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Introduction

Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey

SURPRISING as it may seem in the midst of the creative chaos constituting art-historical studies at the end of the twentieth century, it was not even a decade and a half ago that Norman Bryson chastised the field for operating at an "increasingly remote margin of the humanities," at the site which he would memorably dub "the leisure sector of intellectual life" (*Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, 1983). So much has happened to the discipline: so many controversies, conflicts, even crises. Far from remaining in a state of scholarly torpor, the history of art today promises its students neither a unified field of study nor a time-tested methodology for analyzing visual images. And that lack is precisely where its intellectual excitement comes from. The essays collected here offer a celebration of the diversity of mind, method, and material that has come to define the supple and shifting parameters of the history of art at the end of this millennium.

Evidence for this change of heart is to be found in many of the discipline's institutions. In the United States, for example, each issue of the *Art Bulletin* now publishes a variety of different perspectives on theoretical topics that are crucial to historical interpretation, and the College Art Association's annual conferences currently provide a forum for interpretive debates rather than ignoring them. Many universities and colleges support highly successful curricular initiatives in cultural and visual studies, and grants and book contracts are often awarded to theoretically sustained interdisciplinary projects. Museums and galleries as well have increasingly framed their exhibitions in terms other than those of universal aesthetic value, and practicing artists have become as informed as critics when it comes to situating their work inside larger cultural and political debates. It is no longer necessary to argue either that stylistic analysis and iconography should be the only forms of interpretation recognized by the profession or that there is only one canon of art-historical masterpieces on which scholars should go to work. The theoretical inspiration of art-historical practitioners is both diverse and eclectic. A whole range of heuristic procedures has now been recognized as valid in the making of art-historical meaning.

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It might be said that art history, like many other fields in the humanities, has entered a postepistemological age. In many quarters it is now acknowledged that history is not about the truth, that there is no way in which contemporary understanding can come to grips with the events of the past with any degree of finality or closure. The importance of the historian's subjectivity is recognized as an essential ingredient in any historical or critical narrative. Far from resulting in the facile pluralism that these changes, according to their critics, are supposed to have brought about, they have encouraged more self-reflexive forms of historical interpretation in which the choice of theoretical perspectives and methodological strategies is foregounded and thematized in such a way as to articulate the author's commitment to his or her chosen narrative. The essays brought together in this volume cannot hope to suggest the complete panorama of theoretical traditions that now inform art-historical writing. Instead, they address and exemplify a few of the leading forms of interpretation, as well as issues that have assumed new importance in the new circumstances.

The array of subjects, objects, and interpretive positions offered here, however, does not come without a cost. Once the idea of universal aesthetic value and the validity of historical research are opened to question, the confident center of the field dissipates, and art-history students, no matter how advanced, might legitimately feel bewildered about how to proceed. That is why the editors conceive of this anthology as a kind of theoretical primer. Each essayist has been asked to contribute an example of his or her particular interpretive point of view by making it "go to work" on a particular historical object. By paying attention to this multiplicity of perspectives (which are often in indirect conflict with one another), a student may be emboldened to find his or her own theoretical voice. Obviously, no serious scholar of art history can hope to master all of the interpretive viewpoints now on offer, but a passing familiarity with some of the most visible can only help to encourage the engendering of others as yet unheard.

This collection is intended primarily for an audience of graduate students, and certainly for advanced undergraduates as well: that audience, in other words, that is currently confronted by a bewildering array of methodological alternatives. By putting theory into practice and providing a working bibliography, all of the essays anthologized here attempt to convert the unconverted. But this new intellectual fervor is hardly the result of a revolution "from above" or "from without"; for the most part it has been a revolution "from below." Graduate students, intrigued by interpretive complexity and diversity, have clamored for courses and texts that address the plethora of interpretive issues up front instead of burying them under the auspices of disinterested scholarship. Because they have so often prized the value of intellectual excitement over the scholarly lassitude of teaching and doing business as usual, this collection is dedicated to them.

A word on the cover illustration. *Icon* (1990), an installation by Montreal artist Barbara Steinman, announces some of the themes and concerns of the anthology before a reader turns to the introduction, or even the table of contents, for it visually questions the status of art history as a science, the discipline that traditionally probed the secrets of mute works of art. On the front

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cover, we see her photograph of a restorer's camera taking a close-up of a sixteenth-century Madonna from the school of della Robbia. Out of sight initially (both in the installation and on our cover) is another photo (our frontispiece) that appears to be the result of the conservation lab's analysis. What looks at first like a pentimento revealed by X-ray or infrared photography – and in which the Madonna appears twice – is actually Steinman's electronic manipulation of the first picture. Screened from our view by these two large photos in her installation is *Icon*'s third element (our back cover), comprising two video monitors that show test tubes, one empty, the other being filled with a bloodlike liquid. A voice says, "Take a deep breath."

These aspects of *Icon* might make us contemplate several themes crucial to the study of art history today. What are we to make of the field's dream of scientific objectivity captured here, a dream that places an observer – or a technological surrogate – over against a passive object that awaits scrutiny? This dream also operates under the assumption that works of art have meanings that are hidden and in need of revelation. Steinman's installation confounds other art-historical assumptions as well: Painting is often valued over photography, but of course her work is photography, presented now as an art form that is no longer confined to the role of technological helpmate or documentary supplement to art history. Old-master art is often held in higher esteem than that produced by contemporary artists, yet Steinman accesses the old through her work in the present and leaves conspicuous traces of her temporal and ideological positioning. And while many art historians might continue to insist on the autonomy of their subject and its objects, Steinman shrewdly and instructively imbricates the theme of scientific experimentation on art with the wider and more culturally significant phenomenon of medical testing on human subjects. Were it not for the audio "Take a deep breath," we might tend to think that the analysis in the "back room" of the installation still involved the relief painting. Perhaps we are witnessing a pigment analysis. But the voice makes the testing very personal: We take a deep breath as our blood is drawn; we move from the art world to the "real" world and from the objectivity of disinterested scientific analysis to a personal experience. The point is that the distinctions among these areas are fragile (though revealing) in the extreme.

Looking at this work, then, we can think about how art history cannot remain isolated or innocent in its operations. It forms and performs cultural norms and assumptions. It acts upon and responds to its neighbors in cultural space, whether medical science, as in this case, or other disciplinary structures. The field has contours, borderlines that inscribe sanctioned practices for subjects and about objects but that are also there to be crossed, redefined, reshaped. As a discipline, art history's shape will necessarily change because of pressure from both inside and outside, above and below. Because the subjects and objects of the discipline are in constant flux, the contributors to this collection cannot completely describe the present shape of the field, its historiography, or its future. Least of all do we wish to prescribe its affinities or activities. We believe that it is also the case that the discipline has entered a moment of self-consciousness

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that is substantially different from the heady reinvigoration of the theoretical matrices it has witnessed since about 1980. "Theory" in art history, as in art, now needs no apology. Approaches are adopted and affinities exercised with increasing ease: None is clearly ascendant, which is why the notion of a "representative" set of approaches or methodologies seems destined to be outdated. If collectively we can demonstrate that the field does have shape(s) that are formed historically and that constitute everyday practice as well as influence future patterns of inquiry, we will have accomplished our principal pedagogical objective.

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Part One

Philosophy of History and Historiography

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1

Immanuel Kant and the Bo(a)rders of Art History

Mark A. Cheetham

One of the working titles for this volume – "The Contours of Art History" – incorporated the notion that a discipline or institution can be conceived spatially, that it has a *shape* defined by insides and outsides, borders and limits. If we believe that the field art historians create, inhabit with their various activities, and call their own does indeed have a shape that separates it – however provisionally and without any claim to internal unity or homogeneity, and necessarily depending upon the anamorphic angle from which it is conceived (Preziosi 1989) – from other disciplines and concerns, how are we to characterize these disciplinary limits, and in what ways might such descriptions be important historically, theoretically, and in the practice of art history today? Michel Foucault has argued that disciplines have developed historically as expressions and conduits of power/knowledge; it follows that the particular "shape" of a discipline at a given time will both reflect and fashion its policies of inclusion and exclusion regarding its legitimized objects of study, its methodologies, and its practitioners. As Timothy Lenoir argues, "disciplines are *political institutions* that demarcate areas of academic territory, allocate privileges and responsibilities of expertise, and structure claims on resources" (1993: 82). My first aim is to have us think about art history as a spatial entity in order to refine and answer questions about the field. Perceiving its shape (or shapes), how it came to be contoured this way, and how it changes can help us to understand where we are in a disciplinary sense and how this placement might affect our beliefs, claims, and behavior.

Rather than discuss a particular methodology, I will offer an apology – a defense in the Platonic sense – for the historiography of the discipline itself by focusing on Immanuel Kant's remarkable yet underestimated role in shaping art history and indeed art practice. I will concentrate on his reception as opposed to that of other more obviously influential thinkers such as Hegel.[1] Kant and Hegel have arguably had the greatest influence of any philosophers on the discipline of art history and on artists, and their effects are perhaps equal in scope and significance. As Stephan Nachtsheim claims, "The development of the relationship between art history and the philosophy of art stands from the beginning

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as evidence of the two authoritative, classic authors of German aesthetics, as Kant's and Hegel's mark" (1984: 10).[2] I do not want to assign one a greater importance than the other, but we nonetheless need to ask why so much more has been written about Hegel's roles in these areas than about Kant's.[3] Kant's influence, though pervasive, is less overt than Hegel's, and it frequently stems from his writings in areas other than art and aesthetics. Kant is, in addition, a quintessentially spatial, architectonic thinker[4] whose specific doctrines and terminology, as well as larger patterns of thought and assumptions about philosophy, have thoroughly infected art history and the practicing visual arts in part because of the persuasive, even seductive, form in which they are presented, a form that I believe is crucial in shaping disciplinary behavior. The use of "Kant" in art history can be thought of as paradigmatic of – if certainly not unique in – the relationship between this relatively new, nineteenth-century, field and philosophy, with its ancient traditions. If this claim can answer the question "Why study Kant in relation to art history?," it does so in ways that are not completely in concert with the recent resurgence of interest in his aesthetics. To generalize, negative readings see him as a paradigmatic Enlightenment figure, whose obsession with reason leads to abuses, to a Eurocentric absolutism in aesthetic judgment, for example, and to misogyny (Battersby, Eagleton, Mattick). More affirmative interest in Kant today often focuses on his theory of the sublime, to which I will return below. While my own contribution in no way denies the troubling implications of Kant's ideas, it does seek to recover some of the ways in which he has been influential historically in the visual arts and art history – an influence that can be seen as largely positive. His presence has been constant and can remain useful if we understand its history more fully.

Kant and the History of Art

What we witness in the employment of the name Kant in art history and cognate fields is a practice that might best – if awkwardly – be deemed "Kantism."[5] The name becomes a synecdoche for his doctrines (or those attributed to him), which in turn, through their reception in the visual arts and its surrounding discourses, come to stand for philosophy, the discipline of which he is a part and whose supremacy he asserts.[6] "Kantism" exercises Kant's thinking in at least a minimal way. For Christopher Norris, Kant's philosophy "raises certain questions – of agency, autonomy, ethical conduct, reflective self-knowledge – which were also some of Kant's most important concerns throughout the three *Critiques*" (1993: 71). Frequently, as we will see, "Kantism" invokes "the broadly Kantian notion that consciousness constitutes its world" (Summers 1989: 373). Another formulation of Kant's basic contribution comes from Thomas McEvilley: "The foundation of the Kantian doctrine is the notion of a [disinterested] sense of taste through which we respond to art . . . this quality is

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noncognitive, nonconceptual; it is a *sensus communis*, innate and identical in everyone; it is a higher faculty, above worldly concerns; it is governed by its own inner necessity" (1988: 125).

Kant remains an outsider, despite important work on several areas in which he has been instrumental to art history and to artists. Some examples of his reception are so obvious that they tend to slip from our consciousness. As Albert Boime has noted, many of the earliest responses to Kant were to the first *Critique*, to its apparent claims that we do not have access to the noumenal and that our knowledge of the world rests on our own faculties (1990: 329). Kant's first *Critique* is also the source for the famous analytic/synthetic distinction used early in discussions of Cubism to distinguish both working methods and chronological developments (Green). In both cases, Kant's terminology entered non-philosophical discourse, with artists, critics, and historians referring to the "thing-in-itself" or to "analytic" procedures in Cubist composition. The use of his terminology is neither innocent nor superficial. Thus for Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the art dealer and critic, Cubism's

> new language has given painting an unprecedented freedom . . . colored planes, through their direction and relative position, can bring together the formal scheme without uniting in closed forms . . . Instead of an analytical description, the painter can . . . also create in this way a synthesis of the object, or in the words of Kant, "put together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in our perception." (1949: 12)

Kahnweiler read Kant and neo-Kantian texts by Wilhelm Wundt, Heinrich Rickert, and others in Bern during World War I (Bois 1990, Gehlen 1966). For him, the analytic/synthetic distinction, the notions of the thing-in-itself and disinterestedness, and the formal autonomy of the work of art provided nothing less than a way of conceptualizing Cubism.

Perhaps the two best-known uses of Kant's name were by Clement Greenberg in his apologies for the European avant-garde and for post–World War II abstract painting (Crowther 1985, Curtin 1982, Stadler 1982, Summers 1994) and by the central founders of academic art history – Wölfflin and Panofsky especially – who used Kant to demarcate and ground the new discipline. These relations within art history have been expertly examined by Hart, Holly (1984), Podro (1982), Preziosi, and others, but it is worth emphasizing here that the *need* for grounding is itself a philosophical imperative and that the view that philosophy is the only secure place *for* grounding is a Kantian legacy, one that has done much to shape and place the discipline. This grounding can be metaphysical and epistemological, as in Panofsky's famous and distinctly Kantian search for a stable Archimedean point *outside* the flux of empirical reality from which to judge individual works of art. Kant has also been used more recently to buttress what we might call an ethics of art-historical behavior: In the final paragraph of his essay on Hegel, Ernst Gombrich surprisingly invokes Kant's "stern and frightening doctrine that nobody and nothing can relieve us of

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the burden of moral responsibility for our judgement" as an antidote to the "theophany" that Hegel purportedly saw in history (1984: 69).[7] L. D. Ettlinger similarly looked to Kant as the defender of individual, humanist priorities in art history. In a lecture delivered in 1961 titled "Art History Today," he mentions Kant only in his final remarks, relying on him as the ultimate defender of a renewed humanism, the focus on "those central problems which concern man and his works" (1961: 21).[8]

Largely forgotten today are examples of specific Kantian ideas that have been employed, with varying consequences, by artists. This partial amnesia is, I think, highly selective along the contours established between disciplines and says much about the typically hierarchical relationship between art history and artists as well as about the relationship of philosophy to both these areas. Yet recently artists as different but important as Joseph Kosuth and Barnett Newman in the United States and Anselm Kiefer in Germany have used Kant in various ways. While I certainly do not want to argue for a "pure" Kant or a pure reception of his work in any of these cases – philosophical ideas tend to blend when put into practice, as in Greenberg's teleological and no doubt Hegelian invocation of what he saw as a Kantian insistence on auto-criticism and "formalism" (McEvilley 1991: 160) – I maintain that attention to specific artists' uses of Kant demonstrates both the complexity and potency of his reception and its role in shaping disciplines. I will return to Kiefer, but let me first detail a fascinating use of Kant among artists and critics of his own time. My hope is to add concreteness to the excellent studies of Kant mentioned above and to adumbrate a new conceptual mapping of his importance to disciplinarity.

In 1796, the later eminent Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844) was commissioned to bring with him on his way from Northern Europe to Rome Kant's recently published essay "Perpetual Peace" (*Zum ewigen Frieden* [1795]). His interest in Kant was made concrete by this text and gave him an entry into a vibrant German-speaking art community that based its sense of personal, artistic, and political autonomy largely on Kant's *political* views (Schoch 1992), precisely and not coincidentally at the time when Napoleon declared Rome a republic and artistic freedom seemed to be guaranteed, however briefly, by political change. The leader of this artist colony in Rome ca. 1800, Asmus Jakob Carstens (1754–98), was sufficiently earnest about Kantian ideas to produce a drawing titled *Raum und Zeit* (1794). His rather literal yet allegorical rendition of the fundamental categories of space and time from the first *Critique* was the topic of correspondence between Goethe and Schiller in which the two dramatists criticized the artist's flat-footed response to Kant. But Carstens employed the philosopher's political thinking to greater effect. As Busch confirms, he adopted Kant's distinction between public and private duty to justify his bold refusal to return from Rome to his position at the Prussian Academy in Berlin. "I belong to humanity, not to the Academy of Berlin," he wrote in 1796, and "I am ready . . . to assert it in public, to justify myself to the world, as I feel justified in my own conscience" (Carstens 1970: 109). "By the public use of one's reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it *as a man of learning* addressing the entire

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reading public," Kant stated in "What Is Enlightenment?" (Beantwortung der Frage: was ist Aufklärung?). Like Kant, Carstens asserts the "public" primacy of his conscience over the strictures of what Kant labeled any "private" "*civil* post or office" (Kant 1991: 55).

Another member of the circle Thorvaldsen sought to join, the Tyrolean landscape painter Joseph Anton Koch (1768–1839), evolved a particularist style of depicting nature's phenomena which, in its emphases on amassing detail and on inclusive visibility, is very close to Kant's innovative notion of the "mathematical" sublime in the third *Critique* (Cheetham 1987). But the most profound and sustained interaction between Kant's philosophy and the Carstens circle was realized by the critic and historian Carl Ludwig Fernow, for whom Thorvaldsen's copy of Kant's new book was destined. Fernow knew Schiller (the main disseminator of Kantian ideas at this time) and had studied in Jena with the Kantian Karl Leonhard Reinhold from 1791 to 1793 before arriving in Rome in 1794. Fernow demonstrated that Kant's philosophy was important to more than specialists and that in its reception, his thinking bore directly on the contemporary visual arts: In the winter of 1795–6, in Rome, he gave a series of lectures on Kant's aesthetics to an audience of thirty-six artists, intellectuals, and art lovers, two of whom were Koch and Carstens. Fernow claimed that Kant "made palpable the full dignity and significance of art" (Schoch 1992: 21), and that his philosophy was helpful to the judgments of an active critic and historian (Einem 1935: 82). Though more concrete than Kant, Fernow largely agreed with the philosopher on the need to ground our knowledge of beauty and reality itself in the subject. His letters also reveal his interest in other aspects of Kant's ideas. He notes favorably the formation of the contemporary Roman Republic while praising Kant's "Perpetual Peace" (1944: 231); indeed, Fernow and his compatriots styled their "Künstlerrepublik" on Kant's ideals and thus skillfully and effectively combined the political and aesthetic sides of his doctrine of autonomy, both his belief in personal freedom (under rules) and the necessary independence of artistic judgment from morality on the one hand and nature on the other. Through Fernow, Kant's ideas on politics, ethics, and aesthetics went a long way in structuring the self-image and artistic goals of these important artists.

Students of the humanities know Kant as an important figure in the European Enlightenment and as central to this day in philosophical aesthetics, a field he consolidated with the publication of the *Critique of Judgment* in 1790. In his own time as today, his thoughts on aesthetics were held to be difficult, technical, and best adapted to a strictly philosophical setting. Yet as we have seen, Kant's contemporaries and those in later times were not deterred from absorbing his theories directly or in some mediated form. In 1796, for example, Friedrich Grillo published "Ueber Kunst nach Herrn Kant," written specifically "für denkende Künstler, die die Critik der Urteilskraft nicht lesen" (p. 721)![9] Many recent commentators, on the other hand, minimize the importance of Kant's work with art in the third *Critique*. Cohen and Guyer, two of his most distinguished interpreters, refer to "mere digressions on some specific

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