, as Kant called it, or more simply 'criticism' as it was known in England at the time, to the objects of which the new philosophically extended usage of 'aesthetic' must *also* refer, since aesthetic subjectivity can only feel itself, for Kant, *via* judgements of taste occasioned by objects that 'quicken' it.^{xxiii} This is the point at which the satirical charge of 'ignorance' begins to acquire a more literal bite. For in Kant's later, dialectically ambiguous sense of aesthetic, it is not the extension of sensibility to include the

subject's relation to itself – auto-affection – that is the problem, so much as its consequent principled *indifference to the character of the objects* that occasion judgement; in particular, its principled indifference to the cognitive, relational, historical and world-disclosive dimensions of works of *art*, which were such a central part of 'that which *others* call the critique of taste'.

Famously, judgements of art are explicitly excluded by Kant from being pure aesthetic judgements of taste. That is, Kant excludes from aesthetics precisely those judgements which *constitute* the main part of the critique of taste, historically, as a critical discourse, as an effect of the transcendentalism of his method. These are grasped only by Kant's much neglected and under-elaborated concept of 'logically conditioned' aesthetic judgements – judgements which, operating under the conditions of a determinate concept, such as 'art' or 'painting', are not aesthetically 'pure'. For Kant, artistic beauty can never be what he calls a 'free' or 'purely aesthetic' beauty (at least, not *qua* artistic beauty), but only an 'accessory' or adherent beauty.^{xxiv} This is the conceptual residue of his earlier objection to Baumgarten's use of the term 'aesthetic'. There is thus a conceptual gap between art and aesthetic which cannot be adequately bridged within the terms of Kant's thought. Insofar as 'aesthetics' is taken as the name for the philosophical treatment of art, we are confronted with a new and equally ironic 'ignorance of the thing and of the language': aesthetic's principled ignorance of art.^{xxv} For Kant readily acknowledges that 'aesthetic' itself cannot

distinguish art from nature: art becomes aesthetically pure only when it appears 'as if' it were a product of mere nature'.^{xxvi} Moreover, Kantian aesthetic judgement does not reflect on the conditions of this appearing 'as if' – that is, upon its ontological and epistemological qualities as illusion; it merely takes it as its condition. Kant's restriction of the concept of beautiful or 'fine' art to a type of 'aesthetic art' (his own term) thus excludes most of what has always been and continues to be of most significance about art: the difference from nature marked by its metaphysical, cognitive, and politico-ideological functions, qua art.

The 19th and 20th century tradition of 'art as aesthetic' – artistic aestheticism – perpetuated by the very term 'aesthetics', rests upon a false and contradictory absolutization of Kant's conception of 'aesthetic art'. Contrary to Hegel's acceptance of it as a mere 'name', the term 'aesthetics' functions as much more than a name here: it seals and legitimates the exclusion of art's other aspects from the philosophical concept of art, reducing it to a single plane of significance – namely, its capacity to appear as 'a product of mere nature' and hence as the object of pure judgements of taste. Even Kant's account of genius (otherwise so productive for a post-Kantian, Romantic aesthetic) is subjected to the constraints of this problematic. This ignorance of language – the idea that 'aesthetics' is an appropriate term to designate the philosophical treatment of art – sums up the ignorance of the thing: 'art'. This ignorance persists today in the widespread belief that it is the logical autonomy of pure aesthetic judgements of

taste from other types of judgement (as theorized by Kant) that is the philosophical basis of the autonomy of art. Even writers as sophisticated in their reading of German philosophy as Andrew Bowie and Jay Bernstein, for example, have contributed to the perpetuation of this myth to the level of a philosophical commonplace through their use of the phrase 'aesthetic autonomy' to refer to the autonomy of art. Yet Kant's work cannot, in principle, provide the conceptual ground for an account of the autonomy of the artwork, since it has no account of (nor interest in) the ontological distinctiveness of the work of art. That was the contribution of Jena Romanticism.^{xxvii}

This is not the occasion for an account of the emergence of the Romantic conception of the autonomous artwork out of a displacement of the aporia of Fichte's attempt at a foundational philosophy of the subject into the realm of poetic meaning. However, with respect to Kant, three things about the Romantic theory of art, in particular, should be born in mind: 1) its rejection (or what August Schlegel called its 'denunciation') of the distinction between free and accessory beauty, 'as invalid and as springing from too narrow and too low an assessment of the beautiful';^{xxviii} 2) its abolition of the categorial separation of the beautiful and the sublime (prefigured in Kant's own notion of aesthetic ideas); 3) its elaboration of a metaphysically invested conception of art – as, in Schelling's words, the 'organon of philosophy'^{xxix} – at a concrete-historical level, not as a medium-based *system* of the arts, but as a philosophically constructed (negative)

theory of genres, in an ongoing mediation of the categories of the philosophy of art with the history of art. This third feature is the mediating core of the Romantic philosophy of art, through which it acquires its distinctive philosophical shape of being at once *transcendental*, *metaphysical* and (unlike its Heideggerian version) *concretely historical*: an historical-ontological theory of art.^{xxx} In this respect, the Romantic categories of poetry and the novel, as absolute genres 'forever becoming', have a similar philosophical status to what Thierry de Duve calls 'generic' art, and as what I am calling post-conceptual art.^{xxxi}

As the product of the displacement of the structure of an seemingly irresolvable metaphysical problem (the infinite reflexivity of a self-positing subject) into a special kind of object (art), the autonomous work of art is as irreducibly conceptual – and metaphysical – in its philosophical structure as it is historical and 'aesthetic' in its mode of appearance. It is thus a mistake to suppose that because it is conceptual, there is no role for 'aesthetic' within it. Far from it. As the registration of the necessary sensuousness of presentation, aesthetic is ineliminable from the early Romantics' ontological conception of art. It is, however, ontologically both *partial* and *relational*. The artistic significance of aesthetic must be judged here in the context of the historically shifting relations between aesthetic and other – cognitive, semantic, social, political and ideological – aspects of artworks. And the balance and meaning will be different

in different kinds of art. Furthermore, these relations between the aesthetic and other aspects of artworks derive their critical meaning from their relations to the equally historically variable aesthetic dimension of other (non-art) cultural forms: predominantly, but by no means exclusively, commodity design and display, advertising, mass media and communications technologies – the whole non-art aspect of the apparatus of visual culture. One problem with the philosophical discourse of 'art as aesthetic' is that it mitigates against recognition of these relations as being *internal* to the critical structure of the artwork, and hence against the understanding of contemporary art in certain of its most significant, historical and *anti*-aesthetic aspects.

In the light of this brief reconstruction of the philosophical pre-history, we can discern two parallel and competing, though to some extent also overlapping, traditions in the criticism of art since the end of the 18th century corresponding to the two philosophical discourses of 'art as aesthetic' and 'art as (historical) ontology'. The first runs from Kant through 19th century aestheticism (Baudelaire, Pater, Wilde), via Fry and Bell, to Greenberg's later writings (which mark the aestheticist collapse of his earlier historical self-understanding). It rests upon an aesthetic theory of the arts, with its distant origins in Renaissance naturalism and the new science of optics^{xxxii} and its mainstream in an empirical reduction of Kant's transcendentalism to a psychology – at best, a phenomenology – of perception, of which Wollheim was the contemporary

master.^{xxxiii} The second tradition runs from philosophical Romanticism through Hegel, Duchamp, surrealism and the revolutionary Romanticism of constructivism, to conceptual art and its consequences in what Rosalind Krauss calls the 'post-medium condition', and which I prefer to think of as the *transmedia* condition of post-conceptual art.

The first (aesthetic) tradition finds its concrete critical terms in an aesthetic theory of medium that dates back to Lessing. It is currently being revived in a more explicitly Kantian, transcendental variant by Jay Bernstein, as the philosophical basis for a theory of modernism as the cultural representation of nature's resistance to history – a reading which combines Greenberg with Adorno, via an immanent critique of T.J. Clarke's interpretation of Jackson Pollock.^{xxxiv} The second (historical-ontological) tradition finds its critical terms in a philosophically negative theory of the 'truth of art' which manifests this negativity historically in the concept of 'the new' – an avant-gardist constitutive negation that determines artistic meaning as a determination of contemporaneity itself. It thus derives its content empirically within a *historically open*, but nonetheless *speculatively totalizing*, generic conception of art, within which the historical present is necessarily privileged as the standpoint of a future-oriented (negative) totalization. The qualitative historical temporality of art-critical judgement appears here as a consequence of the philosophical dynamics of historical totalization per se. This second Romantic or generic avant-gardist

tradition has developed in active relation to both historical transformations in the institutional conditions of artistic autonomy (which establish the social conditions of possibility of autonomous meaning production) and socially progressive political cultures which have criticised the prevailing social forms of autonomy, and in particular, their misrecognition as 'aesthetic'. Its current representative is the anti-aestheticism of post-conceptual art.

But what exactly is post-conceptual art? In what sense does it determine the contemporaneity of 'contemporary art'? And what does this equivalence between 'post-conceptual' art and 'contemporary' art, if such it is, tell us about 'the art history that art criticism *is*' (or should be)? – to return to the terms of Rosenberg's declaration from which I set out.

3. Post-Conceptual Art

It has become conventional to periodize the art of the last fifty years in terms of a transition from 'modernism' to 'postmodernism' – however vaguely or varyingly the second of these two terms is understood in this context. (Greenberg's critical hegemony has tended to fix the meaning of the first term, albeit in a conceptually and chronologically restrictive manner, and thereby to open up the artistic field of the 'postmodern' as the space of its abstract negation.) The problem with this periodization, however, is that it fails to endow the complexly interacting set of anti-'modernist' artistic strategies of the 1960s with either sufficient conceptual determinacy and distinctness or adequate historical effectivity. In particular, it fails to register both the *critical* priority of conceptual art within this field^{xxxv} and the historical and critical significance of its 'post-conceptual' legacy. It thus fails to provide a theoretical basis on which we might specify the ontological distinctiveness of contemporary art. I therefore propose an alternative periodization of art after modernism that privileges the sequence modernism/conceptual art/post-conceptual art over the modernist/postmodernist couplet, and treats the conceptual/post-conceptual trajectory as the standpoint from which to totalize the wide array of other anti-'modernist' movements – where 'modernism' is used here in its restrictive and ultimately mystifying, but nonetheless still critically 'actual', Greenbergian sense.

(A philosophically adequate conception of modernism as a temporal logic of cultural forms would embrace the whole sequence; 'postmodernism' being the misrecognition of a particular stage in the dialectic of modernisms.)

By 'post-conceptual' art I understand an art premised on the complex historical experience and critical legacy of conceptual art. Post-conceptual art is a critical category that is constituted at the level of the historical ontology of the artwork; it is not a traditional art-historical or art-critical concept at the level of either medium, form or style. Rather, as the critical register of the historical destruction of the ontological significance of such categories, it provides new interpretative conditions for analyses of individual works. The critical legacy of conceptual art consists in the combination of four main insights, which collectively make up the condition of possibility of a post-conceptual art. These are:

1. the ineliminability but radical insufficiency of the aesthetic dimension of the artwork;
2. the necessary conceptuality of the artwork;
3. the critical requirement of the anti-aesthetic use of aesthetic materials;
4. the radically distributive character of the unity of the artwork across the totality of its material instantiations (and the historical malleability of the empirical borders of this totality).

1. The principle of the ineliminability of the aesthetic dimension of the artwork is the product of the so-called 'failure' of Conceptual art: that is, the failure of its strong, 'pure' or analytical programme, the idea of a 'purely' conceptual art associated for a brief period (1968–1972) with both Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language – although there are important differences between the critical positions of these artists. What 'failure' means here is the practical demonstration of the incoherence of a particular self-understanding of 'conceptual art'. This was not an artistic failure. Indeed, it was a perverse artistic success. It was the ironic historical achievement of the strong programme of 'analytical' or 'pure' conceptual art to have demonstrated the ineliminability of the aesthetic as a *necessary*, though *radically insufficient*, component of the artwork through the failure of its attempt at its elimination, the failure of an absolute anti-aesthetic. (In this sense, it was indeed a repetition of Duchamp: a repetition of the necessary erosion of 'aesthetic indifference'.) This experimental programme thereby fulfilled the classically Hegelian function of exceeding a limit in its established form (the aesthetic) in such a way as to render it visible and thereby reinstitute it on new grounds.^{xxxvi} In this respect, the meaning of 'conceptual art' must be retrospectively critically refigured to incorporate this insight. In its strongest sense, of a 'purely' conceptual or analytical art, conceptual art was an *idea* that marked a particular anti-aesthetic *desire*.

2. At the same time, however, in demonstrating the radical insufficiency or minimal conditionality of the aesthetic dimension of the artwork to its status as art, conceptual art was able to bring once again to light, in a more decisive way, the necessary conceptuality of the work, which had been buried by the aesthetic ideology of formalist modernism – a conceptuality which is historically central to the allegorical function of art. Conceptual art demonstrated in a whole variety of novel ways, with respect to a whole series of different forms of materiality, the sense in which 'aesthetic' in both its ancient and Kantian senses (as sensibility and as pure reflective judgement) is *a part of yet utterly fails to account for* the ontological specificity of 'art'. The aesthetic concept of art mistakes one of many conditions for the whole. It mistakes art's necessary aesthetic appearance for the *ground* of its autonomous, and hence infinite, production of meaning, which is in fact historically relational, rather than 'positive' (that is, given) in any aesthetic sense. Conceptual art demonstrated the radical emptiness or blankness of the aesthetic in itself, as an ontological support, that derives its meaning, in each instance, relationally or contextually, whatever its precise form of materiality – and this includes those instances when it functions as a negation, as well as a carrier, of meaning.

3. Having exposed the aesthetic misrecognition of the artwork as an ideological fraud it thereby established the need for art actively to counter aesthetic misrecognition within the work, through the constructive or strategic

aesthetic use of aesthetic materials. The victory of the 'aesthetic remainder' over strong conceptualism (that is, conceptual art's own inevitable pictorialism) was thus ultimately a Pyhric one. This Pyhric victory – and the transition to a post-conceptual art that it represents – was staged by Art & Language themselves in their paintings and installations of the 1980s and 1990s [figs 1–3]. It accounts for the privileged status of photographic practice within contemporary art, with its necessarily strategic pictorialism. [figs 4 & 5].

4. Finally, in its informality, its infinite proliferation of forms of artistic materials (its principled destruction of an ontological conception of 'medium') and its inclusion of both preparatory and subsequent, documentary materials within its conception of the work, conceptual art demonstrated the radically *distributive* character of the unity of the work. That is to say, each work is distributed across a potentially infinite, but nonetheless conceptually defined, and in practice finite, totality of spatio-temporal site of instantiation.^{xxxvii}

Methodologically, one might say that the reason for the critical priority of conceptual art within the field of anti-modernist practices of the 1960s, is that it was the art that raised the retrospective search for the universal determinations of 'art' to the highest theoretical power by its negative totalization of the previous set of practices, to produce a new (negative) artistic absolute, which functions as the enabling condition of a new set of practices: post-conceptual art. As Adorno recognized, it is only retrospectively that the concept of art acquires any kind of

unity, and this unity is therefore 'not abstract', but 'presupposes concrete analyses, [n]ot as proofs and examples but as its own condition.' The idea of art is given through each work, but no individual work is adequate to this idea. Furthermore, this ongoing retrospective and reflective totalization is also necessarily *open, fractured* and inherently *historically speculative*:

The definition of art is at every point indicated by what art once was, but it is legitimated only by what art became with regard to what it wants to be, and perhaps can, become. ... Because art is what it has become, its concept refers to what it does not contain. ... Art can [thus] be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants. It is defined by its relation to what it is not ... Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out of; its law of movement is its law of form.^{xxxviii}

It is the historical movement of conceptual art from the idea of an absolute anti-aesthetic to the recognition of its own inevitable pictorialism that makes it a privileged mediating form; that makes it, in fact, the art in relation to which contestation over the meanings and possibilities of contemporary art is to be fought out. Indeed, if my claim for the critical-historical priority of conceptual art can be sustained, it is *only* in relation to the category of conceptual art, in its inherent problematicity, that a critical historical experience of contemporary art is possible. In this respect, 'post-conceptual art' is not the name for a particular

type of art, so much as the historical-ontological condition for the production of contemporary art in general – art, that is, that can sustain the signifiers 'art' and 'contemporary' in their deepest theoretical senses.

The reason that the idea of post-conceptual art may be said to determine the contemporaneity of 'contemporary art' is that it condenses and reflects the historical experience of conceptual art in relation to current art practices. As such, it requires a reflective totality of lower-level critical categories for its more concrete comprehension. The construction of such a reflective totality of categories is the task of criticism. The meaning of these categories, however, ultimately derives from their contribution to the (future-oriented) retrospective totalization of which they are a part. This contribution defines the form of 'the art history that art criticism (ideally) *is*' as an art history of the qualitative historical temporality of the new. 'The art history that art criticism (ideally) *is*' is a modernist art history of the qualitatively historically new, of the qualitative historical novelty of the present, from the standpoint of which the past is to be reconstructed and made legible.

Notes

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and the Sixth Annual Conference of the Society for European Philosophy, University of Essex, 29 September 2003. I am grateful to all who participated in those events for their contribution to the development of the piece.

ⁱ Harold Rosenberg, 'Criticism and its Premises', in *Art on the Edge: Creators and Situations*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 135–52, p. 146.

ⁱⁱ Dave Hickey's work is paradigmatic. See Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, Los Angeles: Art issues. Press, 1997.

ⁱⁱⁱ This situation dates back to the failure of the project of a 'critical' postmodernism in the face of the problem of judgement. Hal Foster identified the problem early on (see Hal Foster, 'The Problem of Pluralism', *Art in America*, January 1982; reprinted as 'Against Pluralism' in Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1985, ch. 1), but has made no headway with it, theoretically. Just how blocked the problem has become can be seen in the recent roundtable discussion, 'The Present Conditions of Art Criticism', *October* 100 (Spring 2002), pp. 200–228, in which the very idea of critical judgement causes consternation among the discussants, who appear to associate it, almost exclusively, with a late Greenbergian notion of 'quality'.

^{iv} Cf. 'Sign and Image', Peter Osborne, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, ch. 2. For reflections on the problem of visual essentialism from within studies in visual culture, see W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1: 2 (August 2002), pp. 165–81; Mieke Bal, 'Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2: 1 (April 2003), pp. 15–32. For

a critique of the cultural conservatism of Deleuze's aesthetic conception of art, as exemplified in *The Logic of Sensation*, his book on Francis Bacon, see Art & Language and Tom Baldwin, 'Deleuze's Bacon', *Radical Philosophy* 123 (January/February 2004), pp. 29–40.

The character and object domain of studies in visual culture remain plural and contested; their relations to art history unresolved. However, insofar as 'the visual' is the constituting focus of conceptual interest, whether as a given or a construct, it is in principle indifferent to, and hence cuts across, the art/non-art distinction, which cannot be reduced to any particular visual-cultural regimes – Michael Fried's optical reduction of Greenberg's medium-specific conception of modernist painting notwithstanding. Fried's opticalism is currently enjoying a revival on the back of the popularity of theories of the gaze, which function as one form of theoretical compensation for the aesthetic deficit of the semiotic paradigm. While this has contributed to the development of a theory of spectatorship, it remains conceptually removed from the critical problem of judgements of art, which was its locus in Fried's work of the 1960s.

^v T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999; Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth Century Berlin*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.

^{vi} Rosenberg, 'Criticism and its Premises', p. 148.

^{vii} For a traditionalist like Hans Belting, the crisis of art history does not lie in a crisis of method, or object domain, but in the fact that 'art history can no longer be the guiding image of our historical culture'. Hans Belting, *Art History After Modernism*, Chicago and London:

University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 6. (This is a revised and expanded edition of Belting's *The End of the History of Art?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.) However, contra Belting, this is not because of any Hegelian issues about the 'end of art' (it is not because *art* can no longer offer a guiding image of historical culture), but because of the temporal logic of modernism as a culture of *negation*. 'Our' historical culture is a culture of negation; it thus preserves (negatively) only what it has determinately overcome. Criticism is the discursive medium of this (negatively preserving) overcoming which, in rendering explicit the historical relations of the work, completes the work. This is the modernist element in the Hegelian dialectic, emphasized by Adorno. Cf. 'Modernity: A Different Time', in Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London and New York: Verso, 1995, ch. 1; 'Modernism as Translation', and 'Time and the Artwork' in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, chs 3 & 5.

^{viii} Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, trans. Steven Rendall, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 200, p. 3.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

^x Arthur Danto, 'The End of Art', in his *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 81–115; *Art After the End of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

^{xi} See, for example, Dave Beech, John Roberts et al, *The Philistine Controversy*, London and New York: Verso, 2002; and more generally, John Roberts, 'After Adorno: Art Autonomy, and Critique – A Literature Review', *Historical Materialism* 7 (Winter 2000), pp. 221–39.

^{xii} *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, Volume One, p.1. Even Adorno is not exempt from this terminological confusion, although more than anyone else he provides us with the philosophical means to clarify it; and he is at least more terminologically careful than his translators. The second English translation of *Aesthetic Theory*, by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press, 1997), is in this respect at times worse than the first one. The translation of *Entkunstung* – literally, 'de-artisting' – as 'de-aestheticization', for example, short-circuits Adorno's entire argument. (In the first translation – London and New York: Routledge, 1984 – Lenhardt offered 'desubstantialization of art', which, whilst clumsy, is less misleading.) Generally, although by no means always, Adorno writes of 'artistic experience', *kunstliche Erfahrung*, rather than 'aesthetic experience', *ästhetische Erfahrung*, when it is the experience of the artwork qua artwork that is at issue. Elsewhere in *Aesthetic Theory*, however, aesthetic (*Ästhetik/ästhetisch*) continues to be used to refer to both philosophical discourse on art and the experience of art itself. *Ästhetische Theorie, Gesammelte Schriften 7*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996.

^{xiii} This deficiency is thus found equally in aestheticism and one of its main philosophical opponents, Heideggerianism, which, whilst philosophically 'anti-aesthetic', is so in the name of a Romanticism of Being, to which 'art' is appended as an 'original' appearing. The history of art is thus subordinated there to an epochal history of Being in which the present's openness to the future functions only as the basis for a 'return to origin'. For a recent example, exemplary in its philosophical orthodoxy, despite some updating of its artistic exemplars (e.g. Kafka), see Giorgio Agamben's *The Man Without Content* (1994); trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

^{xiv} Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 5.

^{xv} Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, A21; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Werkausgabe* Band III, herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974.

^{xvi} Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner Pluhar, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1987; *Kritik der Urteilskraft, Werkausgabe* Band X, herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974. The precursor of this integration was, of course, Baumgarten; but Baumgarten's immediately cognitive(intuitive) version of aesthetic as a discourse on taste failed to resonate beyond the 18th century, mainly because of Kant's decisive epistemological critique.

^{xvii} In the second (1787) edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had already begun to concede the struggle over usage. He amended the footnote in question to suggest that 'it is advisable *either ... to desist ... or else to share the term with speculative philosophy and take aesthetics partly in a transcendental meaning* [his own – PO]; *partly in a psychological meaning.*' A21/B36. Italics denote the addition in the 2nd (B) edition. However, here, the concession appears merely pragmatic, in the face of the continuing prevalence of the new usage.

^{xviii} *Ibid.*. In the second edition, Kant qualifies this argument in two ways: he qualifies the claim about the merely empirical sources of the criteria by describing such sources as only the

'most prominent' (*vornehmsten*) ones; and he qualifies the claim about them never being able to serve as a priori rules, by describing such rules as 'determinate' (*bestimmten*), in an anticipation of the conceptual space of a possible indeterminate judgement, which is the main conceptual innovation of the third *Critique*.

^{xix} Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 172, 230, emphasis added; *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, pp. 239, 299.

^{xx} Karl Ameriks, 'Hegel's Aesthetics: New Responses to Kant and Romanticism', *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*. 45/46 (2002), pp. 72–92.

^{xxi} *Hegel's Aesthetics*, p. 1.

^{xxii} Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B152–6. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1990, § 34, pp. 129–33.

^{xxiii} This is Kant's materialism – the aesthetic consequence of his 'Refutation of Idealism'. See *ibid.*, B 274–9.

^{xxiv} Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §16.

^{xxv} This is an ironic reversal of Schlegel's rendering ironic of Kant's complaint against Baumgarten's usage: a prime example of 'the irony of irony', in Schlegel's own terms.

^{xxvi} Kant, *Critique of Judgement*; §45, emphasis added.

^{xxvii} Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990; J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, Penn State University Press, 1992. Bernstein has recently changed his position on this. See his 'Introduction', in J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. xviii–xxii, He now locates the origin of the autonomy claim after Kant, in Schiller's reinterpretation of aesthetic appearance in terms of self-determination, in his *Kallias Letters* (1793), in 'a reformulation of Kant's aesthetic theory that reaches its apotheosis in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*' (1795), the crucial transitional text between Kant and Romanticism. This is more convincing, but only provided that one follows through the ontological consequences of Schiller's position (which, in Schiller himself remains at the epistemological level of aesthetic appearance, *i.e. illusion*) to their Romantic conclusion: namely, that art thus has a distinctive metaphysical function as a distinctive form of presentation of truth, 'the infinite finitely displayed', as Novalis put it. This is the actual philosophical ground of the autonomy of art claim – autonomy not of a type of judgement (Kant), nor merely at the level of appearance (Schiller), but of a certain kind of production of meaning in the object, auto-poesis, distinct from both *techne* and *mimesis*. Furthermore, this can only be realized under particular historical and institutional conditions, the social relations of which must thus be considered *constitutive* of the ontological form. This Hegelian addendum, what Adorno called the 'dual character of art as autonomy and social fact' (and which we might be sharpen into 'the *dialectical unity* of art as autonomy and social fact'), is crucial if philosophical discourse on

art is be critically mediated with art-historical and cultural-historical discourses, and, thereby, to become capable of engagement with contemporary art its full and complex specificity.

^{xxviii} August Schlegel, 'Lectures on Aesthetics', in -Sass (ed.), *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 197.

^{xxix} F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978, Pt VI, pp. 219–33.

^{xxx} This was Friedrich Schlegel's distinctive contribution. In this respect, the early Schelling does not belong to Romanticism proper, but recasts it within the tradition of philosophical idealism.

^{xxxi} Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 32; Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, Cambridge MA and London: MIT, 1996

^{xxxii} David Summers, *The Judgement of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

^{xxxiii} Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1987.

^{xxxiv} See Bernstein, *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, pp. xii–xviii, and 'Social Signs and Natural Bodies: On T. J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea*', *Radical Philosophy* 104 (November/December 2000), pp. 25–38.

^{xxxv} See the argument of my 'Survey', in Peter Osborne (ed.), *Conceptual Art*, London: Phaidon, 2002, pp. 13–51.

^{xxxvi} Cf. Peter Osborne, 'Conceptual Art as/and Philosophy' in Jon Bird and Michael Newman (eds), *Rewriting Conceptual Art: Critical and Historical approaches*, London: Reaction Books, 1999, pp. 65.

^{xxxvii} For the concept of distributive unity, see my 'Photography in an Expanding Field: Distributive Unity and Dominant Form' in David Green (ed.) *Where is the Photograph?*, Brighton: Photoworks/Photforum, Brighton: 2003, pp. 63–70, pp. 66-8; and 'Everywhere or Not at All: Victor Burgin and Conceptual Art', in Catsou Roberts (ed.), *Victor Burgin: Relocating*, Bristol: Arnolfini, 2002, pp. 62–75, p. 75.

^{xxxviii} Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London: Athlone Press, 1997, pp. 263, 2–3; *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 392, 11–12.