

Introduction

Aesthetics after Modernism seeks to demonstrate the ongoing relevance of aesthetic theory for art after modernism. In it I aim to show that even what are typically taken to be the hardest of hard cases engage us in recognisably aesthetic ways and, as such, remain amenable to aesthetic analysis. Why, if that is true, do so many art theorists, critics, and sometimes even artists appear to think otherwise? I trace what might be called the ‘first order’ artworld’s rejection of aesthetic theory to Clement Greenberg’s success in co-opting the discourse of aesthetics, and in particular Kant’s aesthetics, to underwrite a formalist conception of the aesthetic value of modernist art. Not only has this led to Kant being tarred with the brush of Greenbergian formalism; it has also led critics and theorists of more recent art to miss the resources of the aesthetic tradition, notably Kant’s aesthetics, for capturing what is distinctive about our cognitive relation to the kinds of art that interest them. There is a widespread tendency to assume that Kant’s aesthetics cannot speak to these more conceptual aspects of our interactions with art. I offer an interpretation of Kant’s theory of art that seeks to show otherwise, taking Conceptual Art as my primary test case. Here is a kind of art that at least in its ‘stronger’, more purist, forms claims to forgo sensible properties altogether in favour of direct engagement with ideas as art. But if Kant’s aesthetics can be shown to accommodate our cognitive relation to art with no sensible features relevant to its appreciation as art, then it should in principle be able to withstand the challenge of any form of art.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which is prefaced by a brief introduction, so I will be brief here. Part I examines the internal structure of Greenbergian theory, affording it the kind of sustained, scholarly attention that it has yet to receive from a philosopher. Treated in the round—and not, as is typical, dismissed on the basis of some of the more obvious argumentative shortcomings of his better-known essays—Greenberg’s position repays such treatment. Alerted to Greenberg’s conceptual sophistication by reading de Duve, I focus instead on the internal structure of his theory as a whole. This marries a formalist conception of aesthetic judgement with a

medium-specific theory of artistic development. The first chapter focuses on the depth of the connection Greenberg succeeded in forging between these two wings of his theory, pivoting on his understanding of artistic conventions. Modernism works by artists testing the conventions of a given medium as they inherit them. Formalism works by judging the state in which a work leaves the conventions of its medium having so tested them. In the second, I critique each wing of this theory in turn. With respect to Greenberg's formalism, I take issue with his understanding of the 'objectivity' of aesthetic judgement and his notion of aesthetic 'distance', and bring out the incompatibility of both with Kant's aesthetics. With respect to his modernism, I question his conviction that the arts can be parsed on non-question-begging grounds, something that is also put in doubt by the conflicted place of modernist sculpture within his own division of the arts.

Part II comprises two pairs of chapters focusing on the afterlife of Greenberg's modernism and formalism, respectively, for later debates in art criticism and theory. In each case I take one broadly sympathetic and one broadly unsympathetic respondent as my examples. I single out the work of Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss, respectively, as my examples of a sympathetic and unsympathetic response to Greenberg's modernism. In doing so, I focus on the implications of their early responses to medium-specificity, the cornerstone of Greenberg's modernism, for their later criticism. In Fried's case, this would be his return to front line art criticism after a 35-year hiatus prompted by the emergence of the 'tableau form' in recent photographic art. In Krauss's case, it is her work on 'inventing' or 'reinventing' the medium in the teeth of contemporary's art's supposedly 'post-medium' condition. I single out the work of Thierry de Duve and Arthur Danto as my examples of a sympathetic and unsympathetic response to Greenberg's formalism. In de Duve's case, I focus on his attempt to frame a theory of aesthetic judgement adequate to art's post-medium-specific condition by 'updating' Kant, all the while bracketing Kant's own indications of how his theory applies to works of art. In Danto's case, I focus on his rejection of any approach to art grounded in an aesthetics of taste, in favour of a cognitive theory of artistic appreciation. The upshot of Part II, if my arguments go through, is to question the coherence of leading post-Greenbergian theories of the medium, and to bring out some of the ways in which Greenberg's contentious claim to a Kantian provenance for modernist aesthetics continues to overdetermine later conceptions of aesthetics in art theory.

Part III returns to Kant. But rather than focusing, as is standard, on his account of aesthetic judgement (the paradigm case of which would be a pure, conceptually unconstrained judgement of free natural beauty) I focus on his theory of art, specifically, his understanding of works of art as indirect presentations of ideas in sensible form. Given that my goal is to demonstrate the adequacy of Kant's aesthetics to art after modernism, a reading of §49 of the third *Critique* in light of more recent art of the kind that Kant could not have envisaged is crucial for my project. For this is the only way to establish whether Kant's theory of art is conceptually constrained by contingent historical features of the art of his own day. Conceptual Art is the obvious test case: no other kind of art is so routinely (and, if I am right, so unthinkingly) held up as demonstrating the inadequacy of aesthetics to art after modernism. This view, I aim to show, simply does not withstand scrutiny. That done, I consider some obvious worries and objections for the resulting account, including what might be regarded as the empty 'subjectivism' of Kant's aesthetics, the 'perceptualism' of his theory of aesthetic judgement and, notably, Kant's formalism. Greenberg leaned heavily on the latter, and this fact has been used to discredit Kant ever since. But not only are Greenberg's claims on Kant very often contentious, I also want to show that the cognitivism of Kant's own theory has various advantages over the one that Danto opposes to it, and that the non-cognitivism that pervades de Duve's interpretation of Kant cannot be squared with some of the deeper motivations of Kant's broader project.

The upshot, if I am correct, is to remove some of the most obvious obstacles to rereading Kant in the light of recent art and, I hope, decisively shift the burden of proof onto those who would suggest otherwise.

PART I

GREENBERG'S MODERNIST AESTHETIC

Introduction to Part I

In what follows I analyse Greenberg's modernism and formalism in turn, before turning to the internal relation between them. But before I do, there is one general issue in Greenberg interpretation that bears on this relation that I would like to flag up at the outset: that is, the relation between medium-specificity and aesthetic judgement in Greenberg's account—or what I shall here call 'theory' and 'taste'—and the question of which, if either, grounds or determines the other. This is to ask: Is Greenberg trying to outline a philosophy of history as a framework for understanding what has determined the course of modern art and which, in so far as he holds his own taste to have been formed in response to the most advanced art of his day, must have shaped his own judgements upon it? Or, is Greenberg giving an account grounded in his own taste (for which there can be no final justification or proof) of what he deems to be the most significant modern art, and then offering an historical reconstruction of the salient transitions within it? If the former, Greenbergian 'theory' (his understanding of modernism as the increasing separation of the arts between the 1860s and 1960s) drives Greenbergian 'taste' (his formalism as manifested in his judgements as a critic); if the latter, taste drives theory.

I flag this question of priority at the outset because one can see it playing out in the reception and interpretation of Greenberg's work, significantly impacting debates as to his true legacy. The legacy of Greenbergian theory is the main topic of Part II. But it will prove helpful, in situating what follows, to provide some sense of the centrality of this question of priority now. Arthur Danto holds that in so far as Greenberg's formalism was grounded in, and hence underwritten by, the philosophy of history provided by his theory of

modernism (making the ‘best’ art that which best exemplifies the modernist reduction) *theory drives taste*. Michael Fried argues that Greenberg’s teleological understanding of modernism as the gradual reduction of each art to its essence is at odds with his practice as a critic; were his understanding of modernism correct, it would constrain the freedom of his judgements as a critic. Since it does not, his theory of modernism needs to be amended: *critical practice (that is, taste) invalidates theory*. Thierry de Duve, by contrast, maintains that until the limits of modernism were breached by the internal development of art itself, as one artist after another sought to apply the ‘logic’ of modernism as though it were a programme for making art that could be used to generate further art at will, Greenberg managed to calibrate each against the other. *Theory and taste are mutually supporting*: because each requires the other, neither unequivocally grounds or determines the other.¹ Meanwhile the many artists, critics and theorists, including Rosalind Krauss, who bridled at the dogmatism with which ‘verdicts’ of Greenberg’s ‘mere, ungovernable taste’ were delivered—the implication being that if you did not agree with his judgements you were wrong even if he could not prove as much—maintained that *taste determines theory*. Greenberg’s highly partisan reconstruction of modernism’s history was intended to underwrite his verdicts as a critic.²

Not only does this question of the relative weight and priority of modernism and formalism (medium-specificity and aesthetic judgement) in Greenberg’s overall theory continue to divide the reception of his work, it goes to the heart of debates concerning his significance and legacy. As such it is pivotal to understanding the afterlife of modernist aesthetics, notably the role of Greenbergian theory in overdetermining the understanding of aesthetics in art theory since the sixties. Where one stands on this thus turns out to matter both diagnostically and prognostically; it matters not only to whether one thinks Greenberg’s theory succeeds on its own terms, but also to what one thinks the appropriate response should be to the more general artworld rejection of aesthetics in which it has resulted.

Notes

1. Thierry De Duve argues that Greenberg’s hostility towards Minimalism and Conceptual Art arises from the fact that both attempt to apply his retrospective and descriptive account of modernism as if it were a prospective and prescriptive programme, the logic of which could be extrapolated to produce further art at will. At this point Greenberg sacrificed his modernism in order to preserve his formalism (notably, the freedom of aesthetic judgement). See ‘The

- Monochrome and the Blank Canvas', in de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 199–279. This argument has affinities to Michael Fried's claim that the minimalists were the true inheritors of Greenberg's perception of modernism as a reduction to the literal essence of each medium. See Michael Fried, 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism', in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 33–40.
2. See Greenberg's 'Complaints of an Art Critic' (1967) in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. IV, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 268.

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Modernism and Formalism

The Internal Structure of Greenbergian Theory

Modernism defines itself in the long run not as a ‘movement’ much less a program, but rather as a kind of bias or tropism: towards esthetic value, esthetic value as such and as an ultimate. The specificity of Modernism lies in its being so heightened a tropism in this regard.

Clement Greenberg, ‘Necessity of “Formalism”’ (1971)

i. The ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of Greenberg’s modernism

Greenberg’s modernism was, according to Greenberg himself, a retrospective historical account of a tendency across the arts, since the latter third of the nineteenth century, to ‘retrench’ themselves in the specific qualities of their respective media, leading to an increasingly sharp separation between the arts as each sloughed off everything it held in common with any of the others. As a corollary, the distinctive properties and conventions of each art were pushed to the fore. In his later work, this account was presented in an increasingly stripped-down form, leading to various misinterpretations. Most notably, in the absence of the philosophy of history in which it was embedded in his earlier work, that this should be understood as some kind of programme carried out for its own sake. Returning to early Greenberg one finds, on the contrary, that this ‘surrender to the resistance of the medium’¹ was less an end in itself than a by-product of the avant-garde’s defense of high aesthetic standards from the dual threat presented by kitsch and Alexandrianism.² ‘Kitsch’ functions, in Greenberg’s lexicon, much like ‘culture industry’ in Adorno’s: it signifies a simulated and diluted surrogate for authentic culture, stripped of all difficulty and served up for the distraction of the new urban masses. ‘Alexandrianism’, by contrast, denotes

the hypertrophied academicism of the official French Salon of the late nineteenth century, characterized by a deference to tradition on all matters of substance, and a vacuous virtuosity in matters of detail. Defined by its resistance to corruption on the one hand, and stagnation on the other, the avant-garde was Greenberg's term for that element within the advanced art of its day that put the preservation of exacting artistic standards above all else. 'The avant-garde,' Greenberg claims, 'becomes the embodiment of art's instinct for self-preservation. It is interested in, and feels itself responsible to, only the values of art.'³

I stress this shift in Greenberg's writings, from the question of *why* modernism arose in the first place, to an increasingly decontextualized stress on *how* it works once underway, because failing to thematize the socio-historical motor internal to that account, or what one might call the 'why *in* the how', makes a nonsense of his theory. Greenberg's theory always presupposed such a background, even if he increasingly neglected to make this fact explicit.⁴ Failing to keep this background in view also leads to those tendentious characterizations of Greenberg's modernism as a valorisation of 'purity' for its own sake. Thus it is important to recall, despite the fact that 'feeling responsible to only the values of art' was increasingly cashed out in terms of an inward turn towards what is 'unique and irreducible' to each art over the course of Greenberg's career, that this was neither the origin of modernism nor its goal on his account.⁵ Artists do not pursue purity for its own sake: this would have struck him as nonsense. Instead, what goes by the name of 'purity', the description of a state, would be better understood as an activity: it picks out that practice of immanent self-criticism through which artists seek to preserve 'the values of art', by insulating their discipline from the dual threat of external corruption or internal stagnation. For Greenberg these values were ultimately one: 'the goodness of good art'. As he put it two decades later, demonstrating the continuity between his early essays and mature theory of modernism:

The arts could save themselves from this leveling down only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity.

Each art, it turned out, had to perform this demonstration on its own account. What had to be exhibited was not only that which was unique and irreducible in art in general, but also that which was unique and irreducible in each particular art.⁶

The thought was that only if each art could lay claim to an 'area of competence' that was neither shared with any other (hence 'unique'), nor capable of being abandoned without abandoning the activity itself (hence 'irreducible'), would it show that it offered a distinctive kind of experience and thereby guarantee, or at least significantly improve, the likelihood of its continued existence. What each art had to demonstrate, in effect, was that it offered a *specific* experience of aesthetic quality in art. By marking off its own area of competence in this way, each art would arm itself with a set of minimally necessary and sufficient conditions for its identity as a discrete art, and thereby make its future survival as a distinct art possible. The reason for valorising the medium was that cleaving to the specificity of their respective media is what Greenberg believed lay at the heart of each art's response to the threat of its possible destruction, the medium being the locus of each art's uniqueness and specificity, hence the source of whatever vitality it possessed in its own right:

It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably have been borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered 'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance.⁷

By 'self-definition' Greenberg had in mind a primarily immanent and practical, rather than self-conscious and reflective, process through which each art submitted the norms or conventions of its respective medium to a self-reflexive testing as to their necessity or otherwise. The result was that each increasingly oriented itself towards only those conventions, and the distinctive aesthetic effects they had to offer, that had proved indispensable to its continued existence as a distinct art in practice.⁸ By doing so each art had, Greenberg accepted, 'narrowed its area of competence', but with the compensation of rendering its possession of that area correspondingly more secure.⁹ Greenberg called this process the 'infra-logic' of modernism. It transformed the practice of art into an immanent exploration of the minimal conditions that sufficed, at any given time, to produce an object capable of holding up as a work of a given kind (painting, sculpture, etc.):

The aim of the self-criticism, which is entirely empirical and not at all an affair of theory, is to determine the irreducible working essence of art and the separate arts. Under the testing of modernism more and more of the conventions of the art of painting have shown themselves to be dispensable, unessential. By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object that can be experienced as a picture.¹⁰

The point is not, as tendentious criticism of Greenberg would have it, that there was a wilful and, for just that reason, inexplicable turn towards the medium in the art of the immediately preceding hundred years. There was indeed a reason, albeit a largely unselfconscious one, for this inward turn: the need to preserve the arts from being ‘levelled down’, thereby forfeiting their autonomy and with it their claim to intrinsic merit as a result of broader societal pressures. From his first published writings, this was always Greenberg’s social and historical explanation for the birth of modernism. In Greenberg’s words, the arts had been ‘hunted back to their media, and there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined. It is by virtue of its medium that each art is unique and strictly itself. To restore the identity of an art the opacity of its medium must be emphasized.’¹¹

In painting, Greenberg traced this drift towards isolation and self-definition from Manet’s great paintings of the early 1860s (*Olympia*, *Le Déjeuner sur L’herbe*), through Impressionism (especially late Monet) and post-impressionism (notably Cézanne), through Cubism, to arrive—via the flagrant marginalization of Dada, Surrealism and other avant-garde movements of the inter-war years—on the other side of the Atlantic with the Abstract Expressionists and, finally, the Colour Field painters of the 1960s (Noland, Louis, and Olitski), with whom it culminated. This tradition is laid out in broad strokes in ‘Modernist Painting’, an article Greenberg was at pains to maintain was descriptive rather than prescriptive, and hence made no predictions as to how art would—and certainly no prescriptions as to how art should—develop in the future.¹² Though whether one should accept Greenberg’s view of this essay, or his account of modernism more generally, as a retrospective and descriptive account of the ‘very best’ art of its day at face value has been the subject of much controversy.

The fact that it has generally not been understood in this way forced Greenberg to append a postscript to 'Modernist Painting' on its republication in 1978 in which he sought to head off what he took to be a widespread misunderstanding of its purpose. By his own reckoning, he was 'trying to account in part for how most of the very best art of the last hundred-odd years came about' rather than 'implying that that's how it had to come about, much less that that's how the best art still has to come about'.¹³ Many remained unpersuaded by this attempt at clarification. Arthur Danto, for example, was far from alone in believing that what Greenberg judged to be the 'very best' art of its day was overdetermined by a prescriptive theory that entailed the rejection of any movement, such as Surrealism, that flouted the theory's requirements.¹⁴ Indeed, the mere fact that Greenberg understood modernism to pick out the 'best' art of the previous hundred years raises a problem for his simultaneous presentation of his modernism as descriptive rather than normative, for how could a narrative riding off the back of a series of evaluative judgements determining what is granted admission to the relevant domain be considered descriptive in any straightforward sense?

Take Greenberg's selectiveness with regard to the historical evidence: Surrealism, Dada, Futurism, and many other significant avant-garde movements of the modern period provide clear counterexamples to Greenberg's claim that modernism was characterized by a reduction to the essence of each art. Greenberg's response to this problem throughout his career was to maintain that modernism picked out the 'best' art of the modern period, rather than the art of that period per se. But if that is true, the narrative appears to say more about Greenberg's taste than it does about the history of modern art. However one comes out on this, Greenberg's contention that his modernism was descriptive in any straightforward sense would seem to be in trouble. Even if, like de Duve, one makes a point of taking Greenberg at his word, one will still have to explain how a narrative riding off the back of a series of value judgements can be seen as a description of the history of recent art, as opposed to a description of the history of Greenberg's taste.¹⁵

But rather than immediately concluding that Greenberg's theory was simply hostage to his taste, of which it was the prescriptive projection or, conversely, that his taste was simply hostage to a prescriptive theory of modernism necessitating any art that flouted the theory's requirements be judged accordingly, another response is available. For what this arguably reveals is the extent to which Greenberg's theory of modernism, and his understanding of his own activity as a formalist critic, were not only entwined but

mutually sustaining. As Greenberg put it: 'The best taste develops under the pressure of the best art and is the taste most subject to that pressure. And the best art, in turn, emerges under the pressure of the best taste.'¹⁶ Although circular, this formulation has the merit of making clear that Greenberg's modernism and formalism do not admit of the kind of straightforward prioritization, in terms of condition and conditioned that most of his critics, with the exception of de Duve, attribute to them. While the issues this raises cannot be addressed until Greenberg's understanding of such claims about the best art and taste have been unpacked, the extent to which aesthetic value and medium-specificity were mutually dependent in Greenbergian theory should already be apparent. Above all, it was this *binding* of whatever is still vital and aesthetically valuable in art to modernist medium-specificity that was Greenberg's primary legacy to the artworld; as such it is this that any aesthetic theory of art that wants to break free of the constraints of Greenbergian modernism, while remaining informed by recent art and art history, needs to untangle.

ii. 'Subject-matter', 'content', and 'form' in Greenberg's formalism

Greenberg's formalism has been the subject of as much tendentious criticism and misunderstanding as his modernism; the misguided view that Greenberg believed modernist artists pursued 'purity' for its own sake is mirrored by the equally mistaken view that Greenberg valorized 'form' for its own sake. It would be truer to both the spirit and the letter of Greenberg's writings to say he valued form for the sake of content. That said, Greenberg distinguished sharply between 'content' and 'subject-matter': prior to modernism 'subject-matter' would have picked out what a work of art was about; with the advent of modernism, according to Greenberg, it took on the more technical or artisanal sense of the specific possibilities, processes and effects afforded by the medium in question. The emergence of modernism was the advent of a self-reflexivity such that art became its own primary subject-matter:

In turning his attention away from subject-matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft. The nonrepresentational or 'abstract', if it is to have aesthetic validity . . . must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint

once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former. These themselves become the subject matter of art and literature.¹⁷

If 'subject-matter' came to mean this self-reflexive attention to what would previously have been regarded as the means rather than end of a given discipline, 'content', by contrast, came to mean the resulting work's 'quality' or 'value', for which it often served as a synonym in Greenberg's lexicon:

the quality of a work of art inheres in its 'content', and vice versa. Quality is 'content'. You know that a work of art has content because of its effect. The more direct denotation of effect is 'quality' . . . 'Effect', like 'quality' is 'content', and the closer reference to actual experience of the first two terms makes 'content' virtually useless for criticism.¹⁸

Contrary to what many of his critics have claimed, far from championing form over content, or believing content to be irrelevant to art, Greenberg always valued art for its quality, and believed a work's quality to be a sign of its 'content'; though he held the latter notion to be better served, for the purposes of criticism, by terms such as 'quality', 'value' or 'effect'. That said, given that what his critics meant by 'content' is what Greenberg would have called 'subject-matter', and had indeed marginalized on any ordinary understanding of the term—by identifying it with the technical qualities of the medium—there would seem to be a good deal of truth in this charge, even if his critics' vocabulary cut across his own.¹⁹

Greenberg had various suggestions as to why subject-matter became equated with the processes and effects of the medium with the emergence of modernism. These ranged from the social and political turmoil of nineteenth-century France, which politicized artists while leaving them unsure what constituency or class their work now addressed, the hypertrophied academicism of the official Salons, and the rise of a voracious culture industry that raided art for any effect that could be recycled as kitsch, through to the preference of modern sensibility for the 'concrete', 'immediate', and 'positive'. But I set all this to one side here, since Greenberg's explanation for modernism's emergence is not my topic: my topic here is what becomes of subject-matter once it is equated with the processes of the medium, and

how this relates to Greenberg's perception of the relation between form and content.²⁰

Greenberg's proposals for countering the judgement of someone who claims to find a mature work by Mondrian as aesthetically empty as it is phenomenally spare are instructive here.²¹ To paraphrase: imagine two paintings, a still-life consisting of a few pieces of fruit on a tablecloth and a full-blown crucifixion. According to the everyday conception of content that Greenberg rejects, one could say a priori that the latter has more content than the former. Since on any account that identifies content with subject-matter, possession of the former turns upon possession of the latter, and who would deny that a crucifixion is a more significant, complex and richer subject-matter than a still-life, in all sorts of registers—cultural, historical, and theological? No exercise of taste, no aesthetic judgement or discrimination, would be required to arrive at this conclusion; the possession of content could be simply read off the work's subject-matter or theme. Not so on Greenberg's account; on this account it is eminently possible for an inspired still-life to have more 'content' than an academic crucifixion. Take late Cézanne. Whether or not this is the case would be subject to the only relevant test in Greenberg's eyes, the test of experience. And when it came to art that meant aesthetic judgement: 'How could art that's proven itself satisfying, that's elicited a positive value judgement, fail to have 'content', 'relevance', 'human interest', etc.? Aesthetic value judgements, and nothing else, not interpretation, not explication, not argument, answer that kind of question.'²²

But how is Greenberg going to explain the fact, if it is a fact, that the still life has greater content, in his sense of this term, than the crucifixion? Indeed, how is anyone who makes such a claim going to account for this fact? What can they point to in support of their judgement? All they can point to in support of their response is what can be pointed out in the painting itself: the treatment of its theme, whatever that may be; the use of colour and line; the artist's touch, the way he or she handles the qualities of the medium and thereby respects or reformats the existing conventions of the discipline; the originality of the work's composition, and so on. But in doing so our imaginary interlocutor will have slid, not fortuitously but of necessity—as Greenberg would be the first to point out—from talking about 'content' to having to talking about 'form'. Form cannot but figure in the evaluation of content because, despite being art's highest value, 'content' in Greenberg's sense of the term cannot be directly pointed out in works of art. Though

one can point out the curved outline of Brancusi's *Bird in Space* (1928) one cannot point to its gracefulness—its quality or value as outline. This is something one either feels, on having one's attention drawn to relevant features of the work's form, or does not.²³ Appreciating a work's content in Greenberg's sense thus requires first-hand experience, a feeling of aesthetic pleasure or displeasure, in perceiving the work: 'Aesthetic value *is* affect; it moves, touches, stirs you . . . Aesthetic value, aesthetic quality can be said to elicit satisfaction or dissatisfaction . . . satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the "verdict of taste"'.²⁴

In putting the accent on a work's affective impact on a perceiving subject, Greenberg displays the most authentically Kantian dimension of his self-understanding as a critic. If aesthetic quality were an objective feature of the work, its presence should be amenable to demonstration; as a feeling occasioned by the work as an object of perception and reflection, however, its presence is subject to neither criteria nor rule, and can be ascertained through the test of experience alone. As such, 'content' or 'quality' fulfil the same function in Greenberg's lexicon as 'beauty' does in Kant's: they pick out a peculiar kind of feeling that may be elicited by perceiving certain objects, rather than predicating a property of those objects. This is why a formalist critic can only talk about the work's 'form': not for its own sake, more as a matter of integrity in the face of their experience of the work.²⁵ Yet, despite the difficulty of picking out 'content' or 'quality' directly, and the necessity of falling back onto talk about form instead, the two are nonetheless inextricably linked. On this account, form is our means of access to content, the condition of it becoming affective for a perceiving subject. This is why Greenberg focuses on form: by analysing the work's form, he takes himself to be getting at the substance of art—its content—by the only means possible.

Despite what Greenberg implies, however, it does not follow from the fact that a work's content is not objective that we cannot discuss it. We talk about other feelings and emotions, despite being unable point to them, so why can we not talk about the feelings to which aesthetic quality gives rise more or less well, depending upon our degree of articulacy, familiarity with doing so, and the range of relevant vocabulary at our disposal? Greenberg may have been led to think otherwise by his reading of Kant, in particular Kant's thought that aesthetic judgement is 'non-conceptual'. In Kantian terms, aesthetic judgement is reflective not determinative; if I say that 'x is beautiful' (in Greenberg's terms, that x has 'content' or 'quality' or 'value') I am not attributing a property to x so much as attributing responsibility for

the feeling occasioned in me to x . If I then try to put that feeling into words I may go astray in so far as there is nothing determinate there to be put into words. I am not thinking a determinate thought that I am unable to communicate for some reason; rather, I feel moved, I experience more or less intense aesthetic satisfaction, or its absence. But accepting this does not require that we cannot talk about what it feels like to be moved by art: *pace* Greenberg, there are only contingent constraints on trying to put what it feels like to be moved by a work of art into words. The best art criticism—criticism such as Greenberg's own—achieves precisely that.²⁶

iii. The relation between modernism and formalism I: the artistic medium

My reservations with his rhetoric aside, it should be clear that just as Greenberg, the theorist of modernism, did not believe artists pursued 'purity' for its own sake, but as a by-product of trying to defend high artistic standards; so Greenberg, the formalist critic, did not valorize 'form' for its own sake, but for the sake of 'content', which is to say, aesthetic quality. Indeed the motivation for the two claims is substantially the same: both modernism and formalism turn out, on closer inspection, to be instances of what Greenberg called a 'tropism towards aesthetic value.'²⁷ Given that Greenberg defined each in terms of the other this is hardly surprising:

It remains that modernism in art . . . has stood or fallen so far by its 'formalism'. Not that Modernist art is coterminous with 'formalism'. And not that 'formalism' hasn't lent itself to a lot of empty, bad art. But so far every attack on the 'formalist' aspect of Modernist painting and sculpture has worked out as an attack on Modernism itself because every such attack developed into an attack at the same time on superior artistic standards.²⁸

This close correlation, and at times outright identification, of modernism (medium-specificity) and formalism (aesthetic value and judgements thereof) goes to the heart of Greenbergian theory. Indeed the *strength* of this correlation between medium-specificity and 'superior artistic standards' in Greenberg's account was arguably the most important factor overdetermining the marginalization of aesthetics in later art theory, once the hold of modernist theory began to wane. Given this, I now turn to the

relation between them, focusing on the ideas of the artistic medium and the judgement of taste, the core of Greenberg's modernism and formalism respectively. The two intersect in Greenberg's understanding of an artistic convention. As the point at which aesthetic subject and artistic object interlock, this is the pivot upon which Greenbergian theory hinges. Getting clear about how Greenberg conceives artistic conventions is thus necessary not only to understanding his identification of modernism and formalism, but his theory as a whole.

According to Greenberg, judgements of taste take the formal qualities of works of art as their focus of appreciation. A work's form is understood, in turn, as the state in which it leaves the 'norms or conventions' of its medium, having tested them as to their 'uniqueness and irreducibility', and hence 'indispensability'.²⁹ Take a mature Pollock drip painting such as *Number 1 (Lavender Mist)* (1950): the judgement of taste would be premised upon the formal configuration that meets the critic's eye, and that configuration would itself embody, and in so doing record, the state in which this particular

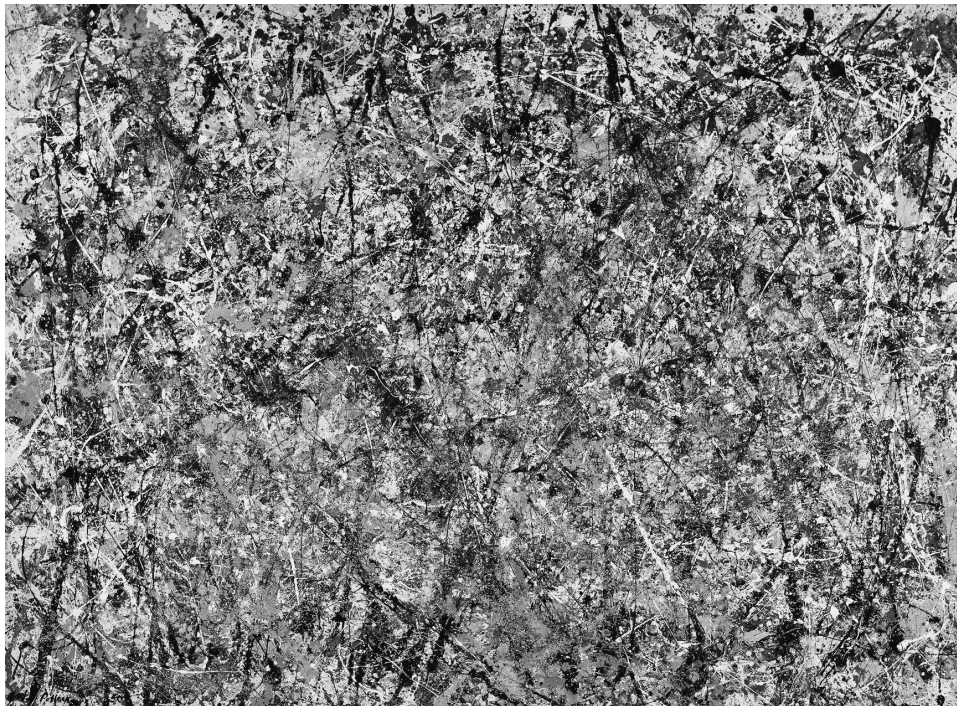


Figure 1.1 Jackson Pollock, *Number 1 (Lavender Mist)*, 1950 (oil, enamel and aluminium paint on canvas, 87 × 118 in. / 221 × 299.7cm). Image courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington DC / Bridgeman Images. © The Pollock-Krasner Foundation ARS, NY and DACS, London 2023.

painting leaves the conventions of painting as a discipline having tested them as to their indispensability or otherwise. This would include (among other things) the extent to which it respected or transgressed the conventions of easel painting from which it emerged in Pollock's oeuvre. Perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, Pollock's work extended the tradition of Western painting by subverting many, if not most, of what would previously have been regarded as its constitutive conventions or norms. Most obviously, these include the conventions by which the appearance of a three-dimensional scene is rendered on a two-dimensional surface. That is, the conventions of illusionistic perspective, the use of shadow and light (value contrast) to produce three-dimensional form, the gradation of colour and hue to convey distance, and so on.

But in addition to these conventions of depiction, Pollock's work also undercut what would previously have been considered the physical constraints of easel painting: that painting consists fundamentally of a window cut into a wider field of view, normally framed against a wall rather than, as in Pollock, an expanse that saturates or encompasses the viewer's entire field of vision, as a result of its mural-like dimensions. Indeed, the 'all-over' nature of Pollock's work set itself against various norms of part-by-part composition and balance that even most abstract art had respected until then. Pollock's work also took issue with many of the technical conventions that his contemporaries took for granted: that one paint on a stretched and braced canvas determining the extension of the image; that one prime the canvas so that the image is built up on its surface rather than being stained, in part, into its weave. That one apply traditional artists' materials with a brush, utilizing the trained dexterity of the wrist and the associated craft skills—'touch' being even more important in the absence of depiction—rather than dripping industrial paints onto unstretched canvas, allowing gravity and chance to play a role in determining the finished work.

All this and more would be taken in by the critic's 'practiced eye', an eye schooled in the same traditions as Pollock, and so aware of the precedents to which Pollock's work was itself a response and, in the light of that familiarity, delivering its 'verdicts'. Such verdicts would have built in, as background cognitive stock, considerations such as whether the work made sense in terms of its preceding tradition, in virtue of having itself made sense of that tradition, while also reformatting it in innovative, unexpected ways. As such, judgements of artistic merit would encompass a view as to whether a work relied solely on tried and tested solutions and, if it did not, whether

it nonetheless managed to retain a perspicuous relation to past work. For only in virtue of such a relation would a work's innovations be registered *as* innovations and thereby made to count, both aesthetically and artistically. What is required for an innovation to count in this way, according to Greenberg, is that it feel intensively meant in relation to the past history of its medium, rather than arbitrary:

Quality in art appears to be directly proportionate to the density or weight of decision that's gone into its making and a good part of that density is generated under the pressure of the resistance offered by the conventions of a medium of communication. This pressure can also act to guide and evoke and inspire; it can be an enabling as well as resistant pressure; and it guides and enables and inspires precisely in virtue of its resistance.³⁰

It is the absence of such pressure on the decisions evident in a finished work that makes for meretricious art. That is, art created in the absence of constraints acting not only as limiting conditions on an artist's activity but, simultaneously, as enabling conditions for that activity bearing meaning or significance. In this respect, making and evaluating of art are of a piece. When the critic delivers their judgement, it is subject to an analogous constraint to that under which artists labour when making the works judged: it is a judgement as to whether their own expectations have been surprised, their own taste extended rather than merely satisfied, by the work. By exposing the expectations of his or her taste to the best work of their own day, work that is not only the most challenging towards, but also the most informed by, the traditions it furthers through innovation, such a critic educates their eye and expands their taste. Thus, for Greenberg, taste is equally important to the production and reception of art. Indeed, it functions similarly in both: it is premised on the form—or, in the case of production, the series of forms—that the medium takes on in a work through previously accepted conventions being put to the test. With artists, this happens as they receive feedback from the medium in which they work while they work: 'The artist *receives* judgement-decisions—inspiration, if you like—from his medium as he works in it; one judgement-decision, as the artist himself sees . . . it, gives rise to another or reacts on a previous one or cancels it out or cancels itself out.'³¹ In this way the artist pressures and thereby educates their own taste, just as the critic's taste is pressured and educated by judging the resulting work.

The strength of Greenberg's position, as I see it, lies in the central role it attributes to the medium in 'pressurizing' or 'disciplining' the taste of both artist and viewer. To see what Greenberg is getting at here, think of the way in which a pervasive kind of recent installation art (in which everyday objects or materials are dispersed around a given space) often seems to court aesthetic failure. Such work can appear to have no constraints that have been worked within and against as a means of generating artistic meaning, other than those provided by the dimensions of a given container, or the nature and associations of the objects and materials themselves.³² But these would be insignificant—merely physical or psychological rather than aesthetic or artistic—features of the work until such time as they are made to count aesthetically or artistically on Greenberg's account. Whether, in any given case, this is really a failure *of the work*, or of the viewer who has failed to keep pace with development of art, and in doing so 'disciplined' their own taste by exposing it to the most challenging work of their day, will always be a moot point in practice, given that aesthetic judgement is not susceptible to proof. But the conceptual point should be clear: any artist who, in the absence of all constraint, is notionally free to do 'anything and everything' possesses only the illusion of freedom since, for freedom to count, for it to have weight or depth or significance, some source of friction is necessary, a 'worthy constraint' in the light of which some, but not all, objects or actions take on meaning. Only given some such constraint, and the possibility that at least some objects, actions or events might fail to meet it, does it make sense to judge any particular outcome as successful or significant. Without such constraints against which to judge, the idea of something constituting a meaningful achievement of its kind loses application, and the notional freedom 'to do whatever' all content. The medium functions as just such a significance-conferring constraint on Greenberg's theory of modernism. As such, it is the preeminent condition of artistic meaning and achievement.

The medium functions as such a constraint, and exerts such pressure, for at least two reasons.³³ The first is the weight of past history and precedent on present practice, and the concomitant need to go beyond past practice, but with fewer available means of doing so. An artistic innovation, on this view, will be the creation of a new solution to the problem of how to make compelling work in a given discipline where none had previously been thought available. The second is that the material nature of a given medium, with its characteristic possibilities and limitations—that paint is liquid and so cannot be cut, unlike wood, which cannot be poured; that stone is hard

but cannot be moulded, unlike metal, which cannot be carved—has to be dealt with when seeking out such solutions. Such possibilities and limitations need to be mastered, resisted or acquiesced to, rather than flouted or merely circumvented. Pollock's work is exemplary on both counts. Hence, the medium functions as both a necessary condition for creating works of art, and as an empirical constraint on the artist's possibilities of expression and innovation in so doing. It is in virtue of coming to terms in this way with the constraints of a particular medium, that works in that medium can be experienced as intensively meant, the decisions embodied in their final form felt to be artistically meaningful. It is only by dint of coping with this 'resistance' of the medium, itself conceived as an array of aesthetic, artistic, technical and (at least implicitly) social conventions and norms evolving over time, that whatever an artist has to say manifests itself. This is why no serious artist can afford, or would want, to evade the pressures of the medium. It is also why all genuine innovation takes place only after an artist has mastered a medium's existing conventions, yet still finds him or herself unable to express whatever it is they have to say within its framework. It is such being unable to express oneself within an existing framework, rather than any attempt to circumvent it, that is the root of all genuine innovation, innovation that impresses itself as meant, and so transforms a discipline from the inside.³⁴ This way of conceiving artistic innovation underwrites Greenberg's perception of Anthony Caro's 'breakthrough' sculptures from the early 1960s:

Caro's originality is more than a question of stylistic or formal innovation. Were it that it would amount to no more than a novelty, and taste would not, in the event, find itself so challenged by it. Caro's art is original because it changes and expands taste in order to make room for itself. And it is able to do this only because it is the product of a necessity; only because it is compelled by a vision that is unable to make itself known except by changing art.³⁵

In this way, conventions are transformed over time, not by fiat or act of will, but by artists who have assimilated the past conventions of their discipline, but who nonetheless find that they are unable to express themselves within those conventions as they have inherited them. In order to do so, it follows that they must already be in command of the conventions in question:

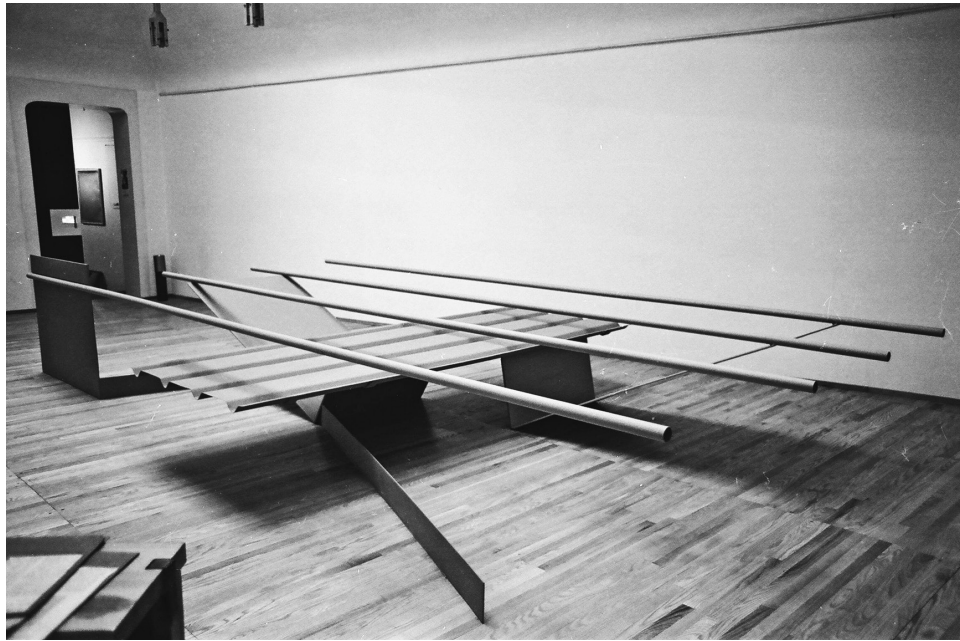


Figure 1.2 Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967 (steel, painted matt yellow, 38 × 229 × 126in. / 96.5 × 582 × 320cm) as installed in the *Recent Sculpture* exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, London (1967). National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Image courtesy John Kasmin / Barford Sculptures Limited. © The Estate of Anthony Caro. All rights reserved, DACS 2023.

The record shows no case of significant innovation where the innovating artist didn't possess and grasp the conventions that he changed and abandoned. Which is to say that he subjected his art to the pressure of these conventions in the course of changing or shredding them. Nor did he have to cast around for new conventions to replace those he had shed; his new conventions would emerge from the old ones simply by dint of his struggle with the old ones.³⁶

This process, in which conventions are transformed over time from the inside, through the ongoing practice of a discipline, is what Greenberg calls modernism. It is the product of this process, changing artistic form, that judgements of taste 'bear down' upon. This is the internal relation between modernism and formalism viewed from the side of the work judged, the object-side of the relation. What is crucial on this side of the relation is the role that artistic conventions play in conditioning and constraining the possibilities that form can be meaningfully made to take on in relation to past

form. But how does this relation show up when viewed from its subject-side? How does Greenberg believe aesthetic judgement works when brought to bear on the state in which a given work leaves the conventions of its medium having so tested them? This is to ask how Greenberg understands 'taste', and what he take its role in judging art to be. Addressing this question takes us from Greenberg's modernism to his formalism.

iv. The relation between modernism and formalism II: value judgement

Greenberg's most sustained treatment of taste and its place in aesthetic judgement is a series of brief texts published in various art periodicals throughout the 1970s. They were first conceived as a series of seminars and were given as such at Bennington College Vermont in April 1971.³⁷ The 'Bennington seminars' are his response to what he saw as an attack on aesthetics internal to art itself. Given that Greenberg conceived art primarily in terms of aesthetic value and valuing, from his perspective this constituted an abdication of art's very reason for being. Greenberg took this betrayal to be inspired by the resurgence of interest in Duchamp during the early 1960s, not least the influence of readymade paradigm on Minimalism and Conceptual Art.³⁸ If one were to sum up the animating thought of the Seminars in a sentence it would be that experiencing art in the full sense consists primarily of valuing, of responding positively or negatively to a work's quality or lack thereof. Without such valuing, according to Greenberg, one is not yet having an experience of art as art: 'When no aesthetic value judgement, no verdict of taste, is there, then art isn't there either, then aesthetic experience of any kind isn't there . . . it's as simple as that.'³⁹ It would be hard to overstate the significance of this identification of art with aesthetic valuing in Greenberg's thought. It is the dominant theme of his later work, and reveals both the degree to which he believed the artistic and aesthetic do not merely overlap but coincide, and the depth of his conviction that aesthetic judgement is constitutive of art—that art just *is* aesthetic valuing all the way down.

What Greenberg objected to most strongly in the art he took to be a product of Duchamp's baleful influence on advanced art from the mid-sixties onward was this rejection of valuing and, with it, the 'satisfactions exclusive to art'.⁴⁰ By 'satisfactions exclusive to art' Greenberg had in mind the difference between aesthetic judgements of art and other forms of such

judgement. This turns on registering the weight of aesthetically meant decision in a work's form, which would be redundant in judging natural beauty, for example. Unless, perhaps, one were admiring nature as God's creation; though in that case one would presumably no longer be admiring it primarily on aesthetic grounds. More specifically, he meant what he liked to call the satisfactions of 'art *as art*' as opposed, say, to art as social critique, entertainment, therapy, idea, happening, or the like: 'What I plead for is a more abiding awareness of the substance of art as value and nothing but value, amid all the excavating of it for meanings that have nothing to do with art as art . . . art *qua* art, all aesthetic experience in so far as it is aesthetic "dissolves" into value judgements.'⁴¹

'Art *qua art*', in contrast to art as anything else is above all an occasion for, and vehicle of, aesthetic valuing. 'Art *qua art*', that is, not only elicits such valuing on the part of its percipients, but also expresses such valuing on the part of the artist, whose aesthetic judgements it embodies in turn. Any response to 'art *as art*' as Greenberg understands it, could thus only manifest itself in terms of aesthetic valuing: 'If the experience of art is essentially the experience of value, and if value requires judging in order to be perceived, then it follows that when we talk about art as art, or aesthetic experience as aesthetic, we are talking about moments of judgement or evaluation.'⁴² In sum, art is to be understood in terms of value, value being the 'substance' of art, and the experience of such value conceived in turn in terms of aesthetic judgement or taste: 'Aesthetic experience *is* judging, is making judgements of taste, is liking or not liking, getting or not getting satisfaction in different degrees; an aesthetic intuition doesn't just coincide with, isn't just consubstantial with, a verdict of taste: it means a verdict of taste.'⁴³

But why *identify* art with the experience of aesthetic value in the first place? Especially given, as Greenberg must have been aware, doing so immediately creates various difficulties: not least how to understand those aesthetic experiences that are *not* aesthetic experiences of art, and how to distinguish those aesthetic experiences that are aesthetic experiences of art from such experiences more generally. For if art is constituted as art simply by virtue of eliciting aesthetic valuing, this would seem to commit Greenberg to the counterintuitive view that aesthetically pleasing natural vistas (among other things) are also art. Such a view fails, that is, to specify what *distinguishes* the aesthetic appreciation of art from other forms of such appreciation. One might try to defend Greenberg here by pointing out that judgements of natural beauty do not exhibit anything like the cognitive complexity of

judgements of artistic value, according to his own theory: they do not build in considerations about 'density of decision,' 'perspicuous relation to past tradition,' 'innovative testing of conventions,' and the like. On this response, everything Greenberg needs to distinguish in kind between aesthetic experience in general and the aesthetic experience of art in particular is already available within his own theory. And this would be true.

But this is not the path that Greenberg takes. Greenberg's response is instead to bite the bullet: the distinction between artistic and natural beauty is one of degree rather than kind. Aesthetic experiences of nature are a kind of 'raw' or 'unformalized' art: a species of art, but one that is as yet only *in potentia*, because it remains to be fully realized or communicated, by being embodied in an established artistic medium. But once such raw art is placed on the record—'cooked,' so to speak—by being embodied in a recognized medium, it becomes art proper. Until such time, raw art remains a kind of 'art at large': it is the kind of indeterminate or unstructured aesthetic intuition that most of us have more or less often (such as when enjoying a natural vista or cityscape) but that for only some of us then functions as a prelude to aesthetic creation proper, the creation of artistic form.⁴⁴ But as soon as such 'art at large' is formalized, by being subjected to the pressure of an established artistic medium, the kind of considerations appealed to above in distinguishing the aesthetic experience of art from that of nature immediately come into play:

What we agree to call art cannot be definitively or decisively separated from aesthetic experience at large . . . there turns out to be such a thing as art at large: art that is, or can be, realized anywhere and at any time and by anybody. . . . The aesthetic intuition of a landscape, when you don't convey it through a medium . . . belongs to yourself alone; nevertheless, the fact that you don't communicate your intuition through a viable medium doesn't deprive it of its 'status' as art . . . The difference between art at large and what the world has so far agreed to call art is between the uncommunicated and the communicated. But I don't find it a difference that holds. . . .

The crucial difference is not between the communicated and the uncommunicated, but between art that is presented in forms that are conventionally recognized as artistic and art that is not fixed in such forms. . . . Yet even this difference is a tenuous one, a difference of degree . . . You can't point to, much less define, the things or the place where formalized art stops and unformalized art begins.⁴⁵

Greenberg is nothing if not consistent here: by identifying art with aesthetic valuing he seems to beg a question as to how art can be distinguished from other kinds of aesthetic valuing. To this his response is that art cannot be so distinguished—at least not in kind, only in degree. But even remaining within the sphere of art, Greenberg's identification of art with aesthetic valuing raises a further question of justification, given the many forms of art since the sixties that have clearly wanted to be done with aesthetic considerations (and perhaps especially taste) altogether, but without thereby being done with art. Greenberg had a striking response when challenged on the identification of art and aesthetic valuing: 'It's value judgement that . . . confers 'form', whether in formalized or unformalized art.'⁴⁶ What might this mean?

Greenberg's review of Picasso's 1957 retrospective at MoMA is illuminating here. Greenberg maintains that many of Picasso's later paintings fail because their *pictorial* presence as paintings fails to eclipse their *physical* presence as objects: 'Modernist painting, with its more explicit decorativeness, does call attention to the physical properties of the medium, but only in order to have these transcend themselves. Like any other kind of picture, a modernist one succeeds when its identity as a picture, and as pictorial experience, shuts out the awareness of it as a physical object.'⁴⁷ Greenberg goes on to claim that many of Picasso's later works fail as a result of formulaic solutions, maintaining that because nothing in these works is itself a product of 'inspiration' or 'judgement-decision' nothing in them requires, or elicits, the viewer's capacity for aesthetic judgement in turn. Because Picasso increasingly imitated himself in his later work, Greenberg claims, his paintings were increasingly 'finished, in principle, as soon as [they were] started, and the result becomes a replica of itself.'⁴⁸ As a result, our awareness of the painting as a material object, a wilfully crafted *thing* rather than intensively meant *work*, resurfaces; it is no longer eclipsed by our aesthetic response to the painting as a picture. What it means for a work to be 'meant' rather than 'willed' should be understood in the sense that emerged from Greenberg's discussion of Caro's struggle with the medium of sculpture as he inherited it. As intensively meant works of art, unlike mere things, register the density of decision (or lack thereof) invested in the way in which the conventions sedimented in the history of a medium have been mined—transgressed, transformed, or consolidated—in coping with its material constraints in the present.

To anyone unsympathetic to Greenberg's starting point, the identification of art with aesthetic valuing, the distinction between 'crafted thing'

and 'meant work' will seem wholly implausible. So it is no surprise that Arthur Danto singles out just this passage as the basis on which to take issue with the assumptions underlying Greenberg's entire aesthetic. After citing Greenberg's remarks about the necessity for pictorial presence to eclipse material presence in modernist works, Danto remarks:

This is just a leap of faith: how would a monochrome red painting show its difference from a flat surface just covered with red paint? Greenberg believed that art alone and unaided presents itself to the eye as art, when one of the great lessons of art in recent times is that this cannot be so, that artworks and real things cannot be told apart by visual inspection alone.⁴⁹

I consider the significance of Greenbergian theory for Danto in Chapter 6. I cite this remark here because anticipating Greenberg's likely response to this objection provides an insight into what he might have meant when he claimed that aesthetic judgement 'confers form'. Greenberg would have replied, I take it, that if a red monochrome really cannot be distinguished from a flat surface that, it just so happens, is covered in red paint, then it had not succeeded as a picture; its identity as a picture had *failed* to eclipse our awareness of it as a physical object. There remains an ambiguity in this formulation, as it stands, as to whether 'succeeding (or failing) as a picture' means succeeding (or failing) in even becoming a picture (albeit perhaps a bad one), or being a picture and succeeding (or failing) as such. But given that Greenberg always maintained there is a difference in kind between responding to art and responding to things, any putative work that fails to elicit any aesthetic response whatsoever fails to transcend its phenomenal substrate, and so cannot be art. Eliciting such a response, whether positive or negative, is a condition of arthood for Greenberg. Accordingly, from Greenberg's perspective, if Danto's red monochrome really cannot be told apart from a world of 'mere real things', including everyday red surfaces, it fails to rise to the level of art. Succeeding as art—in this case succeeding pictorially—just *is* to give rise to an experience different in kind from that of mere red surfaces.

On this account, aesthetic judgement 'confers form' in the sense that such judgement values its object in the relevant sense, rather than merely cognizing that it is an object with a given set of properties (that of being red, painted, and flat). It takes an aesthetic judgement to 'constitute' its object as art because only such judgement is responsive to the specific source of value

in art, the work's form. Aesthetic judgements of art take the way in which a work's medium has been manipulated, its conventions tested, to arrive at this form as their focus of appreciation. In doing so, they are responding to the artist's aesthetic judgements as embodied in that form. This way of putting it appears to run the risk circularity, for how can the judgement that is itself supposed to 'confer form' also be said to be 'elicited by [the] form' it takes as its focus of appreciation? This threat of circularity arises from the fact that what is being characterized indifferently as 'aesthetic judgement' operates at two distinct levels: it has to 'confer' form in order to value its object in an aesthetic register; it must be 'elicited by' form to count as an aesthetic judgement of art. It is thus tempting to think that the threat of circularity could be removed simply by identifying the former register as 'aesthetic' and the latter as 'artistic'. But this would be too quick: it glosses over a problem that runs deeper than this way of characterizing the difficulty acknowledges, given that for Greenberg the aesthetic and artistic can be distinguished in degree but not kind.⁵⁰

Because works of art are *aesthetic all the way down*—the product of increasingly fine-grained adjustments based on a series of aesthetic judgements culminating in accepting the final form of the work—the empirical form of the work embodies and records the artist's aesthetic judgements. The work's viewer takes this form as the object of her own judgement in turn, on pain of failing to judge the work aesthetically. On this account, when Picasso fails, he does so because his manipulation of the medium has become mechanical, lacking in what Greenberg calls 'judgement-decision'.⁵¹ Because his own taste is unpressured by the medium as he works, his relation to the medium ceases to be aesthetic. As a corollary, his aesthetic judgements are no longer embodied in the final form of the work, and no longer require the viewer to exercise their own judgement in turn. The upshot is that his paintings fail to exert pressure on the taste of the viewer, and their presence as pictures fails to eclipse their identity as objects:

When the means of art becomes too calculable . . . whether in conception or execution and too little is left to spontaneity, then that awareness [of the picture as physical rather than pictorial] re-emerges. Picasso is as conscious of this problem as anyone has ever been, but he cannot, apparently, help himself anymore because he is committed to a certain notion of picture-making in which nothing remains to be explored, in which everything has been already given. Here spontaneity—or inspiration—can no longer play a real

part in the unifying conception of a picture, and is confined to nuances, the trimmings of minor elaboration. The picture gets finished, in principle, the moment it is started, and the result becomes a replica of itself.⁵²

Greenberg's argument here is the same as the one he mounted, some 20 years earlier, against academicism in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'. Once Picasso starts knocking out 'Picassos' he becomes as academic as any other academician, and for precisely the same reason: he fails to subject his judgement to the pressure of the medium as he works in it. The more mechanical making becomes, the more judgement drops out of the picture. As a result the artist no longer 'invites the beholder to accept the judgement-decisions he has accepted for himself', no longer 'counts on the beholder's taste as he counts on his own'.⁵³ How does Greenberg know this? The short answer is that he does not *know* this: he *judges* it to be so aesthetically. From Greenberg's perspective, there is nothing he need demonstrate to Danto here. He could not prove this is not a leap of faith if he tried. But this is not because there is something to be done here that Greenberg fails to do. On the contrary, if aesthetic judgements only exhibit subjective rather than objective universality, they are not subject to proof. Greenberg devoted the whole of 'Seminar II' to demonstrating this, which is why one would have expected him to have had the wit not to argue, in the subsequent seminar ('Can Taste be Objective?'), that judgements of taste may be objective after all.⁵⁴

What led Greenberg to do so, despite maintaining that aesthetic judgements cannot be proven, is a question I take up in the next chapter. But what should already be apparent is the extent to which Greenberg's account of modernism, as a process of immanent self-criticism rooted in the medium, *requires* his formalist account of aesthetic judgement on the part of both artist and viewer, with its reciprocal emphasis on the form the medium takes on as the result of the testing procedures of modernism, and vice versa. Without the working procedures peculiar to modernism and their relation to form, aesthetic judgement would be bereft of a suitable artistic object, would be without anything to judge. Likewise, without aesthetic judgement on the part of both artist and viewer, works of art could not be distinguished from mere real things; they would possess material properties like any other thing, but not qualities valued aesthetically. Formalism is thus internal to modernism; without it there would be no explanation of how the artistic self-criticism driving modernism functions. Similarly, modernism is internal to

formalism; it produces those distinctive objects, works of art, on which aesthetic judgement gains traction.

The two are mutually sustaining: they do not admit of the kind of priority Danto accords Greenberg's theory of modernism in determining his taste, or Krauss attributes to Greenberg's taste in determining his theoretical commitments. Indeed, it is arguably because they do not admit of easy partition, or straightforward relation between condition and conditioned, that the link between modernism and aesthetics proved so hard to break for those who took issue with Greenbergian theory. It may also explain why it proved so hard for later generations of artists and theorists to leave modernism behind without also taking themselves to be leaving aesthetics behind in so doing. For Greenberg never presented his own formalism as an aesthetic theory of merely local concern (pertaining to autonomous Western art, or modern painting, or some highly circumscribed forms of modern Western painting, c. 1860–1960); he presented it as an attempt to address the fundamental questions of aesthetics, as they pertained to art in general. This is what has had such a distorting effect on subsequent discussion of aesthetics in art theory.

Notes

1. See Greenberg's 'Towards a Newer Laocoön' (1940), in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. I, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 34.
2. 'Avant-garde' is Greenberg's early term for that element within modernism most concerned with the preservation of the high artistic standards of the past. On Greenberg's account, the avant-garde shows its commitment to the achievements of the past by refusing to abdicate the aspiration to comparable artistic standards in the present. Greenberg contrasts 'avant-garde' to 'avant-gardist', by which he means art that mistakes such innovation for an end in itself rather than a means to the preservation of artistic standards.
3. Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoön', 28.
4. T. J. Clark reintroduced Greenberg's early account of why modernism arose into debates that tend to focus on Greenberg's later account of how modernism works. See his exchange with Michael Fried, in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, 2nd ed., ed. Francis Francina (London: Routledge, 2000). See also the transcript of his exchange with Greenberg following his paper in *Modernism and Modernity*, ed. Benjamin Buchloch (Halifax: NSCAD Press, 1983). For a later commentary, see de Duve's 'Silences in the Doctrine' in *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). I take the distinction between the 'why' and 'how' of Greenberg's from de Duve. Unlike de Duve, I see these as Greenberg's early and mature periods, reserving the epithet 'late' for his appeal to Kant's aesthetics in the late sixties and early seventies. See Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Mark Cheetham also addresses the continuity of Greenberg's thought in 'Clement Greenberg's Strategic Formalism', in *Cheetham, Kant, Art and Art History: Moments of Discipline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87–100.
5. See Greenberg 'Modernist Painting' (1960), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. IV, 86.

6. Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 86.
7. Ibid.
8. 'The essential norms or conventions of painting are at the same time the limiting conditions with which a picture must comply in order to be experienced as a picture'. See Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 89.
9. Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 86.
10. Greenberg, 'After Abstract Expressionism', (1962) in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. IV, 131.
11. 'Towards a Newer Laocoön', 32.
12. Hence Greenberg's aversion to the 'concocted' works of Minimalism and Conceptual Art: seen as a *projection* of the modernist reduction, they become the embodiment of everything Greenberg claimed modernism was not; that is, a programme predicated on a conceptual 'logic' that permits extrapolation: 'The self-criticism in Modernist art has never been carried on in any but a spontaneous and largely subliminal way . . . it has been altogether a question of practice, immanent to practice, and never a topic of theory. Much is heard about programmes in connection with Modernist art, but there has actually been far less of the programmatic in Modernist than in Renaissance or Academic painting . . . It has taken the accumulation over decades of a good deal of personal painting to reveal the general self-critical tendency of Modernist painting. No artist was, or yet is, aware of it, nor could any artist ever work freely in awareness of it'. See Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 91. If Greenberg believed the latter, it raises a question as to what he imagined would happen as a result of telling artists precisely what he claimed no artist could work freely in the knowledge of.
13. Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 93–94.
14. Thus Danto writes (quoting Greenberg) that the 'greatest sin of all, given Greenberg's vision of each medium to itself [is that] "it is possible to construct faithful duplicates in wax, papier-maché, or rubber of most of the recent paintings of Ernst, Dali, and Tanguy. Their 'content' is conceivable, and too much so, in other terms than those of paint"'. So surrealism had to be explained away as outside the pale of history'. See Arthur C. Danto, 'Painting and the Pale of History' in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 107 and 'Surrealist Painting', in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. I, 225–26.
15. 'Modernist Painting' and 'Towards a Newer Laocoön' don't offer a programme, but an explanatory summary of a historical development which has taken place and which has never been a programme'. See de Duve, *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, 52.
16. Greenberg, 'Can Taste be Objective?', *Artnews* 72 (February 1973): 23. This paper, the third of Greenberg's 1971 'Bennington Seminars', is collected in *Homemade Esthetics*, a book that Greenberg projected but failed to complete during his lifetime, 23–30. The book includes the original seminars and the revised versions that subsequently appeared in various art magazines during the seventies.
17. Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. I, 9. As with his modernism, the fundamental tenets of Greenberg's formalism, such as the distinction between 'subject-matter' and 'content' and the equation of the latter with a work's aesthetic effect, date back to his earliest essays: 'The content of the poem is what it does to the reader, not what it communicates'. See Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoön', 33–34.
18. Greenberg, 'Complaints of an Art Critic', 269–70.
19. 'What a work of art is "about"—subject, theme, "ideas", emotions—is, again, not equivalent to its content or meaning. About-ness doesn't isolate the *effect* of a work, either in part or in whole; it doesn't specify the substance of an aesthetic experience. But it's only in that experience that content or meaning dwells—and dwells there inextricably not to be grasped in language'. See Greenberg, 'The Language of Esthetic Discourse' (Seminar VIII), *Homemade Esthetics*, 67–68.
20. For Greenberg's social theory see 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' and 'Towards a Newer Laocoön'. On these see T. J. Clark 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock 'Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed', and Thomas Crow 'Modernism and Mass Culture', collected in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina.
21. See 'The Language of Esthetic Discourse', 67–71.
22. Ibid., 67.
23. Greenberg's argument here has affinities with Frank Sibley's neo-Kantian claim that no array of non-aesthetic properties ever suffices, logically, to license the inference of an aesthetic one. Identifying an object's aesthetic properties requires, in addition, discrimination or taste.

- See 'Aesthetic Concepts', in Sibley, *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. J. Benson, B. Redfern and J. Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
24. Greenberg, 'Seminar One', *Arts Magazine* 48 (November 1973): 45. This is republished as 'Intuition and Esthetic Experience' in *Homemade Esthetics*, 7.
 25. 'Anything in a work of art that can be talked about or pointed to automatically excludes itself from the "content" of the work, from its import, tenor, gist or "meaning" . . . Anything in a work of art that does not belong to its "content" has to belong to its "form" . . . In itself "content" remains indefinable, unparaphrasable, undiscussable . . . the unspecifiability of its "content" is what constitutes art as art. . . . I who am considered an arch-"formalist", used to indulge in that kind of talk about "content" myself. If I do not do so any longer it is because it came to me, dismayingly, some years ago that I could always assert the opposite of whatever it was I did say about "content" and not get found out; that I could say almost anything I pleased about "content" and sound plausible.' Greenberg, 'Complaints of an Art Critic', 269–70.
 26. See, for example, Greenberg's reviews of Pollock dating back to 1943. On these, see Thierry de Duve, 'The Paths of Criticism', in *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, 13–37.
 27. See my epigraph from 'Necessity of "Formalism"', (1971) in *New Literary History*, 3, no. 1 (1971), 191, reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*.
 28. 'Necessity of "Formalism"', 193.
 29. See Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 86, 89, and 'After Abstract Expressionism', 131, respectively.
 30. Greenberg, 'Convention and Innovation' (Seminar VI), *Homemade Esthetics*, 48. On 47 Greenberg writes: 'The particular satisfactions we get from formalized art are due, in some essential part, to the sense gotten of resistances coped with by dint of choices or decision (*intuited* decisions or what I call *judgement-decisions*). Quality, the very success or goodness, of formal art derives, formally, from these decisions, from their intensity or density'.
 31. See Greenberg, 'Seminar Five', *Studio International* (May–June 1975), republished as 'Judgment and the Esthetic Object' in *Homemade Esthetics*, 42–43. On 42 Greenberg claims of the judgement-decisions that generate art: 'Since aesthetic experience is essentially judging, these decisions must consist in judging, just as appreciation does. And because they consist in judging, these decisions are of a special kind in their very character as decisions . . . When the artist makes an aesthetic decision he experiences its result in the decision itself, and at the same time'.
 32. I have in mind work by artists such as Tomoko Takahashi or Jason Rhoades, but the point generalizes.
 33. 'Aesthetic pressure can come from only two directions. There is the pressure of what the artist has to say, make, express. Facing that is the pressure of the conventions of his medium, which is also the pressure of taste—for in the end it's taste and nothing else that empowers or disempowers convention . . . Convention isn't "form," rather it's a limiting and enforcing condition that functions in the interests of the communication of aesthetic experience.' Greenberg 'Convention and Innovation', 51.
 34. Thus Greenberg claimed that, like Pollock, Cézanne—whom he claimed wanted to 'shade deep' even though his taste would not permit it—was a great painter in large part because he was a 'reluctant' rather than a 'premature' innovator: 'Because Cézanne never stopped regretting the light and dark of illusionist tradition; because he kept on trying to rescue the conventions that his Impressionist vision compelled him to undermine—it was in some very important part because of this, the back-drag of the quality of the past—that Cézanne's art steadied itself as it did, for all its ups and downs, on an extraordinarily high level. It was almost precisely because of his greater reluctance to "sacrifice" to innovation that Cézanne's newness turned out to be more lasting and also more radical than that of the other post-Impressionists.' See 'Convention and Innovation', 54. See also 'Cézanne and the Unity of Modern Art' in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. III, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 82–91.
 35. Greenberg 'Contemporary Sculpture: Anthony Caro' (1965) in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. IV, 208.
 36. Greenberg, 'Convention and Innovation', 53.
 37. I have quoted freely from these 'Seminars' in the preceding sections. They are collected, in both their published and previously unpublished forms, as *Homemade Esthetics*. The drafts of these seminars are lodged in the archive of Clement Greenberg's Papers at the Getty Research Institute LA, boxes 28–29.
 38. See de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, Chapters 4–5 and 'Wavering Reflections' in *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, 89–120.

39. Greenberg 'Seminar VII', *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 10 (June 1979): 97; republished as 'The Experience of Value', *Homemade Esthetics*, 62.
40. 'Art can do without taste—I hear voices from as far back as 1913 saying this. What they mean, without knowing it, is that art can do without art; that art can do without offering the satisfactions which art alone can offer. That's what art doing without taste really means. Well, if the satisfactions exclusive to art are dispensable, why bother with art at all?' Greenberg, 'Can Taste be Objective?', 30.
41. Greenberg 'The Experience of Value', 63.
42. *Ibid.*, 61–62.
43. Greenberg, 'Judgement and the Esthetic Object' (Seminar V), *Homemade Esthetics*, 42.
44. This is the point at which Greenberg's aesthetic is most clearly indebted to Benedetto Croce's conception of 'art as intuition'. See Croce, 'Intuition and Art', in *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. Colin Lyas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12–23.
45. Greenberg, 'Intuition and Esthetic Experience' (Seminar I), *Homemade Esthetics*, 5–6.
46. Greenberg, 'The Experience of Value' (Seminar VII), *Homemade Esthetics*, 60.
47. Presumably Greenberg means 'only succeeds' or 'can only succeed' here. Greenberg, 'Picasso at Seventy-Five', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. IV, 33.
48. *Ibid.*, 34.
49. Danto, *After the End of Art*, 71.
50. This problem has notable affinities to the question as to whether the feeling of aesthetic pleasure logically (rather than temporally) 'precedes' or 'succeeds' the judgement of taste, that is, whether pleasure grounds judgement or judgement grounds pleasure—which Kant calls 'the key' to the critique of taste. See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (hereafter *CJ*), trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); §9; Ak. 217–19. References will refer to the section number followed by pagination in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Vol. V of the *Akademie Ausgabe (Kants gesammelte Schriften* [Berlin: Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1908–1913]).
51. On the role of 'judgement-decision in Greenberg's account of artistic creation, see 'Convention and Innovation' See also note 31.
52. Greenberg, 'Picasso at Seventy-Five', 34.
53. Greenberg 'Seminar Five', 191; reprinted as 'Judgement and the Esthetic Object', 42.
54. Greenberg, 'Esthetic Judgement' (Seminar II) in *Homemade Esthetics*, 10–22.

2

Modernism and Formalism

The Internal Limits of Greenbergian Theory

It remains: that when no aesthetic value judgement, no verdict of taste, is there, then art isn't there either, then aesthetic experience of any kind isn't there. It's as simple as that. . . .

I don't mean that art shouldn't ever be discussed in terms other than those of value or quality. . . . What I plead for is a more abiding awareness of the substance of art as value and nothing but value, amid all the excavating of it for meanings that have nothing to do with art as art . . . art *qua* art, all aesthetic experience in so far as it is aesthetic 'dissolves' into value judgements.

Clement Greenberg 'Seminar VII' (1971/1979)

The previous chapter provided an overview of the internal structure of Greenbergian theory. After considering each wing of the theory separately, I then turned to their relation. Without Greenberg's explanation of modernism as a process of testing the conventions of an art as to their indispensability or otherwise, formalism would be without an object to value aesthetically; without formalism's distinctive kind of valuing, works of art could only show up as willed things rather than meant works. Modernism is thus internal to formalism: it is the process of generating the distinctive kind of entities that formalism takes as its focus of appreciation. But formalism is equally internal to modernism: it explains how such entities could come into being, by artists subjecting the results of their interrogation of the medium to aesthetic judgement as they engage in it. Indeed, it is largely because the two were so mutually dependent and supportive that they proved so hard to parse by later artists or theorists who wanted to be done with modernism. With that structure in place, I now want to put pressure on each wing of Greenberg's theory in turn.

i. The limits of Greenberg's formalism I: the 'objectivity' of taste

If, as Greenberg maintained, aesthetic judgement constitutes art as art, it follows that without such judgement art does not exist or function as such.¹ What remains unclear, however, is what Greenberg took aesthetic judgement to consist in and how he thought it operated. That it involves not merely valuing but evaluation is clear; but an evaluation based on what? Greenberg was hard pressed to point to criteria for aesthetic judgement, which he believed must exist, even though he was unable to produce them. They must exist, he reasoned, because without them there would be no reason to believe that taste was more than merely subjective preference, Kant's arguments to the contrary notwithstanding.² This problem exercised Greenberg throughout the 'Seminars', but he tackled most directly in Seminar III, 'Can Taste Be Objective?'

The legitimacy of judgements of taste, that is, the right with which we demand agreement from others for judgements based on nothing more than feeling, is the central problem of Kant's aesthetics. Why precisely *should* others agree? But Greenberg remained dissatisfied with Kant's solution. According to Kant, judgements of taste lay claim to subjective, rather than objective, universality, that is, to universalizing over subjects rather than objects. In Kant's example, when I judge 'this rose is beautiful', I judge that all other (similarly endowed) judges should find it so, and not that I, or anyone else, should find any other object of the same general kind beautiful. As such, aesthetic judgements are particular as regards their objects, universal as regards the claim they raise on other judges.³ This gives aesthetic judgements the grammatical, but not the logical, form of determinant judgements that subsume a particular under a concept. Compare 'this rose is red' or 'this rose is stunted'.

But this surface form belies their true nature. Unlike aesthetic judgements, determinative judgements hold irrespective of whatever consulting my faculty of feeling may tell me. If I claim 'this is a rose' when confronted with a tulip, or 'this rose is red' when it is in fact white, I am simply wrong, whatever my feelings may say. But it would make no sense to say I am mistaken about my *feeling* that it is beautiful. For how could I be mistaken about that—about whether I do indeed take pleasure in my perception of it, as opposed to whether I do so for the right reasons or on the right grounds?

Unlike determinate judgements that predicate a concept of an object, then, aesthetic judgements attest to the subjective state—the feeling of pleasure or displeasure—that judging a given object occasions in me; they claim that all similarly cognitively endowed judges (in Kant’s vocabulary, all ‘finite rational beings’) *should* share my feeling in judging this rose aesthetically, assuming of course that each of us is judging correctly.

To this Greenberg objected that only if standards of taste could be posited, even if they remain inaccessible to rational reflection, would we be justified in thinking there were any objective grounds for taste at all. Kant would have recognized Greenberg’s worry, as to the probity of such judgements, but not his solution. Kant’s whole approach was designed to show that such judgements legitimately demand assent *despite* not being objective. Greenberg was aware that he was departing from Kant here. Faced with a lack of objective criteria or standards for judgement to which he could point, Greenberg appealed instead to the ‘historical record’:

The solution of the question of the objectivity of taste stares you in the face, it’s there in the record . . . In effect—to good and solid effect—the objectivity of taste is probatively demonstrated in and through the presence of consensus *over time*. That consensus makes itself evident in judgements of aesthetic value that stand up under the ever-renewed testing of experience. . . . people who look, listen, or read hard enough come to agree largely about art over the course of time.⁴

Greenberg’s appeal to the record of consensus in judgements over time, especially on the part of those who ‘look, listen or read hard enough’, owes more to Hume’s account of the ‘true judges’ in ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ than it does to Kant.⁵ It even raises a similar question as to what we should do when such judges disagree, and it is in response to this worry that Greenberg invokes the empirical record of consensus over time. For if it could be shown that judgements of taste do indeed tend to converge over time, that would mitigate the significance of disagreements in the present for the objectivity thesis. This move is in keeping with Greenberg’s tendency throughout the ‘Seminars’ to empiricise or psychologise Kant’s own arguments. Greenberg was aware that in doing so was departing from Kant; he was even aware, albeit in a vague kind of way, of why such a solution would not have been acceptable to Kant himself:

Kant's case . . . offer[s] the best clue as to why the consensus of taste hasn't been taken seriously enough: it was solely a matter of record, too simply an historical product. To found the objectivity of taste on such a product would be proceeding too empirically and therefore too unphilosophically. Philosophical conclusions were supposed to catch hold in advance of all experience; they were supposed to be arrived at through insulated reasoning, to be deduced from premises given *a priori*.⁶

This is at best a misleading characterization of Kant's method: the central problem that Kant addresses in the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' and the 'Deduction' arises from the fact that people do, as a matter of empirical fact, demand agreement from one another for some (though not all) judgements based on nothing more than feeling. Kant's question is: *With what right* do they do so? But set the confusions in the method Greenberg attributes to Kant to one side. He is right to claim that Kant does not argue on empirical grounds. Kant would be unwilling to ground universality on any mere fact of empirical consensus, however general. The question is why, and Greenberg unwittingly supplies the answer when he appeals to the great art of the past to support his proposals for amending Kant. Greenberg asks whether it is conceivable that Homer, Titian, and Bach, among other past masters, were judged great in the past, and continue to be judged great in the present, by dint of an 'accidental convergence of a multitude of strictly private, solipsistic experiences'.⁷ Greenberg's point has a certain rhetorical force, arising from the widespread conviction that these artists are indeed the pinnacle of their respective disciplines. But the alternative he poses: either taste is objective or all aesthetic judgements are made in a cultural vacuum cut off from past precedent, is wholly unconvincing. We know that the latter was not a live possibility for Greenberg, given that he always emphasized the extent to which past art and taste exert pressure on present art and taste:

It's the best taste that . . . forms the consensus of taste. The best taste develops under the pressure of the best art and is the taste most subject to that pressure. And the best art, in turn, emerges under the pressure of the best taste. The best taste and the best art are indissoluble.⁸

So Greenberg clearly never entertained the view that the consensus of taste is the result of a miraculous overlapping of 'strictly private, solipsistic experiences'. But why would it follow from the fact that this is *not* the case,

that taste must be objective? This is a non-sequitur. It would be more persuasive to argue the contrary: that *were* a series of individuals' judgements arrived at independently of both one another and the pressure of past precedent on present judgement, and still found to align, this would constitute evidence for the objectivity of taste, rather than vice versa. The very fact that such judgements are not arrived at independently of one another implies that such judgements are unlikely to be objective in the sense intended. Had Greenberg reasoned more consistently, he might have been prompted, like Kant, to reflect on where our tendency to argue as though such judgements are objective derives from, and whether it is justified.⁹

Thierry de Duve has offered a more compelling answer to this question than Greenberg, an answer that starts from the same fact that Greenberg employs to argue for the objectivity of taste, namely, the weight of historical consensus. De Duve suggests that taste, especially the canon of sanctioned past taste, may be thought of by analogy to the record of jurisprudence, the canon of accepted legal precedent and argument. On this analogy, the canon of past masters and works is akin to a tradition of legal precedent. It is formed by past judgements on particular cases, and it underwrites current legal practice. New cases have to be judged on their merits against such precedent as they arise. They have to be *judged*, despite the body of existing law, because they will not replicate, in every particular, those that underwrite existing legal practice. A judgement is thus required as to the authority of past precedent to determine current practice, a judgement as to the applicability of past precedent to the current case.¹⁰ As such, existing legal precedent does not constitute a simple 'subsumption rule' for new cases, and such cases may in principle be put forward as test cases for judgement. That is, as cases that may modify or perhaps even overturn, past precedent. Of course this will be the exception rather than the rule, and will prove hardest where past precedent weighs most heavily, as in the case of previously undisputed masters for example.¹¹ While Greenberg would be right to claim that any existing consensus of taste is an 'objective historical fact', albeit a more contested one that he likes to acknowledge—on this analogy, he would be pointing to the existence of a body of prior legal doctrine—he would be wrong to infer from the fact of such consensus that particular judgements of taste are statements of fact or, *a fortiori*, that the faculty of taste itself must be objective. But this is precisely what Greenberg now does: 'We know the best taste well enough by its effects . . . And through those effects the consensus of taste makes itself a

fact, and makes the objectivity of taste a fact—an enduring fact. The presence of this fact is what's primary.¹²

In effect, Greenberg illegitimately infers a *past consensus of fact* from the *fact of a past consensus*. He slides from the existence, or 'fact', of this historical record to the claim that this historical record is itself a record of fact. But judgements of fact, if they indeed are judgements of fact, do not require a consensus of the kind Greenberg has in mind: they are either true or false, and which they are can be ascertained independently of canvassing how anyone else may feel about the matter. Greenberg tries to support his inference by claiming that the only way to explain why the consensus endures is to assume the objectivity of its verdicts. But not only is this false, since a consensus might endure for any number of psychological, sociological, cultural, or institutional reasons—unconscious bias, path dependence, prejudice, power or habit¹³—that have little to do with its supposed objectivity, but the argument Greenberg offers in support of it is plainly circular:

There's no explaining this durability—the durability that creates a consensus—except by the fact that taste is ultimately objective. The best taste, that is; that taste which makes itself known by the durability of its verdicts; and in this durability lies the proof of its objectivity. (My reasoning here is no more circular than experience itself.) . . . It's the record, the history of taste that confirms its objectivity and it's this objectivity that in turn explains its history.¹⁴

Greenberg grounds the objectivity of taste on the observation that the 'best' taste not only endures, but increasingly coincides over time. Were one to press Greenberg on how we know that the 'best' taste is the best, his answer would have to be that it endures over time; and to the further question as to why it endures his answer would have to be that it endures because it is the best, that is, because it is objective. In other words, the argument reduces to claiming that the objectivity of taste is demonstrated by its endurance, and it endures because it is objective. To be fair, Greenberg is the first to acknowledge the circularity of his reasoning, but this only shows that reasoning on the basis of experience will not get you out of the circle.

Moreover, one can see that this solution does not work independently of pointing to its circularity. Greenberg argues in 'Seminar II' that you cannot prove to someone who disagrees with your aesthetic judgement that they are wrong. This provokes the obvious rejoinder: If you cannot prove it, on

what basis do you assert its objectivity? Evaluations are not descriptions, no matter how seemingly self-evident. Consider Greenberg's choice of Bach as a composer whose greatness is beyond doubt. This is an unfortunate example, in so far as Bach's standing today stands in contrast to the lesser opinion of earlier centuries. If Greenberg were right, Bach would have to be considered an *objectively* great or minor composer, depending on the dominant view of the age one consulted, which is self-defeating.¹⁵ Moreover, this would stand in stark contrast to the answer one would receive were one to ask whether or not Bach was a composer. Only the latter is a matter of fact; the former remains a matter of judgement. Greenberg cannot respond that those earlier views were an aberration, which the subsequent history of taste has adequately corrected for, as that would beg a question as to how anyone could be in a position to know that the history of taste had finished its corrective work. Can we be sure that in two hundred years' time it may not be current consensus that seems questionable? The point is a conceptual one, not an empirical point about Bach: even were we unable to point to Bach, or any other artist for whom such a discrepancy of judgement over time holds true, we would be unable to rule out the possibility that present (and past) consensus might not endure. Because induction cannot furnish the necessity that Greenberg's argument requires, the solution he derives from appealing to the historical record cannot suffice to underwrite the universality claimed by judgements of taste.

ii. The limits of Greenberg's formalism II: the idea of 'aesthetic distance'

The other aspect of Greenberg's empiricisation of Kant is a tendency to read the third *Critique*, psychologically, as a theory of 'what goes on in the mind' when we experience art.¹⁶ This is apparent in his tendency to conflate Kant's understanding of 'disinterest' with a psychological notion of 'distancing'. Although the former has a psychological dimension, which comes out in Kant's talk of needing to 'abstract from' all interest (whether of sense or reason) if one 'mean[s] to play the judge in matters of taste', it should be understood primarily as a *condition* that any bona fide judgement of taste must fulfil to count as pure. The latter, by contrast, is an empirical *characterization* of a particular mental state that may or may not obtain of a given consciousness at a given time, and has often been thought to characterize 'aesthetic

consciousness.' Greenberg slides between the two, typically coming down on the psychological side of the divide.¹⁷ Thus he attributes his own understanding of 'psychical distance' to Edward Bullough's psychological account, while continuing to present his own position as Kantian nonetheless: 'Kant pointed . . . to aesthetic *distance* when he said that the "judgement of taste . . . is indifferent as regards the being of an object;" also when he said "Taste is the faculty of judging of an object, or a method of representing it, by an entirely *disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction".¹⁸ By conflating disinterest with distance, Greenberg transforms Kant's notion into psychological description. In this, it has to be said, he is far from alone.

For Kant, by contrast, disinterest functions as a necessary but not sufficient condition for demanding the agreement of others when making a judgement of taste. It is necessary because failing to abstract from any idiosyncratic interests one may have in the existence of the object judged will render any claim on the agreement of others who do not share those interests otiose; it is not sufficient because the 'Third Moment' lays down a second condition for (legitimately) claiming to speak in a 'universal voice', which Kant calls 'subjective purposiveness'. This is the idea that any genuine judgement of taste must be premised solely on its object's bare *suitability* (or lack thereof) for giving rise to that free formal interplay between the faculties of imagination and understanding that Kant takes to be the source of aesthetic pleasure. Kant holds these two conditions, taken together, to be sufficient to provide the universality and necessity required to ground aesthetic judgement a priori.¹⁹ As such, Kant's account is formal rather than substantive: it concerns the minimal conditions that must be met for claiming to speak in a universal voice, what is required to make doing so legitimate *in principle*; it does not concern itself with whether particular judgements succeed or, if so, why.

So Kant's notion of 'disinterest' should not be understood to pick out anything psychologically substantive, such as a mental attitude or state of mind; it is a condition that any candidate aesthetic judgement must fulfil and, in virtue of fulfilling, may count as pure—other conditions being met. It is also a condition that we may never finally know to be fulfilled, given the opacity of our own deepest motivations. Merely concurring with another's judgement does not demonstrate that either is free of interest, since they might partake of the same interest, or of different interests that nonetheless generate the same verdict. Given, moreover, that neither judge need be aware of their own interests, nor able to determine this through introspection, neither can *know*

whether their own judgement is disinterested. Thus neither would be justified in claiming, in Greenberg's terms, that they had succeeded in adopting a suitably 'distanced' attitude towards a particular object, or made a judgement warranting universal assent.

By an 'interest' Kant has in mind one of two things: either anything idiosyncratic to the particular judge, such as a contingent personal motive (conscious or otherwise) that she may have for liking or disliking an object other than its beauty; or any non-personal, hence putatively universal, reason she might have for liking it not grounded in its beauty, such as a concept of its intrinsic worth or extrinsic goodness. That is, either a moral interest one may take directly in its mere existence, or a satisfaction one might take in its suitability for fulfilling some further end. 'Beauty' by contrast to either the 'agreeable' or the 'good' indicates the object's sheer suitability for bringing about a 'formal purposiveness in the play of the subject's cognitive powers'.²⁰ For this reason Kant maintains that *interests*, whether of inclination or morality, are precisely what must be abstracted from in order to claim, but only to claim (one never being in a position to do more) to speak in a 'universal voice': 'A judgement about beauty in which there is mixed the least interest is very partial and not a pure judgement of taste. One must not be in the least biased in favour of the thing's existence, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in matters of taste.'²¹ Only a liking free of such interest merits being called a judgement of taste: 'Among these three kinds of satisfaction [in the agreeable, the beautiful and the good] only that of the taste for the beautiful is a disinterested and *free* satisfaction; for no interest, neither that of the senses nor that of reason, extorts approval. . . . Favour is the only free satisfaction.'²²

That a judgement be 'disinterested'—based neither on inclination nor respect, but on what Kant calls 'favour', or free liking—thus functions logically, rather than psychologically, as one necessary precondition on such a judgement counting as pure. When Greenberg repurposes the idea as a way of accounting for his experience as an art critic, however, it gets reinterpreted as a substantive psychological fact. That is, as a mental *act* of distancing or 'twist' in one's everyday practical engagement with the world that puts the kind of interested attention typically required by such coping 'out of gear'.²³ The reason Greenberg interprets disinterest in this way is that he believes such distancing to be what sets interest aside, thereby effecting the transition from instrumental concern to aesthetic valuing. By distancing the object one 'purifies' one's engagement with it, valuing it for its own sake, as an end in

itself. Unlike Kant, who lays down a *condition* that must be met—we know not how—for an aesthetic judgement to count as pure, Greenberg takes himself to be pointing out the psychological *mechanism* that enables this condition to be met:

The turn from ordinary to aesthetic intuition is accomplished by a certain mental or psychic shift. This involves a kind of distancing . . . a mind-set ensues whereby that which enters awareness is perceived and accepted for its own immediate sake . . . You become relieved of, distanced from, your cares and concerns as a particular individual coping with your particular existence.²⁴

By 'ordinary intuition' Greenberg has in mind the everyday relation to the world that has to be 'put out of gear' to allow aesthetic intuition to take place: 'The distinction between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic is *installed by* what has come to be called "aesthetic distance". "Distance" here means detachment from practical reality, the reality we live in ordinarily.'²⁵ There are two problems with this. The first is that one may never know whether the relevant 'mind-set' has in fact been achieved. This is why Kant maintains that we can only ever *lay claim* to the agreement of others. Greenberg is aware that one can never prove that one has judged correctly; but this is not because, as he seems to believe, one is right despite being unable to demonstrate as much. It is because one can never be certain one has succeeded in making a judgement that is 'pure' in the relevant sense. The second is that it makes 'distancing', which Greenberg equates with aesthetic judgement, look disturbingly voluntaristic; it runs the risk of reducing aesthetic judgement to an act of will, a matter of *adopting* the desired attitude. But this leads to just the kind of relativism that Greenberg's own claims for the 'objectivity' of taste were an attempt to avoid; for what any given person may or may not be able to distance can only ever be a psychological fact about that person, and the development of their powers of distancing objects or events of various kinds, and psychological facts of this kind are unable to ground normative demands on the agreement of others. This is an entailment of the view that Bullough had the consistency to meet head-on:

Distance . . . admits naturally of degrees, and differs not only according to the nature of the *object*, which may impose a greater or smaller degree of Distance, but varies also according to the *individual's capacity* for

maintaining a greater or lesser degree. . . . not only do *persons differ from each other* in their habitual measure of Distance, but the *same individual differs* in his ability to maintain it in the face of different objects and of different arts.²⁶

Such a psychologistic account cannot resolve the issues of necessity and universality that exercise Greenberg. Nonetheless, Bullough's recognition of the role played by both subject and object draws attention to something that remains curiously underplayed in Greenberg's account. This alternates between the claim that 'distancing' is something the subject does to the object, and the claim that it is something the subject does to herself, a kind of auto-affective act that puts their own interests out of gear. Although the latter is closer in spirit to Kant's requirement that the subject abstract from all interest if they aspire to judge aesthetically, the two ultimately have more in common than apart, notably their foundation in an act of will. What one does not find in Greenberg's account is the thought that 'distancing', if one must call it that, is something the object does to the subject, by virtue of its distinctive nature. That one does not is surprising, given not only Greenberg's attention to the artistic medium as the focus of aesthetic judgements about art, but his insistence that what distinguishes aesthetic experience—in both its productive and receptive dimensions—is its involuntary nature: 'Aesthetic judgements are . . . involuntary: you can no more choose whether or not to like a work of art than you can choose to have sugar taste sweet or lemons sour.'²⁷ Taken together, this suggests there must be something distinctive about the *objects* of such judgement.

If this is correct, there seems to be a basic instability at the core of Greenberg's formalism: his stress on the *involuntary* nature of aesthetic judgement is at odds with the *voluntarism* of his understanding of aesthetic distance. The former suggests that aesthetic valuing arises unbidden, the latter that it is installed by a 'twist of attitude' to oneself and one's experience. On the latter story, but not the former, anything at all ought in principle to be intuitable aesthetically through an act of will. Given that Greenberg equates aesthetic distancing with aesthetic experience in general, and takes such experience to constitute art as art, this would imply that anything at all ought to be intuitable *as art* simply by virtue of adopting the required distance.²⁸ And this is precisely what Greenberg now claims: 'The notion of art, put to the test of experience, proves to depend in the showdown . . . on an act of distancing. Art, coinciding with aesthetic experience in general, means simply a twist of attitude towards your own awareness and its object.'²⁹

The problem here, as Greenberg's identification of art with 'aesthetic experience in general' brings out, is the lack of any clear criterion in his aesthetics for distinguishing between aesthetic and artistic objects. The distinction between the 'raw' and the 'cooked'—between 'art at large' that remains unfocused, diffuse and uncommunicated, because not subject to the pressure of an established medium, and art that is 'formalized' by being subject to just such pressure—seemed to hold out the promise of such a criterion, but according to Greenberg it is only a difference of degree rather than kind.³⁰ All art, it turns out, is more or less 'raw', more or less 'cooked', along a continuum.

In Greenberg's modernism judging the state in which a work leaves its medium, having tested its conventions as to their indispensability or otherwise, functions as such a criterion. The problem is that when one moves from his modernism to his formalism, the latter's psychologism effectively renders the medium conceptually redundant. For if *anything* is in principle amenable to being distanced through an act of will, the medium itself cannot but drop away as a privileged determinant of aesthetic judgement. This leaves Greenberg with no way to mark the distinction between those objects experienced aesthetically that are art, and those that are not. This reduces to a function of the attitude with which they are beheld, undermining both the specificity and significance of the artistic object itself.

Pause to consider how odd a conclusion this is for the leading theorist of modernism and preeminent critic of mid-twentieth-century art to arrive at: if nothing else, it (badly) underplays the role that works of art can play in circumscribing the range of possible responses to them. It may even render his formalism incompatible with his modernism in the last analysis. Recall Greenberg's criticisms of late Picasso's academicism; these turned on the claim that what makes something a work of art is that it transcend its phenomenal substrate. The set of qualities ascribed to the latter cannot exhaust those ascribed to the former, on pain of the work collapsing back into mere objecthood. Even the modernist work that draws attention to its material substrate by emphasizing the physical properties of its medium, and in so doing actively courts this risk, only succeeds as art 'when its identity as a picture, and as a pictorial experience, shuts out awareness of it as a physical object.'³¹ The mark of such success was that the work *elicit* aesthetic valuing:

Aesthetic experience is constituted by evaluation, by the perception of qualities that have value insofar as they *induce* that state of more or less heightened cognitiveness-without-cognition which is aesthetic experience.

It's the valuing inherent to aesthetic perception that sends it 'beyond' primary perception, beyond the perception of phenomena (whether physical or mental) as sheerly phenomenal.³²

If what brings about such valuing, thereby instigating the difference between works of art and mere things, is nothing more than a 'twist of attitude' on the part of the percipient, however, this reduces to what a given person is capable of distancing on a given occasion. This provokes two questions. Is there nothing distinctive about works of art themselves that elicits such valuing? If there is, can this be reconciled with Greenberg's psychologistic conception of aesthetic distance? In Greenberg's modernism, it is the way in which a work puts pressure on established taste by testing the inherited conventions of its medium as to their necessity or otherwise that transports perception beyond its 'primary' mode. So understood, aesthetic valuing consists in *registering the density of decision in the finished work*, thereby intuiting it as intensively meant throughout. But can such valuing, which is predicated upon the presence of the kind of qualities capable of eliciting an aesthetic response to some—but not all—objects be reconciled with the claim that aesthetic experience comes down, in the last analysis, to a 'twist of attitude'? The answer ought to be no. But despite the fact that his own conception of aesthetic distance suggests that nothing precludes the adoption of such an attitude towards any object in principle, Greenberg maintains that not all objects can be valued aesthetically after all:

There can be . . . experience in an aesthetic context that puzzles you to such an extent that it doesn't become aesthetic experience at all. You find yourself registering a purported work of art as something sheerly phenomenal, so that you don't either like or dislike it, you're merely perceiving it in the 'primary' mode. What baffles you is not the brute fact of your experience but the fact that the object or event or performance is presented in an aesthetic context and yet you're unable to react to it aesthetically: that is, judge it.³³

This is an honest and perceptive report of his experiences as a critic, but it conflicts with the claim that *any* object can in principle be distanced. And that it does suggests that Greenberg's second order theoretical reflections may have backed him into a position that conflicted with what he wanted to say about his first order experiences as a critic. For once aesthetic judgement is conceived psychologistically, in terms of aesthetic distancing, it

closes off the conceptual space required by his own insights into the role of the medium in 'disciplining' or 'pressurizing' taste. In doing so it cuts away the ground for a difference in kind between works of art and mere things within his broader theory. At best, works of art may be *easier* to distance on the resulting account.

This tension between Greenberg's first order experiences as a critic and his second order reflections as a theorist might not have arisen had Greenberg been more careful to distinguish between mere aesthetic *distancing* and aesthetic *judgement* proper. Greenberg touches on this difference when trying to make sense of a common kind of aesthetic experience: though there can be 'the conscious decision to attend to the experiencing or making of art' there are 'times when this decision is felt as involuntary. Something aesthetic catches your attention without your having made any sort of decision.'³⁴ This is persuasive: it not only accords with many artists' and poets' accounts of the creative process, it is consistent with the unexpected way in which aesthetic experiences of nature often occur.³⁵ But the possibility of being struck, unexpectedly, by the aesthetic appeal of a natural vista can only be reconciled with Greenberg's account of aesthetic distancing if one distinguishes more carefully between placing one's attention, which Greenberg recognizes is *not* a necessary condition of such experience, but something one may or may not do, and that experience itself. One may try to ready oneself for such experience, perhaps by adopting a certain frame of mind before entering a gallery, but one has not thereby achieved it:

The identification of aesthetic distance with aesthetic experience itself isn't a complete one. You can decide, choose, in advance to have aesthetic distance, put yourself in a frame of mind that's ready to have it . . . Yet this doesn't mean that you already have aesthetic distance by mere virtue of your decision; you've only readied yourself to have it. Aesthetic distance, and aesthetic experience along with it, can also come unsummoned, without your being at all in readiness for it.³⁶

For all his talk about aesthetic distancing, Greenberg wanted to acknowledge that the aesthetic object itself plays a role in structuring the kinds of response to it of which we are capable. Given the nuanced attention to various artists' diverse manipulations of their media in his criticism this is hardly surprising. But the psychological framework of his aesthetics precludes the thought's coherent formulation. Thus it may have been Greenberg's

formalism rather than his modernism that was ultimately flawed; for while his understanding of art was undoubtedly constrained by the strictures of modernist theory, it was nonetheless able to account, within those constraints, for our experience of works as intensively meant. By contrast, the psychologistic underpinnings of his formalism prevented him developing an internally coherent theory of aesthetic judgement.

iii. The limits of Greenberg's Modernism I: specific arts and specific senses

It is common knowledge that Greenberg's modernism turns on the thought that the arts can be distinguished in terms of what is specific to their respective media. But this is bound up with a second aspect of Greenberg's modernism that generally goes unremarked. This concerns the specificity of our sensory modes of access to the various arts. These two aspects of Greenberg's modernism resist being easily separated out for the purposes of analysis; Greenberg seems to have viewed each as a concomitant and sometimes even an entailment of the other, such that specific media and the effects of which they are capable are presented as corollaries of the particular senses through which we perceive them. What these ways of parsing the arts have in common is that both are species of *materialism*—one of the senses, the other of artistic media. To this extent both are odds with Greenberg's supposed Kantianism as a critic and theorist.

Greenberg's attempt to align particular arts with particular senses manifests itself most clearly in his early work, notably 'Towards a Newer Laocoön' (1940); but it is still apparent in his convoluted argument for 'opticality' as late as 'Sculpture in Our Time' (1958) and 'Modernist Painting' (1960). The correlation between specific arts and individual senses can be seen as part of the epistemology underwriting Greenberg's account of aesthetic judgement, the corresponding division of the arts in terms of the properties of their respective media as part of the ontology underwriting his theory of modernism. Both encourage the false belief that the arts can be straightforwardly parsed on the basis of supposed differences of kind. The former is open to challenge on phenomenological grounds; the latter on historical and other empirical grounds.

Recall Greenberg's explanation for the increasing separation of the arts under modernism. Greenberg argued that only if each art could demonstrate

that it afforded an experience not to be had elsewhere would it be avoid reduction to something else (kitsch, entertainment, therapy, etc.) and thereby secure its survival. As a result, each art increasingly focused on what was required to be good as *that* art—good as painting, sculpture, poetry, etc. But this created a problem: Once each art had made this turn away from representational content and subject-matter, towards the internal exploration of its medium as the source of whatever vitality and value it possessed as an independent art, what would function as the standard against which its quality could be judged? This is the role that the innovative and intensive investigation of the resources afforded by a specific medium fulfils in Greenberg's account: as such medium-specificity came to function as a necessary precondition of aesthetic quality in art, and anything that lay between or across the arts was banished to an aesthetic no-man's land—at least in theory.³⁷

Greenberg had good grounds to claim that some constraints are necessary to the creation of art, if this activity is to be thought of as meaningful. Artists and their audience need *some* norms against which to make and judge, norms that do not function as criteria or rules—such that if a given criterion or set of criteria is fulfilled the result will necessarily be a good work of art—but leave room for innovation in creation and freedom in judgement. The countervailing idea that one might achieve complete freedom from past practice is self-defeating: for once everything is equally legitimate nothing is any longer more or less urgent or meaningful than anything else. This forecloses the possibility of meaningful innovation, innovation manifesting a perspicuous relation to past practice in virtue of which it is capable of being judged *as* innovative. Greenberg was acutely aware of this, and the self-critical interrogation of the resources of a specific medium was meant to provide just such a 'worthy constraint' in modernist theory.³⁸ Seeking to evade the constraints of a specific medium, either by migrating to the novel and—so the argument runs—less demanding space between media, or by seeking out new media less burdened by the weight of past practice, always constitutes *prima facie* grounds for critical sanction, providing modernists like Greenberg and Fried with a powerful rationale for their trenchant rejection of just about everything produced in the shadow of Minimalism, Conceptual Art, or Pop.³⁹

But acknowledging the necessity of constraints to the realization of successful art does not entail accepting that the constraints provided by the internal resources of specific artistic media fit the bill, nor even that what such 'internal' features of a medium might be is straightforward.⁴⁰ But what is perhaps most puzzling about Greenberg's conviction that it is *discrete*

artistic media and their relation to individual senses that provide the ‘worthy constraints’ in the light of which modernist art is to be made and judged, is that he also believed there is a single, *indivisible* realm of aesthetic quality in which all the arts must partake, and which any work of good art—whether poetry, music or painting—does partake, namely, ‘the goodness of good art’:

Artistic value is one not many. The only artistic value anybody has yet been able to point to satisfactorily in words is simply the goodness of good art. There are, of course, degrees of artistic goodness, but these are not differing values or kinds of value. Now this one and only value, in its varying degrees, is the first and supreme principle of artistic order.⁴¹

The idea of a single, indivisible domain of aesthetic value in art, though seemingly at odds with his stress on the separateness of the arts, does align more closely with Greenberg’s self-declared Kantianism. It can be grounded in the unified structure of human sensibility (Kant’s a priori forms of intuition) and the categorical conditions through which this is cognized, rather than being parcelled out between discrete media and the sensory modalities through which they are intuited.⁴² Despite this, Greenberg’s underlying empiricism leads him to argue that *specific* arts, as intuited by *particular* senses, offer distinct modes of access to this indivisible—and, in terms of his own theory, inexplicable—source of aesthetic quality in art. Indeed it is only in virtue of doing so that they are to be considered independently viable arts. Greenberg’s modernism, his perception of the arts being ‘hunted back’ to their increasingly isolated ‘areas of competence’, was motivated by a genuine perception of authentic culture under siege; but what underwrites his conviction that the arts *could* separate themselves out in response to this perceived threat?

Greenberg’s earliest articles equivocate between locating the ground of this division in two kinds of empirical difference: material differences between the arts on the one hand (painting’s exploration of flatness, sculpture’s articulation of three-dimensional space, etc.) and the subject’s five senses on the other (painting being defined solely in optical terms, sculpture being defined initially through a combination of optical and tactile terms and, subsequently, in optical terms alone, and so on).⁴³ This enabled Greenberg to postulate clearly defined and—the anomaly of modernist sculpture aside—mutually exclusive means of access to a single, unified realm of aesthetic quality in art. But neither withstands scrutiny. The former can be challenged

simply by canvassing counterexamples. In response to the claim that the 'irreducible essence' of painting consists in 'flatness and the delimitation of flatness'⁴⁴ one may point to the increasing tendency of painting from the early 1960s onwards to subvert such essentialism, resulting in works, such as Sol LeWitt's early monochromes with protuberant grids or Donald Judd's early painted relief-constructions that such a theory is unable to accommodate. Similarly, one can point to three-dimensional works that derive from and appeal to a sensibility rooted in painting or, conversely, two-dimensional works that derive in some sense from sculpture: the indispensable role played by colour in Judd's constructions for the former, the reference back to operations performed on concrete materials in Lawrence Weiner's wall-texts for the latter. What such examples, perhaps especially Weiner—whose work brings a reductive tendency in modernist painting into dialogue with a sculptural investigation of the potential of particular materials, including words—show is the increasing irrelevance of medium-specific categories to understanding the most challenging art produced after the mid-sixties. One cannot simply rule all such examples out of bounds, as neither painting nor sculpture, without begging the question. For such examples suggest that painting and sculpture are *not*, in fact, mutually exclusive: to respond by insisting they cannot be either, because they fail to respect the differences between them, is to assume precisely what one is being asked to demonstrate. Perhaps they are both.

In this way, what Greenberg took to be categorical differences between the arts proved increasingly unable to discharge the ontological duties required of them. This left modernist theory facing a dilemma. Had Greenberg insisted such works *cannot* be art, because they fail to respect the boundaries between artistic media, he would not only have shown modernism to be prescriptive, which he was always at pains to deny; in doing so he would also have undermined the freedom of aesthetic judgement. Given the centrality of evaluative judgement to Greenberg's aesthetics, this was a line he was unwilling to cross. Yet, precisely by preserving the freedom to judge such entities as works, he thereby acknowledged that art's ongoing, non-medium-specific development had exceeded the explanatory reach of modernist theory.⁴⁵ Although it offered an elegant way to parse art's recent history, the idea of medium-specificity turned out, in light of art's subsequent development, to be no more than an empirical fact about the art of a particular period and locale. As such it cannot be used to underwrite essentialist claims to the effect that all painting is essentially *x*, all sculpture essentially *y*.

The prospects for erecting a principled distinction between the arts on the basis of the sensory modality they address appear equally poor, given Greenberg's understanding of the relation between receptivity and experience. This implicitly requires that intuition be parceled out between the isolated 'tracks' through which it reaches us, as though sensory experience could be reduced to the sum of their input. Were this true it would make sense to disaggregate intuition into the contributions made by each of its constituent channels and that, in turn, might provide a rationale for defining the arts in terms of their 'specific' contributions to sensory experience. But while it may make sense to consider the counterfactual: that is, the contribution that an individual sense might otherwise have made, in the anomalous case that that sense in question is defective, it is phenomenologically unconvincing to portray normal cases of intuition as mere *aggregates* of the senses, especially when it comes to such culturally and historically freighted entities as works of art.

Whatever else may be wrong with such a picture, it seriously underplays the cognitive conditions of intuition itself, by presenting sensory experience as though it were an unmediated product of isolated senses passively receiving causal stimuli from the world. This already glosses over the spontaneity of mind required simply to be aware of sensory experience *as* sensory. This is apparent whenever Greenberg appeals to 'immediate sensation' as that to which modernist art orients itself, to the extent of claiming that modernist painting and music 'exhaust' themselves in the sensations to which they give rise.⁴⁶ It bears remarking that Greenberg relies almost entirely on the example of music in making this argument, typically deriving his claims about avant-garde artforms 'exhausting' themselves in immediate sensation by way of analogy:

The advantage of music lay chiefly in the fact that it was an 'abstract' art, an art of 'pure' form. It was such because it was incapable, objectively, of communicating anything else than a sensation, and because this sensation could not be conceived in any other terms than those of the sense through which it entered consciousness. . . . Only by accepting the example of music and defining each of the other arts solely in terms of the sense or faculty which perceived its effect and by excluding from each art whatever is intelligible in the terms of any other sense or faculty would the non-musical arts attain the 'purity' and self-sufficiency which they desired.⁴⁷

Immediately following these remarks about the kind of sensory experience in which music and, by analogy, the other modernist arts is meant to exhaust itself, Greenberg goes on to identify this realignment of art's vocation with a new emphasis on the resources of specific artistic media. In doing so, he demonstrates the extent to which his understanding of modernism was grounded on aligning an idea of medium-specificity with discrete sensorial experience:

Guiding themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, by a notion of purity derived from the example of music, the avant-garde arts have in the last fifty years achieved a purity and a radical delimitation of their fields of activity . . . The arts lie safe now, each within its 'legitimate' boundaries, and free trade has been replaced by autarchy. Purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art.⁴⁸

In Greenberg's writing such invocations of immediate sensation and the facticity of the medium to which they are coupled are generally accompanied by a positivist paean to the orientation of modern sensibility to the 'concrete', 'factual', and 'immediate'.⁴⁹ But even taken as a placeholder for an epistemology capable of grounding his theory of art, this picture fails to accord sufficient weight to the cognitive conditions of experience. That is, the role of the mind in rendering intuition, or even sensation, intelligible as such, that is, intelligible *as* intuition or sensation.⁵⁰ Consider just how rich and substantive an interpenetration of cognition and intuition must be assumed for Greenberg's own account of what the critic's 'practiced eye' supposedly takes in at a glance to get off the ground. The richness of his early criticism of Pollock offers a particularly striking example. Greenberg's appeal to music, taken at face value, is as informative an account of what responding to a work of art involves, as the empiricist epistemologist's 'red patch now' is as a description of apprehending the world. Just as we perceive books of a particular colour, volume and anticipated heft, determining how we subconsciously shape our grip or brace our arm when reaching out to pick them up, and not mere coloured patches arrayed in space, so we hear the distinctive rumble and throb of a diesel engine idling, and not bare noise. Similarly, we perceive particular paintings and musical compositions: that is, perceptually and cognitively complex, historically embedded, and culturally emergent structures, not mere collections of lines or colours arrayed in space, or bare successions of notes sounded along a temporal continuum.⁵¹

Greenberg's modernism thus turns out to be compromised on the side of both subject and object, by assumptions about individual senses on the one hand, and their relation to individual arts on the other. Having aligned specific arts, under the influence of music, with specific senses early on, he continued to conceive the intuition of works of art on the model of distinct sensory modalities throughout his career. Like his tendency to read Kant's third *Critique* as an account of what goes on in the mind when making an aesthetic judgement, this is a product of Greenberg's deep-seated empiricism as a critic.

Greenberg's understanding of cognitively uninflected sensation even leads him to what, from a Kantian perspective, would have to be considered a fundamental confusion: it causes him to conflate judgements of taste, properly so-called, with what Kant would have concurred were aesthetic judgements, albeit of *sense* rather than *reflection*. That is judgements grounded, like judgements of taste, in feeling albeit, unlike judgements of taste, in feelings occasioned by objects impacting causally on the sense organs. Kant regarded bare 'sensation' of this kind as incapable of raising a normative demand on others because, unlike disinterested reflection on a perceptual manifold's 'subjective purposiveness', it is not grounded in those (typically formal) dimensions of sensible experience that can be taken to universalize. The issues this raises are complex and cannot be addressed until I consider Kant's theory directly in Part III.⁵² Suffice to say here that only judgements about a perceptual manifold's 'subjective purposiveness', that is, its suitability for cognition *in general*, 'depend upon reflection', and it is such dependence that 'distinguishes the liking for the beautiful from the agreeable, which rests entirely on sensation'. By contrast, 'the agreeable is [merely] what the senses like in sensation'. 'In so far as we present an object as agreeable', Kant holds, 'we present it solely in relation to sensation.'⁵³ Running these two species of aesthetic judgement together—one pure, the other impure—by conceiving judgements of taste properly so called in terms of sensation thus amounts, in Kantian terms, to confusing judgements making a *warranted* claim on the agreement of others, by virtue of being grounded in reflection, with judgements concerning what we happen, idiosyncratically, to find agreeable in sensation, which warrant no such claim.⁵⁴

In sum, the central idea of Greenberg's modernism, medium-specificity, turns out to be based on an attempt to align an empiricist idea of cognitively uninflected sensation that owes more to Hume than to Kant with specific artistic mediums, as though the sensory impression made by a work of art

were a simple correlate of the intrinsic properties of its medium, from which it could therefore be directly read off. That this is so should give any theorist minded to reject Kant's aesthetics largely on the basis of Greenberg's employment of it pause for thought.

iv. The limits of Greenberg's Modernism II: the 'opticality' of sculpture

The problems that beset Greenberg's attempt to distinguish between the arts by means of the sensory modality they address come out especially clearly in the case of modernist sculpture, given its apparent, and anomalous, dependence on painting according to his own account. In keeping with his atomistic conception of sensation, Greenberg conceptualized the experience of painting in purely 'optical' terms. But doing so required him to ignore some fairly obvious facts about embodiment that impact our experience of painting. We encounter paintings, and other concrete particulars like sculpture, as entities that stand over against us—assuming, that is, a certain minimal size relative to the human body. That is, we often register them somatically as the kind of thing capable of meeting our gaze (in the case of painting) or blocking our way (in the case of sculpture) rather than as the kind of thing typically found on a tabletop suitable to being picked up with one hand. This is not true, for example, of our experience of symphonies or novels, where this distinction finds no purchase. Since in neither case do we encounter the *work* of music or literature (as opposed to the scores, books or performances that pick those works out) as objects or events occupying a shared physical space with us, considerations of size relative to the body simply have no place. With novels we imaginatively inhabit the narratives they afford; with symphonies we immerse ourselves in the sound worlds that they open.

Something similar is generally true of film, despite the fact that film can also be employed as medium for visual art, to the extent that film also tends to absorb its viewers, rather than being encountered primarily as an object within their visual field. Though something like the latter *can* happen to film when its mechanics (the physical presence and sound of the projector, the physical presence of the screen, especially when free-standing or angled relative to a wall) are foregrounded within an exhibition space, as often happens when film is taken as a medium for art. This is true, albeit in different ways,

of the work of Douglas Gordon and James Coleman, among other visual artists who take film as their medium.

The phenomenological distinction here seems to be between arts such as painting and sculpture, of which it is true that the experience they afford is constrained by the physical properties of objects within the visual field or spatial awareness of the viewer, and those arts such as literature, music, or film, of which it is not. The same aesthetic experience is afforded by novels, regardless of physical differences between their editions, the same aesthetic experience afforded by film, regardless—perhaps within limits—of the size of the screen on which it is projected, though film is clearly a less clear-cut case. By contrast, halving the size of an easel painting or doubling the size of a figurative sculpture will immediately impact the experience they afford, for the simple reason that one is directly impacting the work rather merely the vehicle through which we pick the work out.

Given that the visual arts (painting, sculpture, etc.) tend to fall on the *same* side of this phenomenological divide, attempting to found ontological distinctions between them by appeal to the senses looks like a losing strategy. As concrete particulars intuited by the senses, whether unique or multiply instantiated, the visual arts would seem to have more in common than apart. Indeed, given that painting and sculpture are both *visual*, appealing to differences between the sensory modality required to apprehend them would seem to be an especially poor basis for trying to distinguish between them. Their phenomenology suggests that any distinction between them will need to be grounded elsewhere, if it is to gain a purchase on the differences that obtain between them as experienced. One basic difference between the experience of painting and sculpture is that it takes time to walk around a sculpture, so as to view it in the round, whereas paintings present a single face to the viewer so do not require movement through space to take them in. This is not to say that paintings are taken in instantaneously: viewers still require time to scan a painting's surface, as analysis of saccadic eye movements shows, and this demonstrates that the experience of painting has a temporal dimension, however condensed. As a corollary, the experience of painting will also depend upon a temporal horizon of anticipation and recollection (or 'protension' and 'retension'). As such, any notionally 'atemporal' account of how paintings are experienced will remain just that—notional: at best an idealization, and at worse misleading, even if something like this has often been taken by modernism's leading theorists to function as a kind of

'regulative ideal' governing the kind of presence to which Modernist painting aspires.⁵⁵

One can see why this thought might have seemed attractive: while nothing is lost by momentarily closing one's eyes or averting one's gaze in front of a painting, something is lost if one does this while watching a film. One cannot deny that there is a difference, if not an absolute or categorial difference, between the arts of this sort: though one misses nothing by momentarily averting one's gaze before a painting; one misses a part of the work by momentarily stopping up one's ears or closing one's eyes while listening to piece of music or watching a film. The former but not the latter is, so to speak, *always there in its entirety*, even if our finitude—not least the fact of embodiment itself in conditioning human sensibility—entail that we cannot perceive that entirety instantaneously.⁵⁶ Note, however, that just the same can be said about sculpture: we do not miss part of the work by momentarily averting our gaze. By contrast, arts with a proscribed temporal duration (theatre, film, music, or dance) tend to have an immersive dimension; one has to experience such works on their own time rather than one's own.

This has made a basic division between the spatial and temporal arts seem attractive to many. Greenberg's most salient text is called 'Towards a Newer *Laocoön*', making his own intentions clear. But against Greenberg's attempt to ground *categorial* differences between the arts, and our experience thereof, either on a correlation between particular arts and individual senses, or the irreducible material properties of distinct media and their supposed effects, one might instead propose a qualified (or 'weak') aesthetics of space and time as an alternative starting point. But the experiential co-dependence of space and time requires that any aesthetic that attempts to distinguish between the 'spatial' and the 'temporal' arts begin from the necessity of both to sensible intuition. Not only is this less dogmatic than either of Greenberg's own proposals, it also offers some explanation as to why—if he is right—there is only *one* kind of aesthetic value in art ('the goodness of good art') rather than several. Such an account would also be more consistent with Greenberg's self-declared 'Kantianism', given that Kant conceived space as the form of all outer sensibility, hence as a condition of perceiving anything at all in the external world, and time as the form of all inner sensibility, hence as a condition of perceiving anything whatsoever:

Time is the formal *a priori* condition of all appearances whatsoever. Space, as the pure form of all *outer* intuition, is so far limited; it serves as the *a*

priori condition only of outer appearances. But since all representations, whether they have for their objects outer things or not, belong, in themselves, as determinations of the mind, to our inner state; and since this inner state stands under the formal condition of inner intuition, and so belongs to time, time is an *a priori* condition of all appearance whatsoever.⁵⁷

On this conception of our relation to objects of experience, work of arts must, like any other object of outer experience, be positioned *both* spatially and temporally.⁵⁸ Grounding the arts in an original unity of space and time underlying sensible experience, and not in specific media or discrete senses, also has the benefit of defusing a peculiar anomaly that otherwise arises from Greenberg's attempt to erect categorial distinctions between the arts. That is, the embarrassing dependence of modernist sculpture on modernist painting on Greenberg's account, given the latter's supposedly thorough-going medium-specificity.

Greenberg understood modernist sculpture in terms almost indistinguishable to those through which he understood modernist painting. This is because, on Greenberg's account, modernist sculpture emerges when traditional carved or monolithic sculpture, sculpture in the round that occupies space, is 'opened up' as a result of its passage through Cubist collage and *papier collées*. The account runs as follows: through Cubist collage, painting emerges from its 'fictive depths' to confront the flat surface that is its fundamental condition as a distinct art. This was emphasized by the collaged elements affixed to the surface of cubist pictures in such a way as to bring the picture plane right up against the literal plane of its paper, card, or canvas support. Having risen to the surface, the affixed elements eventually started to project outwards into real space making the works increasingly legible as objects in three-dimensional space. Constructed works in shallow relief, such as Picasso's astonishing *Guitar* (1912), mark the precise moment when modernist sculpture emerges, via cubist collage, from modernist painting.

As will be apparent, this is not the most promising starting point for locating the relative specificity or distinctness of modernist painting and sculpture; indeed it would seem to render modernist sculpture in Greenberg's own terms at best a 'confusion' of the arts, and at worse a 'corruption' of one art by another. This is because modernist sculpture, which initially takes the form of shallow bas-relief oriented to the wall rather than floor, is 'constructed'; that is, built or assembled, rather than carved. Rather than heavily occupying space, it sometimes encloses it by

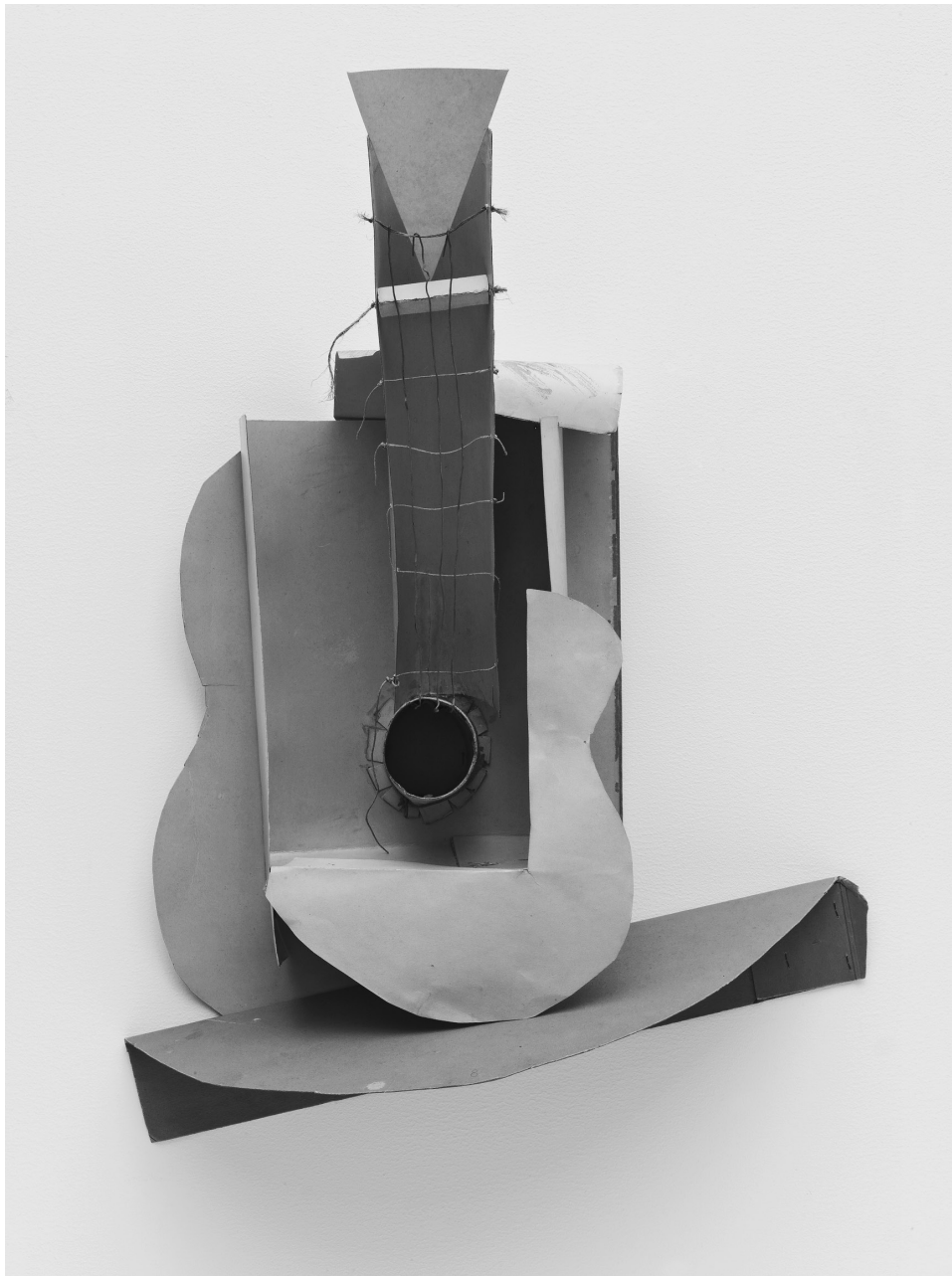


Figure 2.1 Pablo Picasso, *Guitar Paris*, October–December 1912 (paperboard, paper, thread, string, twine, and coated wire, 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ $\times$ 13 $\times$ 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. / 65.4 $\times$ 33 $\times$ 19cm). Image courtesy of Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence. © Succession Picasso/DACS, London 2023.

drawing in space with nothing more substantial than a strand of wire, as in the welded sculptures of González or Picasso. As such, Greenberg took it to be *addressed primarily to the eye* rather than an embodied viewer in space and time. Like painting, it is an essentially 'optical' art, which thereby becomes the key term in Greenberg's account of both modernist painting and sculpture:

Under the modernist reduction sculpture has turned out to be almost as exclusively visual in its essence as painting itself. . . . The human body is no longer postulated as the agent of space in either pictorial or sculptural art; now it is eyesight alone . . . It is significant, moreover, that modernist sensibility, though it rejects sculptural painting of any kind, allows sculpture to be as pictorial as it pleases. Here the prohibition against one art's entering the domain of another is suspended thanks to the unique concreteness and literalness of sculpture's medium. Sculpture can confine itself to virtually two dimensions . . . without being felt to violate the limitations of its medium because the eye recognizes that what offers itself in two dimensions is actually (not palpably) fashioned in three.⁵⁹

Greenberg's convoluted claim that the 'eye' recognizes, as a result of sculpture's 'uniquely concrete' medium, that what appears to be two-dimensional in reality occupies three, and is therefore acceptable to a sensibility that would otherwise insist on specificity and distinctness, should be recognized for the rationalization it is.⁶⁰ It amounts to a back-handed admission that modernist sculpture, if Greenberg's critical appraisal of it is correct, cannot be straightforwardly accommodated within the terms of his own theory, premised as it is on supposedly irreducible differences between the arts. Given that theory, Greenberg ought to regard modernist sculpture as a peculiar, and perhaps even indefensible, blurring of the boundaries between the arts, such that while painting must rid itself of all semblance of sculpture—notably the illusion of a third dimension into which one might imagine traveling with anything more substantial than the eye—sculpture not only need not rid itself of everything it shares with painting, but is to be celebrated for precisely those pictorial qualities (opticality, virtuality, and weightlessness) they now have in common. The

resulting claims for the 'opticality' of painting and sculpture makes a non-sense of medium-specificity:

The desire for 'purity' works . . . to put an even higher premium on sheer visibility and an even lower one on the tactile and its associations, which included that of weight as well as of impermeability . . . This manifests itself in the pictorial tendency to reduce all matter to two dimensions—to lines and surfaces that define or enclose space but hardly occupy it. Rendering substance entirely optical and form, whether pictorial, sculptural or architectural, as an integral part of the ambient space—this brings anti-illusionism full circle. Instead of the illusion of things, we are now offered the illusion of modalities: namely, that matter is incorporeal, weightless and exists only optically like a mirage.⁶¹



Figure 2.2 David Smith, *Australia*, 1951, Bolton Landing, New York, c. 1951. Photo: David Smith. © Estate of David Smith/VAGA at ARS, NY and DACS, London 2023

This is one of the most notorious passages in Greenberg's writings and, in the light of art's subsequent development, arguably one of the most untenable.⁶² It has been roundly criticized elsewhere and I have no desire to go over old ground again here. My own concern is what this reveals about the internal coherence of Greenberg's modernism. According to the latter, the arts have gradually been 'hunted back' to what is 'unique and irreducible' to their respective media: despite this, modernist sculpture is conceived as nothing if not a *hybrid* painting-sculpture or 'pictorial sculpture'. Even if Greenberg is right about modernist sculpture critically, there is no way to accommodate this critical insight consistently within the framework of his own theory. This is a problem entirely of Greenberg's own making: it would not arise on any division of the arts that did not posit an *irreducible* separation between the arts as its starting point.

* * *

I now have set out what I take to be the internal structure of Greenberg's theory, and I have also raised some worries for each of its two main aspects, formalism and modernism, in turn. In doing so my goal has been twofold. On the one hand, I have tried to bring out what I think is not only the ambition but also the conceptual elegance of his theory's internal structure: How many other theorist-critics active in the twentieth century can boast a theoretical framework for their criticism that is remotely so well-fortified? There should be no doubt that Greenberg's work repays attention: philosophers in particular have tended to dismiss his work out of hand as lacking in theoretical sophistication, but have done so on the basis of the most scant familiarity with his writings. On the other hand, I have wanted to put pressure on the tight correlation between aesthetic value and medium-specificity at the core of Greenbergian theory. Only once these have been disentangled will it be possible to defend a revised conception of the former without feeling obliged to defend the latter, and in so doing lay the ground for a robust aesthetics of art *after* modernism. That is, an aesthetics that is neither hostage to Greenberg's claims on Kant or the aesthetic nor detached, as so much philosophical work in aesthetics still is, from its historical and contemporary objects. Too many critics of modernism have taken the aesthetic, and especially Kant's conception of the aesthetic, at Greenberg's word. Indeed, it is arguably because they have,

that so many have been moved to reject both. But if Greenberg can be shown to have been wrong about either or both, it undercuts the ground for these rejections. On my account, it is those theorist-critics who claim to be most opposed to Greenberg's legacy who turn out to most embody it, albeit in inverted form. Demonstrating this is one of the main goals of Part II.

Notes

1. See Greenberg's 'Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties' (1969) in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. IV, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 293: 'Things that purport to be art do not function, do not exist as art until they are experienced through taste. Until then they exist only as empirical phenomena, as aesthetically arbitrary objects or facts'. See also 'The Experience of Value' (Seminar VII), *Homemade Aesthetics*, 59: 'It's the judgement of value, quality, that opens art, makes aesthetic experience accessible, actual, makes art live'.
2. In 'Complaints of an Art Critic', Greenberg writes: 'Because aesthetic judgements are immediate, intuitive, undeliberate, and involuntary, they leave no room for the conscious application of standards, criteria, rules, or precepts. That qualitative principles or norms are there somewhere, in subliminal operation, is certain; otherwise aesthetic judgements would be purely subjective, and that they are not is shown by the fact that the verdicts of those who care most about art and pay it the most attention converge over the course of time to form a consensus. Yet these objective qualitative principles, such as they are, remain hidden from discursive consciousness: they cannot be defined or exhibited' (165–66).
3. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, §8; Ak. 215.
4. Greenberg, 'Can Taste Be Objective?' (Seminar III), *Homemade Aesthetics*, 26.
5. David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), 254–68.
6. Greenberg, 'Can Taste Be Objective?', 28–29.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. While it is true to say that Kant 'argues *a priori*', he does so from problems that arise empirically. It is *because* we often argue against dissenting judgements of taste, despite not being able to prove our own to be correct, that taste arises as a problem in the first place. While Greenberg is right to say that Kant wants to reach conclusions that hold universally and necessarily, which is to say *a priori*, it is misleading to say that he wants to reach conclusions that 'catch hold in advance of all experience'. On the contrary, Kant's arguments respond to seemingly intractable problems that arise within experience.
10. For a philosophical argument to a similar conclusion see Juliet Floyd's superb 'Heautonomy: Kant on Reflective Judgement and Systematicity', in *Kants Ästhetik / Kant's Aesthetics / L'esthétique de Kant*, ed. H. Parret (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 192–218.
11. See de Duve 'Art was a Proper Name' (4.2) in *Kant after Duchamp*, 66–73, and 'Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?' in *Artforum* 22, no. 1 (September 1983).
12. Greenberg, 'Can Taste Be Objective?', 28.
13. Take, for example, Bourdieu's work on the cultural capital underwriting the apparent unassailability (in Greenberg's terms, the presumptive 'objectivity') of the consensus around particular works and artists. See Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) and *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).
14. Greenberg, 'Can Taste Be Objective?', 26 (punctuation taken from the original).
15. If taste is not 'objective', then the idea of the 'best taste', in the sense Greenberg intends, that is, *objectively* 'best' taste, collapses. And if that collapses then any account, such as de Duve's, that holds Greenberg's modernism to be a *descriptive* history of the 'very best' art of the last hundred years must be flawed. There can be no 'description' in any straightforward sense when the putative description depends on a series of value judgements. De Duve's position is all the more surprising given that he argues against Greenberg's claims for the objectivity of taste. See de Duve, 'Wavering Reflections', 107–10.

16. 'Kant . . . came closer to describing what went on in the mind when experiencing art than anyone before or anyone after him.' See Greenberg, 'Can Taste Be Objective?', 29.
17. See Edward Bullough's 'Psychical Distance' (1912); reprinted in *The Philosophy of Art*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, 297–311. For a critique of views of this kind, see George Dickie, 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964): 56–65.
18. Greenberg, 'Observations on Esthetic Distance' (Seminar IX), *Homemade Aesthetics*, 74, my italics.
19. See Paul Guyer on the difference between the first and third and the second and fourth Moments of the 'Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement' in 'Pleasure and Society in Kant's Theory of Taste', in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. P. Guyer and T. Cohen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 21–54.
20. Kant *CJ*, §12; Ak. 222. For Kant's tripartite distinction between the beautiful, agreeable and the good, see 'The First Moment'; especially §§4–5.
21. Kant *CJ*, §2; Ak. 205; see also §5; Ak. 209: 'The judgement of taste is merely *contemplative*, i.e., a judgement that, indifferent with regard to the existence of the object, merely connects its constitution together with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure'.
22. Kant *CJ*, §5; Ak. 210.
23. The former is Greenberg's term from 'Seminar One', 44; the latter is how Bullough puts it in 'Psychical Distance', 298–99.
24. Greenberg, 'Seminar One', 44.
25. Greenberg, 'Observations on Esthetic Distance' (Seminar IX), 73, my italics.
26. Bullough, 'Psychical Distance', 302, Bullough's italics.
27. Greenberg, 'Complaints of an Art Critic', 265. Compare Greenberg 'Seminar One', 45: 'Aesthetic judgement is not voluntary . . . All intuition, whether ordinary or aesthetic, is involuntary in content or outcome. Your aesthetic judgement being an intuition and nothing else, is received not taken'. Though Kant took intuition to be passive, our experience of particulars in space and time is nonetheless dependent on the fulfilment of a thick set of cognitive conditions on Kant's account. Greenberg's account is a Humean re-reading of Kant. Like Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' it conceives aesthetic judgement as heightened sensory discrimination, as though aesthetic experience were largely a matter of finely tuned taste buds or retina versed in making fine-grained discriminations. See Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', 254–68.
28. 'Aesthetic distance and aesthetic valuing can't be separated . . . in actual experience . . . one means the other. There's no valuing without the distance, no distance without the valuing, the judging. By dint of being aesthetically distanced, which means at the same time being aesthetically judged, an object or an occurrence receives form.' See Greenberg, 'The Experience of Value' (Seminar VII), 60.
29. Greenberg, 'Seminar One', 44. De Duve offers a compelling account of why Greenberg may have been forced into this conclusion, focusing on the influence of Duchamp's Readymades on those artists, notably the Minimal and Conceptual artists, who emerged in the 1960s. See 'Wavering Reflections' in *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, 89–119. De Duve is especially good on Greenberg's candour in thinking through the implications of Duchamp's work for aesthetics.
30. Greenberg, 'Intuition and Esthetic Experience' and 'Appendix: Draft of Chapter One', in *Homemade Esthetics*, 5–6 and 198.
31. Greenberg, 'Picasso at Seventy-Five', 33.
32. Greenberg, 'The Experience of Value' (Seminar VII), 59, my italics.
33. Ibid.
34. Greenberg, postscript to 'Judgement and the Esthetic Object' (Seminar V), 66.
35. See, for example, Marcel Duchamp's own account of 'The Creative Act' in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 138–40.
36. Greenberg, 'Observations on Esthetic Distance' (Seminar IX), 74.
37. As W. T. J. Mitchell argues in his reading of Lessing's *Laocoon*, the need to police the boundaries between the arts undercuts the more general point the argument is trying to establish: 'There would be no need to say that the genres *should not* be mixed if they *could not* be mixed . . . the argument from desire, then, has the salutary effect of unmasking the ideological character of the argument from necessity. The case against time in painting, space in literature must now be made, not because these things are illusory or impossible, but because they are all too possible.' See 'Space and Time: Lessing's *Laocoon* and the Politics of Genre' in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 95–115, 104.
38. Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', 9.

39. Greenberg maintained that Pop was 'soft', easily assimilable, despite its ostensibly avant-garde veneer, and Conceptual Art was 'concocted'; Fried believed Minimalism was a 'sure-fire', and hence 'theatrical', simulation of authentic aesthetic experience.
40. This is the issue that Fried's notion of an historical *a priori*, his conception of essence as constantly shifting in relation to the ongoing transformation of an artistic discipline, is intended to force. See 'How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark' in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. F. Francina, 87–101, and 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism' in *Art and Objecthood*, 34–40.
41. See Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties', 292.
42. This is suggested by the more 'idealist' side to Greenberg's thought that sits uncomfortably with the empiricism I am tracing here as, for example, when Greenberg remarks in 'Modernist Painting' that 'the essential norms or conventions of painting are at the same time the limiting conditions with which a picture must comply in order to be *experienced as a picture*' (my italics) and, further, that 'the limiting conditions of art are altogether human conditions'. See 'Modernist Painting', 89 and 92.
43. There is a clearer division in Greenberg between painting and music as oriented to eye and ear, respectively, that is taken over from Lessing's division of the arts between painting and poetry, eye and ear, space and time. For a history of attempts to divide the arts in this way see 'The Senses and the Self', in J. Rée, *I See a Voice: Language, Deafness & the Senses—A Philosophical History* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 327–63. For an argument that such attempts necessarily fail, see W. T. J. Mitchell, 'Space and Time: Lessing's *Laocoon* and the Politics of Genre'.
44. Greenberg 'After Abstract Expressionism', 131.
45. On the transition from specific to the generic, see Thierry de Duve, 'The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas', 221–22.
46. See Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoön', 34: 'Painting and sculpture . . . *look* what they *do*. The picture or statue exhausts itself in the visual sensation it produces. There is nothing to identify, connect or think about, but everything to feel. . . . If the poem, as Valéry claims, is a machine to produce the emotion of poetry, the painting and statue are machines to produce the emotion of "plastic sight". The purely plastic or abstract qualities of the work of art are the only ones that count'.
47. Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoön', 31–32.
48. *Ibid.*, 32.
49. In 'The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture' (1947), for example, Greenberg insists on the 'materialism' and 'positivism' of art since Impressionism; the 'hard-headed' and 'matter-of-factness' of modernist artists; their emphasis on 'immediate sensations, impulses and notions'; and the 'concrete' art that resulted, concluding that 'a substantial art, requires balance and enough thought to put it in accord with the most advanced view of the world obtaining at the time'. In 'The New Sculpture', Greenberg stresses the emphasis on 'factual, empirical reality' since the nineteenth century; and the ensuing taste for the 'actual, immediate and first-hand' that characterizes 'modern sensibility's' taste for that 'most palpable' aspect of art, the medium, and communication of only the most 'concretely felt, irreducible experience'. See Greenberg, 'The New Sculpture', *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. II, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 164–67 and 314–35.
50. Compare Kant: 'Without sensibility no object of thought would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.' Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter CPR), trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929) A52/B76. References are to the standard A/B edition pagination of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Vol. 3–4 of the *Akademie Ausgabe* (*Kants gesammelte Schriften* [Berlin: Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1908–1913]).
51. I take the idea of a 'culturally emergent' entity from Joseph Margolis. In developing this idea Margolis distinguishes between perceiving the 'intentional' and merely 'material' properties of an object. See *Art and Philosophy* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980). His claim that Greenberg conflates the physical *material* (or medium) of painting with the historically and culturally emergent artistic *space* (or medium) of painting is relevant here. See 'The History of Art After the End of Art', in *What, After All, Is a Work of Art?* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1999), especially 27–38.
52. I consider Kant's formalism, specifically, in Chapter 8.
53. Kant, *CJ*, §4, Ak. 207; §3, Ak. 206; §4, Ak. 208 respectively.

54. Greenberg's gloss on the involuntary nature of aesthetic judgement—that 'you can no more choose whether or not to like a work of art than you can choose to have sugar taste sweet or lemons sour'—is an instance of this confusion. See 'Complaints of an Art Critic', 265.
55. This aspect of modernist aesthetics becomes pronounced in Fried's notion of 'presentness' and Cavell's conception of modernist painting as 'wholly open.' I consider both in Part II.
56. Compare Cavell's conception of flatness in 'Excursus: Some Modernist Painting', *The World Viewed*, revised and expanded ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 109. Cavell claims that one of the things modernist painting (notably Pollock's) revealed is 'not exactly that a painting is flat, but that its flatness, together with its being of a limited extent, means that it is *totally there*, wholly open to you, absolutely in front of your senses, of your eyes, as no other form of art is.' Cavell characterizes this 'total thereness as an event of the wholly open' (111).
57. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A34/B50.
58. On Kant's own inconsistencies in trying to divide the arts under Lessing's influence, see J. Rée, *I See a Voice*, 350–55. As WJT Mitchell remarks: 'Our beginning premise [should] be that works of art, like all other objects of human experience, are structures in space-time, and that the interesting problem is to comprehend a particular spatial-temporal construction, not to label it as temporal *or* spatial. A poem is not literally temporal and figuratively spatial: it is literally a spatial-temporal construction. The terms 'space' and 'time' only become figurative or improper when they are abstracted from one another as independent, antithetical essences that define the nature of an object.' See Mitchell, 'Space and Time: Lessing's *Laocoon* and the Politics of Genre', 103.
59. Greenberg, 'Sculpture in Our Time' (1958) in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. IV, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 59.
60. This evasion is responsible for another peculiarity of Greenberg's account of modernist sculpture: Greenberg holds both that the 'immediacy', 'concreteness', and 'literalness' of modernist sculpture is what renders it so in tune with 'modernist sensibility' that it stands on the verge of replacing painting as the dominant modernist art *and* that in its modernist guise it dissimulates its most fundamental properties as sculpture (mass, weight, and three-dimensions) in favour of a pictorial mode of address to the eye alone.
61. See Greenberg, 'Sculpture in Our Time', 60. This is a reworking of the earlier 'The New Sculpture'. Greenberg's conception of sculpture becomes less concrete and more optical over the intervening years. For a critique of the various amendments made between the two, see Yve-Alain Bois 'Greenberg's Amendments', *Kunst & Museumjournaal* 5, no. 1 (1993): 1–9.
62. See Rosalind Krauss's remarks on 'opticality' in '1967/1987: Genealogies of Art and Theory: Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop', in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: DIA Art Foundation and Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 59–64, and *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). See also Yve-Alain Bois, 'Kahnweiler's Lesson', in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), fn. 41, 284–85, and Bois and Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

