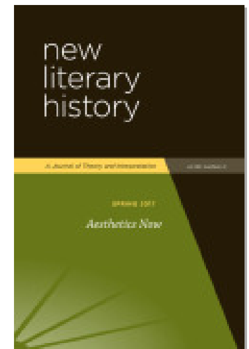
The Fear of Aesthetics in Art and Literary Theory

Sam Rose



New Literary History, Volume 48, Number 2, Spring 2017, pp. 223-244 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2017.0011*

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/663805

Access provided at 2 May 2019 15:33 GMT from University of St Andrews

The Fear of Aesthetics in Art and Literary Theory

Sam Rose

Reading the preface to the new edition of the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, one might think that the battle over the status of aesthetics is over. According to the narrative of its editor Michael Kelly, aesthetics, held in generally low esteem at the time of the 1998 first edition, has now happily overcome its association with "an allegedly retrograde return to beauty," or its representation as "an ideology defending the tastes of a dominant class, country, race, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, or empire."[1] The previously "rather pervasive anti-aesthetic stance" of the 1990s passed away with that decade.[2] Defined as "critical reflection on art, culture, and nature," aesthetics is now a respectable practice once again.[3]

The publication of the *Encyclopedia*'s latest iteration is a timely moment to review the current state of its much-maligned subject. The original edition of 1998 faced major difficulties, with Kelly writing that his requests for contributions were greeted not only with silence from some, but also with responses from angry callers keen to tell him how misguided the entire project was.[4] And while Kelly emphasizes the change toward a more positive view, in some critics, it seems, the fear of aesthetics in art and literary theory has only increased. If an early moment in this alleged growing dissatisfaction with aesthetics is marked by Jean-Marie Schaeffer's *Adieu à l'ésthetique* (2000), a more recent one can be found in Steven Connor's essay "Doing Without Art" (2011), where the opening lines of Jacques Rancière's *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*—"Aesthetics has a bad reputation. Hardly a year goes by without a new book either proclaiming that its time is over or that its harmful effects are being perpetuated"—are said to "hum with promise."[5] Claiming that no suitable account has ever been offered of the existence of that mysterious entity "the aesthetic," Connor suggests that aesthetics needs to be abandoned entirely. Gone would be the experience of being "abstractly aware that we are responding to something that is art," "of suspending one's responses, or cautiously putting them in brackets," and gone would be the angst that the thought of "doing without art" has often given rise to.[6] We should instead be sanguine about the possibility that a "whole

New Literary History, 2017, 48: 223–244

subject area should simply be," in the phrase of another more worried literary critic, "deleted."[7]

The pattern of argument found in Connor's essay is telling in its focus, however. Rather than a direct attack on aesthetics as such, the main thrust of the essay is to take issue with the possibility of a definable idea of "the aesthetic" that could feasibly underwrite a thing called "art," along with dramatic claims for art's power that follow from thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, Rancière, and Alain Badiou. Even within its opening pages, the essay subtly shifts from initial talk of "the distinctiveness of art and of aesthetic judgement" and of the "definition of art or the aesthetic," into talk of "aesthetic theory" per se. Though critiques of aesthetics come in a number of forms, this slippage indicates a common move in such arguments. Aesthetics is reduced to one or other arguably contingent associations, then dismissed wholesale on that basis.

In this essay, then, I explore the fear of aesthetics in art and literary theory through an examination of common objections. My primary focus is the charge of "the narrowness of the aesthetic," which, as the most deep-rooted attack, is the one that I deal with at greatest length and with some examination of textual detail. (Given that the problems in many cases lie in longstanding textual controversies, the foundational texts of aesthetic theory are read, as far as is possible, through subsequent commentators, rather than by taking them outside their histories of interpretation.) Two subsidiary charges leveled at aesthetics—equally important, but currently less prominent—are dealt with more briefly: the disengagement from politics and the neglect of art. In showing how many of these attacks come to contradict and undo one another, I move toward a final section where I suggest there may be, literally, nothing to be afraid of. Undoing such fear, however, may not amount to a straightforward defence of aesthetics, for a redeemed aesthetics buys its newfound recovery and rejuvenation at the expense of a stable identity or subject matter. Aside from its extension to reflection on "nature," there may in the end be nothing left to differentiate this apparently triumphant practice of aesthetics from a more general domain of art and literary "theory."

The Narrowness of the Aesthetic: A Genealogy

The primary theme in attacks on aesthetics is the idea that aesthetics trades solely in "the aesthetic," or nothing but highly specialized forms of aesthetic experience. Connor's article is a classic example, from within literary theory, of the assumption that there is an inextricable link

between aesthetic theory and the theorization of aesthetic experience (as "the aesthetic"), and that without the grounding in the latter the former simply could not find a justification. The view of the aesthetic from which this line of argument takes off finds a more strictly art theoretical equivalent in Keith Moxey's *The Practice of Persuasion*, where it is implied that an art history grounded in aesthetics would be one that reduces "the rich variety of human responses to art to a single kind of experience."[8] The attacks based on this theme might be summed up as saying that those interested in aesthetics assume a definable thing, called "the aesthetic" or "beauty," that this is strictly sensuous and thus marked off entirely from cognition, and that the investigation of this is the sine qua non of "aesthetics" as a practice. This is more or less what James Elkins identifies as the narrowest conception of aesthetics, "shrunk to individual passages in Kant and to an identification with beauty."[9]

This view takes its support from a particular genealogy of aesthetics. It is relatively uncontroversial to say that it was Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten who, in the mid-eighteenth century, coined the term "aesthetics" to designate "the theory of sensuous knowledge," and that Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, at the end of that century, set aesthetics on its modern course by systematically uniting a generalizing discussion of the arts with philosophizing about knowledge of this kind.[10] The more tendentious move in the genealogy is the suggestion that, under the influence of both Kant and eighteenth-century British aestheticians, aesthetics was from this foundational moment set up to deal primarily with the special questions of taste and judgement raised by the study of the aesthetic in relation to works of art. Conflating "aesthetic" on the one hand as designating our response to certain "formal and sensuous properties" of things in the world, with "aesthetic" on the other as designating that which "pertain[s] to art *qua* art," aesthetics had laid the ground for the notion that the distinguishing properties of art *qua* art simply were its "aesthetic" or "formal and sensuous" ones.[11]

This reading of the tradition as it was taken up by twentieth-century theorists such as Clive Bell and Clement Greenberg has been aptly summed up by Paul Mattick Jr.: "Stemming from late Enlightenment and Romantic critical thought, [it] located the essence of art in properties of the artistic object—its ability to evoke an 'aesthetic experience' in the viewer, above all its supposed 'intrinsic perceptual interest,' what Bell called its possession of 'significant form.'"[12] A number of writers since have pointed out that the late twentieth-century reaction against this "tradition" was really a reaction against its corruption at the hands of those twentieth-century figures, Greenberg above all, with whom it had come to be synonymous. The result was either way the same. "Kant" and

"aesthetic theory" came to stand for nothing more than a kind of formalism that sought to identify art *qua* art through the "aesthetic" experience generated by the immediately sensible configuration of its objects. By the 1980s and the highly influential volume *The Anti-Aesthetic*, edited by Hal Foster, this narrowing down of the purview of aesthetics had pushed many toward the view that any mention of aesthetics or "the aesthetic" could only mean a reference to this way of thinking.[13] According to the same view, an embrace of an "anti-aesthetic" stance was the sole way to move from Greenberg, formalist modernism, elitist conceptions of beauty, and the like, to a contextually minded, conceptually oriented, repoliticized view of what visual culture and its study might involve.[14]

The Narrowness of the Aesthetic: An Internal Response

Such attacks call for both internal and external—i.e., "Kantian" and "disciplinary"—replies.

Internally, it is not hard to show that those in the Kantian tradition (call it aesthetics in the "narrow, more or less Kantian sense") are far more nuanced than this picture allows, as attention to its founding figure makes clearest.[15] The basic error of the purist view of Kantian aesthetics is twofold, neatly indicated by Noël Carroll as the consequence of an illegitimate subsumption of the philosophy of art under an illegitimately narrow conception of aesthetics.[16] Where earlier aesthetic theorizing tended to take natural beauty as the paradigmatic subject of investigation, later aesthetic theorists aiming at a characterization of art took these investigations and simply "transpos[ed] the theory of beauty onto the theory of art" (*BA* 16).

Standing at the eighteenth-century origin of the tradition, Francis Hutcheson is representative in having taken the sensation of beauty to be something given immediately in experience, and as such to be "disinterested" in the sense of entirely ruling out the possibility that it might comprise knowledge ("interest") of any kind. While Kant moved discussion of "beauty" into the realm of the "aesthetic" and "judgements of taste," the definitively influential moment of the third *Critique* was nonetheless a discussion of the "free" beauty found in "pure" judgements of taste. The focus of such judgments was the "feeling of purposiveness or pattern" afforded by the object, "without regard to [its] actual purpose or utility" (in a way that would make contemplation "subservient to a consideration of practical concerns"), and that would as such result in a harmonious free play of the viewer's faculties of imagination and understanding (*BA* 28-30). For Kant as for Hutcheson, then, such

judgments concerned a pleasure taken in the immediate appearance or configuration of the object, to the real existence of which the viewer would be indifferent. When this kind of theory of beauty is taken as a model for defining *art* and what is expected from it, every consideration beyond the most restricted kind of immediate perception will inevitably fall by the wayside.

Crucially, while Bell, Greenberg, Monroe Beardsley, and others may have made this move, earlier aesthetic theorists like Hutcheson and Kant never did. Especially telling in this regard is that when, in 1999, the then-editor of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* attempted to "bolster the credibility of philosophical aesthetics at the end of the twentieth century," he found it necessary to begin with an attack on the historical misrepresentations that have come to afflict the Kantian grounds of aesthetics.[17] For Peter Lamarque, "Kant's position has become inextricably, though unfairly, bound up with extreme forms of aestheticism in art criticism that are often used to discredit it" (AU 7). Such "aestheticism" is "exemplified by the *fin-de-siècle* 'art for art's sake' movement and the writings of Oscar Wilde, James Whistler, George Moore, Clive Bell, and others" (AU 4). As inclusion of the last name on this list suggests, "the extreme aestheticist conception, which cuts art off from all social, moral, or intellectual concerns," is that which assumes the "inextricability of the aesthetic attitude and artistic formalism." This tradition appears to have misappropriated "the Kantian aesthetic judgment" as sufficient for all objects in the world, including works of art, and on this basis concluded that (in Bell's famous words) "in order to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas or affairs, no familiarity with its emotions . . . nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space" (AU 7).

Giving a qualified defense of the account given by Kant of the disinterested pleasure taken in pure judgements of taste, Lamarque usefully points to exactly how it is that the "position is so often distorted and misappropriated." "Disinterested pleasure," on the basis of which we judge a thing beautiful and claim universal assent in so doing, derives from "contemplation of an object as it immediately appears to us, without regard to what kind of object it is or any desire on our part to make practical use of it." This is a judgment that requires no thought of the "concept of the object" or its "real existence"; it can be made "without knowing anything about it or what kind of thing it is—its nature might be a complete mystery yet still be pleasing" (AU 6). As Lamarque stresses, however, this account captures only "the logic of one kind of judgment, that such-and-such is beautiful." When speaking of works of art, Kant denies that such a "pure aesthetic judgment" is "appropriate or

even possible": judgment of a work involves knowledge of "what kind of object we are looking at," including the concept the object falls under, and a conception of its "purpose" and "perfection." Kant's discussion of fine art, according to Lamarque, "implies the need for 'reflective,' even cognitive, judgment well removed from judgments of beauty alone" (AU 7). A properly Kantian account of fine art, then, is far more nuanced and interesting than attacks on Greenberg and other twentieth-century writers have allowed.

Though a relatively familiar point in aesthetics, this same argument has since been taken up outside of the discipline within theories of art more generally. Diarmuid Costello, for example, has recently made an attempt to recover the broadened Kantian account of fine art from its neglect at the hands of twentieth-century art theorists.[18] Mindful of the critical reactions to Greenberg amidst the post-1960s waning of formalist modernism and the rise of conceptual art, Costello sees the rejection of "Greenberg" to have mistakenly resulted in a wholesale rejection of both "Kant" and "aesthetics" in contemporary art theory.[19] (The reduction of Kant's theory of fine art to his theory of taste and aesthetic judgement is, Costello points out, something that has even influenced aestheticians as sophisticated as Arthur Danto.[20]) Costello instead highlights the stress placed by Kant on "aesthetic ideas." Artworks "present concepts that may be encountered in experience, but with a completeness that experience never affords," or they "communicate ideas that cannot—in principle—be exhibited in experience." And they do so in such a way "that they imaginatively 'expand' the ideas presented in virtue of the indirect means through which they are obliged to embody them in sensible form" (GK 224).

Rather than engaging in the impossible task of a direct presentation of rational ideas in sensuous form, works of art thus present "aesthetic attributes" of such ideas "in ways that provoke 'more thought' than a direct conceptual elaboration of the idea itself could facilitate" (GK 225). This "sensible, though necessarily indirect, embodiment of ideas" generates in the viewer "a kind of free-wheeling, associative play in which the imagination moves freely and swiftly from one partial presentation of a concept to another." The value of the work of art is thus not bound up with the contemplation of form, nor with straightforward representation, but in "imaginative engagement" with (indirectly and sensuously embodied) ideas (GK 225). Kant's aesthetics are now revealed as perfectly suited to deal with the expanded field of contemporary art, for on this reading "many, if not most, works of art typically viewed as anti-aesthetic on the formalist conception of aesthetics that the artworld inherits from Greenberg nonetheless engage the mind in ways that may be called

aesthetic in Kant's sense" (GK 226).[21] This rejection of the formal in favor of "aesthetic ideas" shows how easily the narrow version of the Kantian account can be turned on its head. "Aesthetics" emerges not as a problem for, but as the necessary ground for, a coming to terms with conceptual or supposedly "anti-aesthetic" art.

The Narrowness of the Aesthetic: An External Response

The internal response rests on what is still a contested reading or set of readings of Kant. The external response is even simpler, and should satisfy even those who reject the uncoupling of "Kant" from the old idea of "the aesthetic" as a unique and singular form of experience. In short, the link between present-day aesthetics and the Kantian tradition that supposedly gave birth to it is partial at best.

Revisionist examination of the style and concerns of those eighteenth-century English and German thinkers dealing with art and beauty has shown again and again how their key notions such as the "aesthetic," "disinterest," "art," and the like were often very distant from, and in conflict with, present day concerns.[22] Thus aesthetics as actually practiced today—for the sake of clarity I focus in this section on the analytic tradition—has had a series of fairly clear ruptures with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traditions of all kinds. As Rancière's comment on the challenge to aesthetics from the "supercilious champion of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy" suggests, it was clear as early as Alfred Jules Ayer's sweeping critiques of aesthetics in his 1936 *Language, Truth, and Logic* that analytic philosophy would force aesthetics to fight for its survival.[23] Rather than sounding the death knell of aesthetics, however, the rise of analytic philosophy meant that the twentieth-century rise (or rebirth) of aesthetics in the UK and the US was far more diffuse and harder to pin down than it might have been otherwise.[24] While such famous names of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century as Bernard Bosanquet and Samuel Alexander had by mid-century faded into relative obscurity, many more seemingly "traditional" writers like Benedetto Croce, George Santayana, John Dewey, R. G. Collingwood, and even Herbert Read maintained their popularity, and were either directly published or regularly discussed in the pages of the journal of the American Society of Aesthetics, formed in 1939, and of the journal of the British Society of Aesthetics, from 1960.

Meanwhile, the response from analytic philosophy was less one of abandoning aesthetics as a practice than of trying to set it right. In 1951 John Passmore's famous attack on the "dreariness" of traditional

aesthetics picked up the tone set by Ayer in 1936: if aesthetics was to have any future at all, it would need to abandon the tendency toward woolly generalizations about "art" as a whole that led to "dreary and pretentious nonsense."[25] In the same decade, William Elton's *Aesthetics and Language* (1954) marked "the first systematic and self-conscious effort to bring linguistic methods of analysis to bear on aesthetics," and now-classic papers of the decade by writers such as Morris Weitz ("The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" [1956]) and Frank Sibley ("Aesthetic Concepts" [1959]) showed the promise of this new direction.[26] The idea of some unifying notion of "the aesthetic" attacked by Connor had (as he notes) been dismissed in 1956 by Weitz and branded "the first mistake" of traditional aesthetics by William Kennick in 1958, while Passmore had already in 1951 suggested the same solution of abandoning analysis of "art" as a whole in favor of a focus on individual practices.[27]

By the 1960s Danto and George Dickie were offering definitions of art that were in a sense "anti-aesthetic"—as well as directly attacking the very concept of "aesthetic experience"—and that focused not on inherent aesthetic qualities but on associated art theory (Danto) or "the artworld" (Dickie) as the basis of artistic identification.[28] The year 1981 saw a landmark of sorts with the publication of Danto's *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, often said to have definitively steered the analytic philosophy of art away from the formalism, solipsism, aesthetic-cognitive binarism, and narrow readings of Kant that continued to plague it.[29] And by 1989 it seemed to writers like Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin that the necessary "reconception of the subject, resources, and objectives of aesthetics . . . is what analytic philosophy provides."[30] (As a demonstrable sign of the openness of analytic aesthetics at this point, it is worth noting that the *Analytic Aesthetics* collection containing Goodman and Elgin's essay included not just the literary critics Charles Altieri and Christopher Norris, but also Pierre Bourdieu on "The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic.") Aesthetics revived via analytic philosophy would no longer "overlook the interpenetration of cognitive and aesthetic concerns"; it would reject the "attempt to police shifting and inconsequential boundaries," and it would also dispense with the "dichotomies of subject and object, emotion and cognition, essence and accident" that were previously "imposed a priori rather than derived from our encounters with art."[31]

In the field of analytic aesthetics at present, where general or universal ideas of the aesthetic are not dismissed entirely, their use is often taken to preclude any reflexive tie to art or to grand powers claimed on its behalf. Such discussions either emphasize how extremely partial the concepts are to the analysis of art, or they defend aesthetic experience as broad

enough to include cognitive, moral, and other such properties.[32] The "aesthetics" of the everyday and of nature are fiercely debated without the implication that analysis under this heading could ever reduce to a narrow kind of beauty or aesthetic experience.[33] Investigation can even extend to "nonperceptual" artworks that are said to possess no perceptible properties relevant to their appreciation as art.[34] Many would now agree with the suggestion that "philosophy of art" and "aesthetics" should be understood as distinct areas of inquiry, designating respectively the philosophical investigation of art and of our sensory being in the world (*BA* 1, 20-22). But what this misses is the stress aesthetics places on ways that, beyond narrow "aesthetic experience," the broader investigation of perception and experience is often crucial to the study of art or culture. What passes under the banner of "aesthetics" in Britain and the US at present thus includes an expanded study of the philosophy of art that, in its abandonment of the unquestioned tie between art and the aesthetic, allows for the possibility that narrowly Kantian accounts of beauty and aesthetic experience are as "orthogonal" or even irrelevant to such interests as one likes. This equally opens the way to the reintroduction of less limited accounts of perception and experience at the heart of such study.

The Disengagement from Politics

The perceived narrowness of the aesthetic underwrites most charges that aesthetics is apolitical or politically suspect. This old or narrowly "Kantian" view of aesthetics is still held onto by those who see it as involving a "particular mode of authoritative aesthetic judgement"—a model straightforwardly "derived from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*"—and so "do not believe the aesthetic approach to visual culture, which inevitably cleaves to the connoisseurial tradition and perpetuates its authoritarian effects, to be a productive one at this moment in our cultural history."[35] The responses given above to the narrowness of the aesthetic suggest that this is now an anachronistic way to see things. But what more substantive consequences does the broadening of aesthetics have for its potential politics?

There is now a standard narrative of the newfound political potential of aesthetics, moving from a politically motivated critique in the 1970s to the beauty-based recovery of the 1990s and to the ethical and political turns of the 2000s.[36] (Foster's reflective words on the 1983 *Anti-Aesthetic* seem relevant here: "I also have to admit that we totalized the aesthetic and reified it as a bad object for our own purposes. *Mea culpa*! But we

were critics, not philosophers, in a very contested field of discourse and politics."[37]) The *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* now features not just a number of essays on politics and aesthetics, but also a set of contributions highlighted by Kelly as a sign of aesthetics being a "discursive ally" to politicized activity, wherein "male-gendered and white-racialized aesthetic concepts (for example, beauty and the sublime), once deconstructed, can be embraced as forms of subaltern self-empowerment": "Decolonizing Aesthetics," "Disability Aesthetics," "Disinterestedness," "Feminism," "Migratory Aesthetics," "Negritude," "Trauma," and "Visual Culture."[38] (To which could be added the essays on a number of traditions outside of the West, on thinkers from Marx to Hélène Cixous, and on subjects from the "Canon" and "Sociology of the Artist" to "Race" and "Sexuality.")

The rise of the political turn in aesthetics has been linked to a widespread movement, especially in the realm of art and literary "theory" practiced in departments of English and art history, toward post-Sartrean French thought in dialogue with the German aesthetic tradition.[39] According to the narrative given by Peter de Bolla and Stefan Uhlig, this rethinking of aesthetics shifted attention from the old questions about the status of art objects and their place in an artworld to "speculative traditions of epistemology, politics, and ethics."[40] Here, above all, it is the third *Critique*—"the Kantian *über*text"—that, transformed by a wide range of often competing accounts, has seemed to guide the way: "The 'aesthetic' is no longer primarily an area of inquiry for artists, practitioners or even philosophers of art: it has become a bridgehead in our most recent attempts to reconceptualise—or perhaps re-colonize—politics, society, or the subject. Most especially, it is seen as providing or enabling the conceptualization of a counter to what is often viewed as the straightjacket of standard epistemology in which the rational enlightenment tradition has long been mired."[41] Those involved with this political or ethical turn in aesthetics are less likely to dwell on Kant's accounts of beauty or art per se than on the ability of imagination and understanding to explore the richness of particulars without the need to subsume them under concepts. Aesthetics, including its acknowledgement of the singularity of the artistic or literary work, becomes the source of an alternative kind of reason and a form of resistance to "the determinate categories of instrumental rationality."[42] This form of strategy embraces the universalizing consequences of the unity of aesthetics and artistic practices across the board—including the "communities of sense" formed via the subjective universality of aesthetic judgement—for their fundamentally left-wing, emancipatory possibilities.[43] (Even as critical a study as Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* ends with an appeal to what is shared in "human nature" or "species being" in order to ground

a "materialist ethics" that would also be "aesthetic."[44]) This tendency ranges across philosophical aesthetics, across broader forms of cultural and communication studies, and across contemporary art world practices: from Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics* and Rancière's series of works on the politics of aesthetics (most recently *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*), to Jill Bennett's *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art after 9/11*, to the debates in the wake of Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics.*[45] It is in large part due to this line of thought that it now seems natural to countenance arguments not just for an art-based "politics" of aesthetics, but also for the "new" aesthetics' intertwinement with the ethical, or for an "aesthetic" turn in political thought of various kinds.[46]

Much of this writing is nonetheless subject to Connor's critiques of the "numinous authority" and implausible "political promise" associated with a particular politics that attaches to "the aesthetic" and to the special idea of "art" that goes with it.[47] Given the internal and external replies to the narrowness of the aesthetic offered above, however, it would be wrong to take this form of the politics-aesthetics connection as inevitable. If, after all, aesthetics *can* deal with the cognitive and *can* be pluralistic, then there is as little need for a quasi-Kantian recovery of "the aesthetic" as a way toward the political as there was for the earlier "anti-aesthetic" stance of the 1980s. Figures such as W. J. T. Mitchell and Rita Felski have made clear that politically motivated practices of "visual culture" and "cultural studies" can engage with aesthetics without endorsing narrow conceptualizations of art, beauty, and aesthetic experience.[48] And even within the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy, aesthetics is no longer necessarily seen as either Kantian or universalist. Many scholars have long made the case for pluralism, constructivism, and even out-and-out relativism about interpretation.[49] The feminist critique of universalist assumptions about taste and judgement, for example, is now a widely acknowledged part of the standard story of the development of aesthetics (being *within* rather than *against* aesthetics as it now exists as a practice).[50] This antifoundationalist and anti-Kantian stance has been directly explored by at least one of the major figures in the "return to beauty," Alexander Nehamas: in his work, both aspects are brought together in a quasi-pragmatist account of beauty and interpretation that rejects Kant and numinous ideas of the aesthetic for Nietzsche and a philosophy of beauty anchored in desire and the practice of lived human life.[51] All of these responses suggest that the problem does not reside in aesthetics per se, but in the error made by any "aesthetics" that automatically assumes a politics tied to rereadings of the third *Critique.* Within the broadened conception of aesthetics, the rejection of an inherent politics of "the aesthetic" can just as easily be made from *within* aesthetics as from a position *against* it.

The Neglect of Art

The failure of aesthetics to actually engage with the objects of art and literature is an especially awkward charge to answer properly, given that it may be constitutive of its difference from other disciplines. According to Elkins, for example, the clash between general truth and historical particularity is often thought to define aesthetics in opposition to art history: "The argument concerns the nature of what is taken to be either irreducibly visual or ungeneralizably singular about artworks. Art history would then be the discipline that clings to either or both possibilities, and aesthetics the discipline that abstracts or otherwise generalizes them."[52] Since these words were written in the mid-1990s, however, aestheticians have spent an increasing amount of time talking about artworks, often in highly sophisticated, historically informed ways. This is especially true of analytic aesthetics where the standard "quasi-scientific dialectical method of hypothesis/counter-example/modification" in many (though not all) cases necessitates the introduction of large numbers of artworks as examples.[53] The more direct focus on the individual case is also commonly seen. The journals of the British and American Societies of Aesthetics occasionally feature articles on artists or artworks that wouldn't appear out of place in *Art Journal* or *Artforum*, while recent books like *Aesthetics and the Work of Art* or *Introducing Philosophy of Art: In Eight Case Studies* are a straightforward reflection of the trend toward grounding abstract theorizing in concrete examples.[54]

But this response is probably too easy. It might be more interesting to face head on the proposition that aesthetics by definition isn't *about* actual artworks—that once the balance of analysis shifts from a general theme or concept to the specifics of an artwork, then what is being carried out is something more like art history or art criticism. Support for this idea can be drawn from the fact that art history and literary studies as professional activities are alike in largely being "case"-based, with the standard form of an article being the focus on a single theme, period, author, or work of art or literature. An expansion from the single work to general rumination would then be a move from art history or literary study to art or literary "theory"—or aesthetics. On this basis it is unsurprising that, far from marooned on a separate island and barely able to understand those in aesthetics, as Elkins claimed, art historians (including Elkins himself), when in a more generalizing mode, can publish in the journals of the British and American Societies of Aesthetics, give keynotes at their conferences, and even win their prizes.[55] This implies that practice and theory are two sides of the same coin, with aesthetics simply being what art or literary historians are doing when

the balance of their writing tips from the particular, or case-based, into a more generalizing or "theoretical" mode. Aesthetics is just the name for the "theory" or "philosophy" part of what art and literary historians do.

One would thus expect a deep dependence on aesthetics in art history, and this is precisely the case, as long as aesthetics is defined broadly and art history is not being written in an entirely positivist mode. When books like J. M. Bernstein's *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* and Richard Wollheim's *Painting as an Art* are placed on philosophy shelves and taught in philosophy or theory courses, while Rosalind E. Krauss's *The Optical Unconscious* and Charles Harrison's *Painting the Difference: Sex and Spectator in Modern Art* are categorized as art history, the idea is that the *primary* goal of the former is something like a general account of "the conversion of the materials of painting into a medium, and the way in which this medium could be so manipulated as to give rise to meaning," while the latter authors care most of all about the accounts of the particular artists and period offered.[56] At the same time, books in the art history category are still likely to be dependent on theory, which they aim to refine in turn. In the case of Krauss, this means her own take on the Greenberg-Kant tradition via Lyotard, Benjamin, and others, while in Harrison's work a modified version of Wollheim's philosophy of painting forms the underlying premise of the entire book. If our whole understanding of an art historical period can rest on a particular reading of the consequences of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for the experience of sculpture, or on the ontology of art revealed by Marcel Duchamp's readymades, then aesthetics is clearly not only the abstracting moment of art historical writing, but also its internal motor.[57]

The "internal motor" aspect here introduces one final problematic, suggested by the very name "aesthetics," as distinct from "the philosophy of art." In its original incarnation, we might remember, aesthetics was supposed to stand for the systematic investigation of sensory knowledge. This link with the sensory or perceptual suggests a rather different significance, as indicated by references to the "aesthetics *of x*," where "x" might be anything from "the everyday" to "exile" to the individual artistic or literary work. Aesthetics here does not mean "involving aesthetic experience" so much as "concerning sensory or perceptual experience." (A point reinforced by the now widespread use of "affect," stripped of its more technical origins, to serve as a less tainted stand-in for the sensory or perceptual moment of experience that "the aesthetic" would elsewhere serve to designate.[58]) As such, aesthetics refers less to generalizing about the nature of art or literature than to a discourse about the experiential moment in an encounter with a work.

It is to such a conclusion that sympathetic writers on aesthetics since the 1980s have pointed, with calls for a reorientation via "a more serious engagement with the historical specifics of art," or for an aesthetics "compelled to descend to [the level of individual works] to clarify and assess the claims about art that they embody. Philosophy and criticism become inextricably intertwined, and both become bound to art history."[59] This conception of aesthetics as a dialectic of theory and critical engagement with the individual work has perhaps most openly been taken up in de Bolla and Uhlig's aforementioned volume on *Aesthetics and the Work of Art*, which rejects the process of beginning interpretation with a preexisting idea of what art is, and instead aims for an aesthetics that emerges in conversation with the work itself. Kelly, also a reviewer, sums up the way this process operates in de Bolla's own writing:

> De Bolla begins with the materiality of the art work (support, size of canvas, pigment, etc.) that, when we encounter it, generates an affective experience indicating "the presence of an artwork." He adds that "it is *only the work*"—not aesthetic theory—"that stakes a claim to art". . . . To summarize, he has an encounter with an object and an affective experience, and then he is able to make sense of his experience by grasping the aesthetic grammar of *this* artwork, that is, a grammar unique to this work. From which de Bolla concludes: "Herein lies the common territory between aesthetics and the work of art: without the work this aesthetics would not be visible, still less required, and without aesthetics this work would be indiscernible, even unintelligible". . . . De Bolla insists that he can avoid the haunting circularity between aesthetics and the work of art because the conceptual grammar of a work of art can be articulated without any prior appeal to a general theory of art: "the claim that *this object* makes to artness is sui generis."[60]

Aesthetics now fully emerges not just as concerned with the general, *but also* as necessarily engaged with the radically particular. It is not just the moment *beyond* art and literary history, but is also present at the all-important moment *within* them: the point when their objects are directly encountered and taken in. A truly "anaesthetic" art or literary study would not only be one that eschewed aesthetic theorizing, but one that refused to countenance the relevance of the thoughts and feelings that the work gave rise to in the maker, viewer, or reader. For if aesthetics is broadened into "experience" of a more generalized, at least partially cognitive sense, *the analysis of the moment of experiential encounter with the work is simply the same thing as a concern with its aesthetics.*

This insight has the interesting consequence that the most historically minded, and the most "literary," of writers can also be those who have the deepest engagements with the aesthetics of works of art. Imagina-

tive, quasipoetic, art historical reflection like that of Michael Ann Holly, or art historical discussion deeply sensitive to the experiences that the works give rise to like that of Richard Shiff, now explicitly emerges as art history inflected by, or in dialogue with, aesthetics.[61] Looking backward, one could recuperate a great many art historians to this aim. Amongst canonical figures a straightforward case would be Michael Baxandall, whose careful concern with historical reconstruction was said to be justified only insofar as it would "prompt other people to a sharper sense of the pictorial cogency" of the work in question; "*au fond*" the art historian was just that person found in every group of travelers or tourists "who insists on pointing out to the others the beauty or interest of the things they encounter."[62] It would now make equal sense to recoup Edward Snow, a writer on art whose work has a strong feel of "practical criticism" to it, and who is probably more often read in literature than in art history departments. In the opening pages of his book on Johannes Vermeer, Snow equates "aesthetic appreciation" with "beauty," and thus sees the former as an "instinctive step backwards" that cannot but help retreat from the full range of intensities that a richer relationship with the work might involve.[63] But though Snow does not acknowledge it, a broadened conception of aesthetics avoids this problem, just as it obviates Connor's fear of "suspending one's responses, or cautiously putting them in brackets," in the encounter with art. Snow's writing itself is the ultimate example of how redundant such simplifications are (Fig. 1):

> [The pearl's] tear-likeness betrays, in the very place of art's triumph, a reluctance and a powerlessness at the heart of art's transformative urges. It condenses, renews, and gives visible form to the grief transcended in it. In this it is like *Head of a Young Girl* itself, where the author's parental care for his creation, already overdetermined by the erotics of image-making, becomes implicated in an unwillingness to let go, to deliver over into iconicity and otherness. It is as if there can still be felt within the finished painting a conflict between the slow, loving, self-forgetful time of bringing it into being and the spectatorial instant of confronting it as an accomplished work of art, immaculate, closed, apart, abandoned at the threshold of life. A desire to remain lost in an open, endlessly prolonged act of creation fuses with the knowledge that painting is from the first an act of parting, and that those who make art are destined to confront not just love and new life but death, loss, and subjective isolation . . . In front of perhaps no other painting is there such a feeling that what one desires has been found. We lack only the means to reach.[64]

The concern of this writing is to describe the experience offered by the work of art—setting down words on the interplay between "what is visible on the canvas" and "what happens inside us as we look at it."[65]

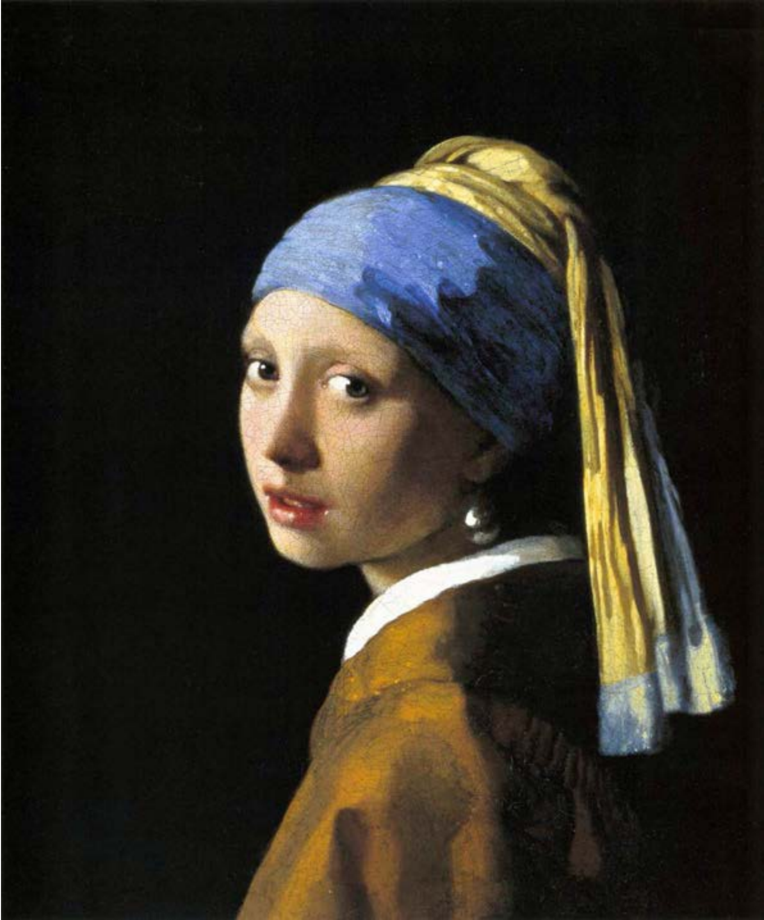


Figure 1. Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, c. 1665, oil on canvas, 44.5 x 39 cm, The Hague: Mauritshuis (Photo: Wikipedia Commons).

And finding this kind of vocabulary for affect—as de Bolla would have it—is as exemplary of a work-centred aesthetics as it is of an aesthetics-sensitive art history.[66] (For all its apparent absorption in the immediacy of the work, there is still an overriding theoretical supposition about art developed in Snow's writing, to do with the notion that "something stays this way we cannot have, / Comes alive because we cannot have it."[67]) Avowedly resistant to beauty and aesthetic appreciation as it may be, his whole project might be summed up with the same words that have recently been used to give the goal of a rejuvenated aesthetics:

"the analysis of experiential or perceptual qualities of historically reconstituted artworks."[68]

Nothing to be Afraid Of

At this point it looks like Kelly's optimism may have been justified. Aesthetics does not reduce to simplistic questions of beauty, does not reduce "the arts" to singular kinds of experience and judgement, and is a broad enough term to reject any strict binary that would rule the cognitive out of bounds, including socially and historically inflected forms of experience. Aesthetics also (even within the analytic tradition alone) deals with a great many issues into which "the aesthetic" enters only partially, if at all. One can be cautious about "the aesthetic" or even reject it entirely, while still happily continuing to benefit from an interest in aesthetics. On these bases, there is plenty of room for ethics and politics, whether in relation to art itself or to the new political possibilities that thinking with the aesthetic opens up. It may even be the case that anti- or dubiously political stances on beauty and the like can only be properly countered from *within* the arguments of aesthetics. Finally, aesthetics as now practiced includes sensitive discussion of artistic practices of various kinds without the need to homogenize the arts, or even to abstract beyond the encounter with the individual work.

I want, nonetheless, to suggest in closing that this victory may come at a price, albeit one that happy pluralists can take to be positive and necessary. At one point in "Doing Without Art," Connor recoils at the suggestion that his adumbration of a philosophy of fidgeting might be a step toward "an aesthetics of everyday life," along with "the principles of emancipation, transfiguration, or resistance that such an aesthetic would underwrite."[69] But on the terms of a rejuvenated aesthetics, the error of this suggestion lies not in its appeal to "aesthetics" as such, but rather in the subsequent assumption that this would involve particular theorists that would lead the project in a particular direction. What justification could there possibly now be, aside from laziness or habit, to appeal to Kant and reworkings of the third *Critique*, rather than to Michel Serres or another of Connor's preferred thinkers?[70]

In short, inasmuch as it deals with art and culture, the "new" aesthetics buys its freedom from past caricatures or overly narrow concepts of the subject at the expense of anything that might differentiate it from cultural theory generally. Gone are all first principles and assumptions, above all the safety of the Kantian foundations, and the stable working

definition of (or even belief in) entities like art and aesthetic experience. Rote appeals to the special powers of the aesthetic or art emerge now not as being bolstered by the practice of aesthetics, but *as having got aesthetics wrong*—as having mistaken an invitation to thought for a safe route along which that thought can proceed. Even attempts to distinguish "philosophy of art" from aesthetics break down. Aesthetics appears to have an intertwining macro- *and* microfunction, standing not just for an abstracting tendency toward theoretical discussion but also for the kind of analysis that deals with the specificity of the perceptual or experiential encounter. Aesthetics is now "critical reflection on art, culture, and nature," at the same time that it is "the analysis of experiential or perceptual qualities of historically reconstituted artworks." These two aspects revolve around and feed into each other, necessarily constituting the practice of aesthetics as it has been outlined here.

On the logic of this recovery of aesthetics, wherever critical thinking about art and culture takes place, there may be no principled way left to differentiate between "theory" as such and the form of aesthetics that has made the moves necessary to escape its various critics. Some will feel this dissolves the fear of aesthetics, leaving behind the stifling nature of the subject when narrowly conceived. For others this shift, more worryingly, may signal a dissolution or even deletion of the subject as a whole. Much now depends on the extent to which aesthetics can avoid the turn back to narrow Kantian roots or reductive notions of "art" or "the aesthetic," while at the same time leading to productive research that actively exploits its potential breadth and freedom. One strong possibility is that traditional "microfunction" concerns with perception and experience, bypassing the reductivist blind alleys, will give exactly this kind of impetus to distinctive and innovatory work on art and culture. Another is that "aesthetics" will end up as no more than a catch-all term for thinking about art, culture, and nature, and it will have escaped its critics and rendered itself largely empty at the same time.

University of St Andrews

NOTES

1 Michael Kelly, "Preface to the Second Edition," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 1:xxi.

2 Kelly, "Preface to the Second Edition," 1:xxi. Throughout this paper a differentiation between aesthetics as a "practice" and a "discipline" is used so as not to rule out from the outset the possibility of the inclusion of aesthetics within other disciplines.

3 Kelly, "Preface to the First Edition," 1:xxxi.

4 Kelly, *Iconoclasm in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), ix–x.

5 Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Adieu à l'ésthetique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000); Steven Connor, "Doing Without Art," *New Literary History* 42, no. 1 (2011): 53.
6 Connor, "Doing Without Art," 63.
7 Simon Jarvis, "An Undeleter for Criticism," *Diacritics* 32, no. 1 (2002): 3.
8 Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Persuasion: Paradox and Power in Art History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 82. For a similar view of the relative narrowness of the aesthetic from a very different kind of art historian, see David Summers's argument that a fully imaginative historical reconstruction of works of art is one that gives only secondary importance to the aesthetic, which is itself "preconceptual and prepurposeful, a reaction preceding involvement in the complexities of human meanings, motivations, aims and affairs." Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003), especially 58–60.
9 James Elkins and Harper Montgomery, eds., *Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2013), 3.
10 Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Origins of Aesthetics: Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 5:36–47.
11 Peter Kivy, "Introduction," in Noël Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), x (hereafter cited as *BA*).
12 Paul Mattick, Jr., "Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics in the Visual Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 2 (1993): 254.
13 Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983).
14 A point most recently explored in Diarmuid Costello, "Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (2007): 217–28; and Monique Roelofs, "Anti-Aesthetics," in *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 1:101–105.
15 Jerrold Levinson, "Adieu à l'esthéticien?" *Aesthetica Supplementa* 25 (2010): 159–66, where this Kantian form of aesthetics is said to have "always weighed heavier in Continental Europe than in the United States or the United Kingdom."
16 Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory," in *BA*, 20–44. This and the subsequent two paragraphs closely follow Carroll's argument and his readings of Francis Hutcheson, Kant, Clive Bell, Clement Greenberg, and Monroe C. Beardsley.
17 Peter Lamarque, "The Aesthetic and the Universal," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 33, no. 2 (1999): 2–3.
18 An attempt prefigured in Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), although Costello is critical of de Duve's reading of Kant. The retrieval of Kant's aesthetics for art history is applied more broadly in Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art: 1750–2000* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005).
19 As explored in Costello. See "Greenberg's Kant" and "Retrieving Kant's Aesthetics for Art Theory after Greenberg: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice," in *Rediscovering Aesthetics*, ed. Frances Halsall, Julia Jansen, and Tony O'Connor (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2009), 117–32.
20 See Costello, "Retrieving Kant's Aesthetics"; and Costello, "On Late Style: Arthur Danto's *The Abuse of Beauty*," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 44, no. 4 (2004): 424–39.
21 For extended accounts of how this plays out, see Costello, "Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art," in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, ed. Elisabeth Schellekens and Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007); and Costello, "Kant and the Problem of *Strong* Non-Perceptual Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 53, no. 3 (2013): 277–98.
22 For very different examples of how other traditions based on English and German contemporaries might look, see Karen Collis, "Shaftesbury and Literary Criticism: Philosophers and Critics in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Review of English Studies* 67,

no. 279 (2016): 294–315; Peter Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," in *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (New York: Verso, 2013), 37–69.
23 Jacques Rancière quoted in Connor, "Doing Without Art," 1. Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936); and see R. A. Goodrich, "Ayer on Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 17, no. 1 (1983): 49–58.
24 The outlines of the history given here are drawn in particular from Lamarque, "Analytic Aesthetics," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Michael Beaney (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 770ff.; Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds., *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1–5; Richard Shusterman, "The End of Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 1 (1997): 29–41; and Lydia Goehr, "The Institutionalization of a Discipline: A Retrospective of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and the American Society for Aesthetics, 1939–1992," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 2 (1993): 99–121.
25 J. A. Passmore, "The Dreariness of Aesthetics," *Mind* 60, no. 239 (1951): 335.
26 Lamarque, "Analytic Aesthetics," 770.
27 Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 1 (1956): 27–35; William E. Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" *Mind* 67, no. 267 (1958): 319; Passmore, "The Dreariness of Aesthetics"; Connor, "Doing Without Art," esp. 55, 68.
28 Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571–84; George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1964): 56–65; Dickie, "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1969): 253–56.
29 Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981). For this reading, see Kivy, "Introduction" (*BA* ix). Alongside this book in importance, Lamarque places Levinson's *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* and Kendal Walton's "Categories of Art," as well as work by Richard Wollheim, Nelson Goodman, and Joseph Margolis.
30 Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, "Changing the Subject," in *Analytic Aesthetics*, ed. Shusterman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 191.
31 Goodman and Elgin, "Changing the Subject," 191–92.
32 Recent accounts of the alternative narrowed and broadened views are given in Carroll, "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, no. 2 (2012): 165–77; and Alan H. Goldman, "The Broad View of Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 4 (2013): 323–33.
33 Notable recent cases include the environmental aesthetics of Glenn Parsons and Alan Carlson, and the everyday aesthetics associated with writers such as Katya Mandoki, Yuriko Saito, and Thomas Leddy.
34 James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 4 (2003): 363–78.
35 Amelia Jones, "Every Man Knows Where and How Beauty Gives Him Pleasure: Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics," in *Value, Art, Politics*, ed. Jonathan Harris (2002; Liverpool: Univ. of Liverpool Press, 2007), 372, 370, 369.
36 Costello and Dominic Willsdon, eds., *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics* (London: Tate, 2008), esp. 7–19.
37 Foster, quoted in "Introductory Seminar," in Elkins and Montgomery, *Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic*, 27.
38 Kelly, "Preface to the Second Edition," xxi–xxii.
39 Peter de Bolla and Stefan H. Uhlig, *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 8–9.
40 De Bolla and Uhlig, *Aesthetics and the Work of Art*, 9.

41 De Bolla and Uhlig, *Aesthetics and the Work of Art*, 9. For an extended case study, see Robert Kaufman, "Red Kant, or The Persistence of the Third *Critique* in Adorno and Jameson," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 682–724.
42 Derek Attridge, "The Singular Events of Literature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 1 (2010): 84.
43 Beth Hinderliter et al., eds., *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2009).
44 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 408–15.
45 Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005); Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (London: Verso, 2013); Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art after 9/11* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002). Major recent explorations of the artworld outcomes of these debates include Grant M. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2011); and Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).
46 For the "ethical" turn, see Costello and Willsdon, *The Life and Death of Images*. On "political" turns, see Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), including a revision of his 2001 article "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Thought"; and Nikolas Kompridis, ed., *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
47 Connor, "Doing without Art," 54.
48 See W. J. T. Mitchell's contribution in Costello, *The Life and Death of Images*; and Rita Felski, "The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies," in *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Michel Bérubé (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 28–43.
49 Margolis has been one of the most longstanding advocates of a principled relativism, as explored at length in Margolis, *Interpretation Radical but not Unruly: The New Puzzle of the Arts and History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995). For takes on constructivism in aesthetic response and interpretation respectively, see Marcia Muelder Eaton, "The Social Construction of Aesthetic Response," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 2 (1995): 95–107; Peter Alward, "Butter Knives and Screwdrivers: An Intentionalist Defense of Radical Constructivism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72, no. 3 (2014): 247–60. Another important line of exploration in this regard is the susceptibility of aesthetic response to "mere exposure"; Bence Nanay, "Perceptual Learning, the Mere Exposure Effect and Aesthetic Antirealism," *Leonardo* 50, no. 1 (2017).
50 For an "introductory" text that says as much, see Darren Hudson Hick, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 161–62, 172, 175. Useful overviews are given in the three essays on "Feminism," in *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 3:22–32; and Jane Kneller, "Kant: Feminism and Kantian Aesthetics," in *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 4:71–74.
51 Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007).
52 Kelly, *Iconoclasm in Aesthetics*. Elkins, "Why Don't Art Historians Attend Aesthetics Conferences?" in *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, ed. Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41. (The essay is a reprint of a paper given at the American Society of Aesthetics conference in 1996.)
53 Lamarque and Olsen, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, 2.
54 De Bolla and Uhlig, *Aesthetics and the Work of Art*; Derek Matravers, *Introducing Philosophy of Art: In Eight Case Studies* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2012). Such articles include: Justin Remes, "Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52, no. 3 (2012): 257–70; Sherri Irvin, "Artwork and Document in the Photography of Louise Lawler,"

The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 70, no. 1 (2012): 79–90; David La Rocca, "The False Pretender: Deleuze, Sherman, and the Status of Simulacra," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69, no. 3 (2011): 321–29; Michael Podro, "Literalism and Truthfulness in Painting," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 4 (2010): 457–68; Jason Gaiger, "Dismantling the Frame: Site–Specific Art and Aesthetic Autonomy," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49, no. 1 (2009): 43–58.

55 Elkins, "Why Don't Art Historians Attend Aesthetics Conferences?"

56 Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), 7.

57 On the former see Stephen Melville, "Phenomenology and the Limits of Hermeneutics," in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Moxey (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 143–54. On the latter compare Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–43; and Art & Language, "Voices Off: Reflections on Conceptual Art," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 1 (2006): 113–35.

58 This emerges most plainly where the two terms are directly conflated or used interchangeably, as in De Bolla, *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001). The complications surrounding the term are illustrated by the fact that, as well as suggesting that references to "affect" in artistic discourse have little to do with its technical meanings (usually reduced to "a matter of emotion, feeling, or mood"), Elkins posits at least twelve sources and related sets of meaning for the term: "Trauma theory"; "The biomediated body"; "Neurobiology and neuroaesthetics"; "Animal affect"; "[Brian] Massumi's position"; "Deleuze and Guattari"; "Synesthesia"; "Political theory"; "Clinical psychiatry"; "Anthropology"; "Geography"; and "Presence." See Elkins and Montgomery, *Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti–Aesthetic*, 10–14.

59 Mattick, Jr., "Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics in the Visual Arts," 258; and (as also quoted by Mattick, Jr.) Andrew Benjamin and Osborne, eds., *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics* (London: ICA, 1991), xi.

60 Kelly, "Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (April 18, 2009): https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23985-aesthetics-and-the-work-of-art-adorno-kafka-richter/.

61 In this regard, see the contributions by Holly and Richard Shiff to Halsall et al., *Rediscovering Aesthetics*.

62 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 136–37; Baxandall, "The Language of Art History," *New Literary History* 10, no. 3 (1979): 454.

63 Edward Snow, *A Study of Vermeer*, revised and enlarged edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1994), 3.

64 Snow, *A Study of Vermeer*, 22.

65 Snow, *A Study of Vermeer*, 3.

66 De Bolla, *Art Matters*, especially 4–5.

67 Robert Hass, "Art and Life," in *Time and Materials: Poems 1997–2005* (New York: Ecco, 2007), 30.

68 Halsall et al., *Rediscovering Aesthetics*, 3.

69 Connor, "Doing Without Art," 68.

70 See, for example, Connor, "Thinking Things," *Textual Practice* 24, no. 1 (2010): 1–20; Connor, "Spelling Things Out," *New Literary History* 45, no. 2 (2014): 183–97.