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State of the Arts

Joseph Margolis, Temple University, USA

I

In an unpublished “minor text,” “What is Enlightenment?,” named for that other well-known “minor text,” Immanuel Kant’s 1784 answer to the question posed by the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, that extraordinarily clever modern man, Michel Foucault, demonstrates in a light-fingered way that Kant’s answer deepens the meaning of his three great *Critiques* beyond his imagination and against himself, by subverting the universalist and transcendentalist pretensions of his master vision. Foucault proceeds by historicizing Kant’s fixities, by transforming the meaning of explaining human nature, human enlightenment — hence, in effect, the meaning of the fine arts as well: he simply replaces a rational Critique by a genealogy of self-understanding (more or less in Nietzsche’s sense, perhaps in a sense akin to a Heideggerean reversal of Hegel’s critique of Kant¹), in order to place himself strategically in the position of continuing the subversion of the *Kantian* project well into the time of our own captive review of modernist pretensions. In this way, he proceeds against the self-deceptions, simple and not so simple, of figures like Jürgen Habermas, Noam Chomsky, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger (all of whom Foucault confronted or had in mind), as well, of course, as Kant himself. Quite a heady undertaking.

Foucault accomplishes all this in a marvelously modest offhand way by drawing on the orienting innovations and daring of Baudelaire’s reflections on modernism,² which helps him define the deeper originality of Kant’s answer (as he construes it) by inhabiting that supposed originality himself and hinting at its true bearing on Kant’s first and third *Critiques*. For history — or, better: historicity (as Foucault understands the matter, correctly I would say) — is the final source of transient assurance against every mistaken presumption of what is deemed to be perennially true; or of what we cannot possibly think without admitting; or of every inviolable and privileged perfection. (This is not in the least alien to Baudelaire’s account of the modernist’s preoccupation.) Aesthetics, I should say, is, ultimately, the space of cultural celebration, the politics of norms and principles practiced under the sign of unforeseen change, stability among ephemera, the evolving order of whatever is at all intelligible as the historical expression of the human condition itself: sheer utterance therefore — preeminently, the arts — praised or at least collected if not praised; finally, then, the largest of generousities practiced on ourselves.

You must bear in mind that there is almost no philosophical concession to the historied nature of human thought or art in Kant’s third *Critique* (or in cognate texts) — where, of course, there should have been: a palpable blindness among the imperatives of Kant’s own *aude*, the site of a correction that has still to be completed in our lax age. I take that to be Foucault’s lesson.

The criticism Foucault insinuates, which links Kant (by subversion), Nietzsche, Baudelaire, himself — and, hopefully, ourselves as well — will be:

archaeological [Foucault says] — and not transcendental — in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from this form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, do, or think. It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.³

Here, Foucault's skill might indeed be characterized as "Hegelian" (in the lightest of readings) in the sense that, in answering the question about "Enlightenment," Foucault advises us, compellingly, first, to treat the historically "accidental" and the philosophically "universal" as one and the same, viewed from different vantages but always within the flux of history; and, second, to regard conceptual closure, necessity, and impossibility as, at one and the same time, no more than the enabling and restrictive fluencies of (so to speak) the age to which we belong — not abstractly (under some would-be constitutive principle of reason) but in concretely formative and transformative ways (in accord with the contingently horizoned practices of our time). There's the point of Baudelaire's wit and heroism, in combing through the ephemera of everyday life in order to find and fix the (unending) "genealogical" explanation of why we are as and what we are — but might (and still could) be different, if we but responded differently to the evolving, as yet unfathomed possibilities of the very world we occupy. Foucault is dismantling Kant by means of his high regard for Kant's subliminal subversion of his own largest claims — and, with them, the self-deception of *our* Kantian loyalties.

I take advantage of this contrived reflection to say that we are now — ourselves — at a new juncture at which it might be important to answer the *Monatschrift's* question differently once again — perhaps even more forcefully than Foucault does, in our dangerously threatened world. For now is surely the moment in which the definition of a global aesthetics confronts us, unblinkingly, with the need to propose a departure from the Enlightenment pretensions of a rational universalism of the peculiarly Eurocentric sort that Kant invents in his terribly influential way and then politely advertises in the submission to the *Monatschrift*.

Foucault deflects the force of all of Kant's seriousness with his easy babble, all the while he strikes a decisive blow against Kant's continuing hegemony. Because he shows us — without arguing the point — how and why Kant's apriorism cannot possibly exceed being more than a perverse construction of *a posteriori* history. He compels us (elsewhere) to acknowledge the profound diversity of human cultures — for instance in the *History of Sexuality*.⁴ He returns us to the human condition therefore, to the artifactual nature of human thought and reason — to the "actual" possibilities of human freedom *within history*; hence, too, to the extravagance (Kant's extravagance) in pretending to understand human nature (in thought and deed) only by way of an Olympian — actually, a rather ramshackle — higher dualism, impossible to confirm, inaptly fitted to the complex unity and coherence of ordinary human experience: so that Kant is able to claim to have discovered an exclusive and changeless bond between empirical heteronomy and transcendental autonomy — which he nowhere specifies and never could. (I'm hinting

here at the reason for the complete failure of Kant's transcendentalism — at the exposé, hardly against Kant alone, of that politically useful sham we call universalism!)

What Foucault and Baudelaire — and Hegel and Nietzsche — share is a recognition of the end of universalism as a literal goal of rational inquiry and the need to specify what might replace it in the flux of history — in order to secure a continuing sense of rigor among affected modes of inquiry or intelligent practice: in particular, for our present purpose, an account of how to understand the description, interpretation, appraisal, and appreciation of the fine arts of all the peoples of the earth.

My own intuition insists that something close to Hegel's dialectical strategies — already premised on the exposé of Kant's faulty invariances among the categories of rational understanding — in effect, strategies that rely instead on the improvised, openended, material or *geistlich* generalities of historical emergence, gathered in terms of one or another narrative of telic continuity (or of freedom and rational self-understanding, as Hegel puts it) — has the best chance of being at all adequate to the concrete logic of evolving history, the arts, politics, morality, and religion. When Hegel first confirmed, against Kant, that there was no science of science, no apodictic knowledge of the conditions of contingent knowledge,⁵ he effectively established that what we claim as knowledge of the world cannot be more than a historically changeable construction.

What is normally ignored in isolating the lesson of Hegel's argument is, first, that predicative extension cannot but be dialectically informal and endlessly revisable, in accord with our evolving sense of the narrative thrust of historical *actualités*; and, second, that totality and universality are never more than utopian goals assigned (by us) as the infinite and all-encompassing limit of our limited attributions in the here and now.

We rely (as we must) on selected historical events or artistic prototypes provisionally marked as pregnant with the essential import of an age: as in favoring Goethe's Faust as the paradigm of the Romantic *Geist*. But when we do that, for instance in adopting Santayana's compelling account of Goethe,⁶ we adopt the best-seeming candidates for a surrogate universalism fitted to a human scale (that is, frankly, a generalization that is neither necessary nor universal in Kant's categorical sense), which even Hegel's occasionally excessive verbal self-indulgence cannot possibly better. Kant's transcendental universals are simply beyond the reach of human competence. Full stop.

If so, then Hegel already uses Kant's vocabulary against Kant: speaks of necessity where he means contingency — and of universality where he means finite regularity. So that utopian finality is never more than the risked commitment of a replaceable reading of some here and now, by which (as we learn from Foucault) the politics of predication stands exposed. For our present purpose, the contemporary answer to the *Monatschrift*'s competition is just that universalism is the last refuge of cultural hegemony — and that, as a result, the redefinition of the aesthetic and the fine arts must abandon altogether Kant's way of introducing the discipline. We must, for instance, begin with the arts as historied and intelligible artifacts and relegate the antinomy of taste to a minor role. The entire lesson, I suggest, is daringly captured — opportunistically, of course — in a single gesture in Marcel Duchamp's notorious hanging of his readymade in the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, in New York City.⁷ But Kant's is a false universalism — I mean Kant's apodictic modality — that needs to be abandoned therefore. The *Fountain* has of course easily survived the change.

II

If you see the point of all this, you see how utterly unhelpful Kant's account of beauty is in the first part of the third *Critique*: for, under reasonable challenge, it loses forever the very idea of the universality of the judgment of taste that it so cleverly reclaims. What needs to be grasped is the logical difference between generality and universality: universality, what is strictly universal (*allgemein*), is utopian, subjunctive, inherently inaccessible except as serially projected; whereas generality, what is merely general (also, *allgemein*), is indicative, perspectived, actual, historically transient albeit stable enough. The two are regularly confused and conflated, because, of course, the universal is no more than an interpretive wager projected as the infinite extension of the generalities that we know. All that needs to be added, to fix the lesson we require, is the inference that what, from a formal point of view, is merely logical, is, also, when construed politically, a clear bid for cultural authority — a form of imperial force “by other means.”⁸

I draw from this the essential theme of a fresh answer (or, perhaps better, a further detail in Foucault's answer) to the original question, which, in my opinion, helps to restore our sense of the corrective power of Hegel's critique of Kant's great undertaking at the very start of the innovation Foucault ponders: namely, that thinking, reason, knowledge, understanding have, or are, histories and that Kant, who cannot be bested in his exposé of the would-be abstract, necessary, universally binding — but altogether arbitrary — discoveries claimed by his rationalist predecessors, should have realized that he too was precluded (by the force of his own argument) from claiming to discern his seemingly more modest discoveries if only (as he apparently believed) they were restricted, referentially, to the internal machinery of our cognizing faculties, without yielding any necessary truths about the external world. But that's hardly more than a whistling in the philosophical wind. Foucault puts the whole of Kant's Critical system at mortal risk by reading the transcendental turn “genealogically” — that is, against transcendentalism. And yet, you might hardly notice that that *is* precisely what Foucault is doing.

The bearing of Foucault's indirection on the past and future of aesthetics, which, of course, was not Foucault's specific topic, though, once mentioned, was bound to be as deeply affected as any other inquiry to which Kant's transcendentalism might be applied, is just this: that, in our time, acknowledging the global scope of now-pertinent reflections on art, criticism, objective judgment, divergent norms of beauty and the like, we cannot fail to see that universalisms and privileged forms of judgment of any kind *are*, given the history of philosophy and the history of the reception of the arts themselves, more than ordinarily likely to be manifestations of cultural imperialism and conceptual colonizing meant to entrench (however innocently) the norms and judgments embedded in the most influential movements of the history of the philosophy of art. There is, for example, a colonizing force already implicit in Kant's conception of a rational moral agent — which, you remember, aesthetic sensibility dependently subserves and, separately, is disallowed any independent cognitive competence of its own.⁹ So that, if Hegel, Nietzsche, and Foucault are at all right in their analysis of the tradition that culminates in Kant's work, then Kant's most imperious directives could never be strictly validated. Aesthetics would have to favor very different intuitions.

I would say that, by refusing to admit any native cognitive or critical competence to aesthetic judgment, Kant's almost completely vacuous account of aesthetic taste in the first part of the third *Critique* lends considerable inertial support, obliquely, to the proxy

role of the aesthetic vis-à-vis other sources of valid judgment said to be governed by universal rational constraint. The entire story becomes enormously consequential if we think carefully about the plain fact that Western aesthetics has its precise beginnings, more or less professionally, with the publication and reception of Kant's third *Critique*. There is no other modern text as influential as Kant's in the discipline of aesthetics.

Kant gives us a completely false sense of the center of gravity of the entire discipline: regarding both the intellectual worth of whatever critical analyses fall under its primary constraints and the logical standing of their characteristic claims — at the same time, because of the *Critique's* transcendentalist pretensions, we are automatically led to endorse the paradigms of artistic beauty the Western tradition authoritatively affirms. You see, therefore, how Kant's logic defines the very politics of aesthetics. We cannot have the one without the other.

And yet, the 18th-century British belletristes whom Kant so much admired — Addison, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Burke, Hume — never doubted the immediate logical pertinence of critical reasons in support of one's appreciation of fine art (chiefly, literature), where universality (as with Hume) was always acknowledged to be a problematic induction.¹⁰ Not only that, but the precocious, ill-starred Baumgarten, whose *Metaphysics* Kant apparently used as a text late into his own career and who is said to have coined the term “aesthetic” in a sense somewhat close to its early modern formulation (though hardly in accord with Kant's purpose), had already treated imagination as a cognitively informed faculty in its own right, had admitted the pertinence of art-critical and art-historical studies to aesthetic judgment, and nowhere characterized the subjective (subjectively responsive) emphasis of the aesthetic as entailing the irrelevance of conceptual discrimination. Here, Baumgarten remains close to the spirit of Lessing — and, very plausibly, closer to contemporary persuasion than Kant's distinctly retrograde account. That's to say, Kant's preposterous views are very much his own.

The Australian philosopher and theorist of culture, Harry Redner, who begins his recent book, *Aesthetic Life*, with a reflection on similar considerations, formulates almost at once two extremely important generalizations, which I happily endorse — and which I think can be fairly derived from the gist of Foucault's lesson as I've presented it (perhaps cast a little differently from Redner's formula — but close enough): the first, that “the boundary between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic must be mapped anew for each culture”; the second, that “aesthetic qualities are not subjective phenomena; neither are they [merely] objective; they belong [says Redner] to the cultural or mental realm. . . . [The fact] that many of them depend on perception does not make them subjective.”¹¹ It's remarkably difficult to savor, in our own age, how utterly alien these mild theorems already are to the doctrines Kant originally professed — and yet how effortlessly their good sense strikes the ear now.

If we admit the force of these corrections (which go deeper than they appear), Kant's transcendentalism will be read as a profoundly indefensible version of his own immensely attractive proposal of the transcendental “turn” in philosophy; we would be drawn at once to overturn a good many of the theorems of the third *Critique*. The transcendental *a priori* might then be easily transformed into an *a posteriori* posit fitted to the changing history of cultural experience; and concepts might then prove to be historically evolving constructs grounded in the actual experience and practice of a people, impossible to grasp or use correctly if detached from the specific paradigms, the

concrete prototypes and salient exemplars that orient and validate their opened application. There would then be no autonomous, apodictic principles to call on: objective judgments regarding the arts and the cultural achievements of a particular society would require a measure of immersion in its embedding culture; and any alternative, any apriorist assurance, would be no more than the thrust of a form of cultural imperialism. I find that a most important lesson for our time: important but too difficult to be easily learned.

For the same reasons, there is no apriorist disjunction that can be made out among Kant's different modes of judgment: scientific, moral, aesthetic — or, we may now add, among judgments of intra- and cross-cultural objectivity of any kind. The third *Critique* could never, then, rightly play a foundational role in aesthetics: we could never hope to get our bearings on beauty and the arts on Kantian grounds; and aesthetics could never be pursued as an autonomous discipline. Its cognitive credentials would have to be acknowledged; but those would now be as modest as the credentials of moral and scientific judgments already are.

Since Kant, however, we have had to find other ways of making a proper start in aesthetics. It's simply a scandal that we still dither over father Kant's false beginnings. Nothing favoring Kant's opening instruction was ever suggested by Kant's British or German predecessors. Truth to tell, for all its grandeur, Kant's speculation in the third *Critique* was (and remains) as wild (intellectually) as it could possibly be: I'm speaking of course of Kant's headlong defense of a closed *a priori* system of thought already mortally wounded by the pertinence of Herder's early ineffective nagging regarding the small truths of history.¹² I trust you see that I regard the Kantian "transcendental turn" as profoundly equivocal in its possibilities: as, say, between inquiries canonically enriched by *geistlich* resources and Kant's own *transcendentalist* constructions. The standing of aesthetics hangs in the balance.

III

We must, somewhere, acknowledge and repudiate Kant's mistakes. Otherwise, we risk losing both philosophy and aesthetics. Faithless, you will say, mean-spirited, possibly even illiterate. But the fact remains that Kantian aesthetics has made a perfect monument of the irrelevance of relevance: art becomes a complete mystery of nature; the craft of painting and poetry is no longer a legible discipline of any kind; never mind what you see and understand in Vermeer and Milton — it has no evidentiary bearing on your judgment of the beauty of what either has created; I cannot pertinently show you how Cézanne's landscapes evolve from earlier stylistic options; I can't compare the merits of Braque and Picasso as cubist cousins; my claim to see the poignance of the Betrayal represented in Giotto's fresco is nothing but a bewildered change of topic.

But will you admit that Kant, from the very start, wrongly championed a variant of the same rationalist self-deception he convincingly exposed in his first *Critique*, and that in his third *Critique* he applied the same error in an utterly barbaric way to the antinomy of taste? He resolves the antinomy, you must concede, on grounds that have no connection at all with any fluent practice of appreciation regarding the arts or, for that matter, regarding beauty in either nature or art. There are then no genuine connoisseurs to be found, it seems. There's nothing to learn in learning how to read or look or listen in learning about the arts — unless it's to learn how to copy *exactly* whatever strikes our thoughtless sensibilities as the correlate of that special pleasure we call "aesthetic." Can

that be true? Kant saves “aesthetic universality,” of course, but only by a labored conceptual maneuver that has absolutely no use or plausibility beyond the clockwork of his own system. No doubt he’s gained an immense philosophical victory — he’s snatched triumph from disaster once again. But he has nothing to say about the arts; or, better, what he says that *is* genuinely interesting (and, of course, there is much that is interesting) never seems to issue from the contrived powers of the third *Critique*’s regulated resources, unless it is to make us aware of his special skills and the distant relevance of the great first *Critique*.

This sounds more than a little harsh — and it is harsh. But it hardly detracts from my immense admiration for the extraordinary insight of what we may call Kant’s “transcendental turn,” which is of course the pivot of the whole of “modern” modern philosophy, that is, when contrasted with Kant’s own transcendentalism: the latter is the product of his disastrous reliance on the very rationalism he masterfully rejects in the first *Critique* but somehow instantly salvages in both the first and third *Critiques*. It’s the entire circumstance that explains the pointed pointless resolution of the antinomy of taste. The transcendental turn, by contrast, Kant’s almost unmatched invention, must be separated from his own transcendentalism.

The post-Kantian Idealists are divided here. On the whole, they are reluctant to abandon ontological necessity. By contrast, Hegel, I would say, though he also seems to shadow Kant’s duality — at least rhetorically — ultimately demurs; it’s the concrete complexities of history and culture that persuade Hegel. He returns to the finitude of the human state; he converts the *a priori* into the *a posteriori*; he abandons universalism, metaphysical necessity, the pretensions of absolute knowing, the facultative privileges of Reason, the determinacy of the infinite *telos* of *geistlich* history; but he preserves and manipulates all of these conceptions heuristically, in order to match (and discount) the amplitude of Kant’s closed system — without admitting closure and without violating the contingencies of historical experience. To put Hegel’s correction crudely: he restores everything that Kant excludes — and more.

Surely, that is the only way to understand the opening lines of Hegel’s Introduction to his own *Aesthetics*:

These lectures [he says] are devoted to Aesthetics. Their topic is the spacious *realm of the beautiful*; more precisely, their province is *art*, or, rather, *fine art*.

For this topic, it is true, the word Aesthetics, taken literally, is not wholly satisfactory, since “Aesthetics” means, more precisely, the science of sensation, of feeling. . . . [T]he science which is meant [here] deals not with the beautiful as such but simply with the beauty of art. We will therefore let the word “Aesthetics” stand . . . the proper expression for our science is *Philosophy of Art* and, more definitely, *Philosophy of Fine Art*.

By adopting this expression, we at once exclude the beauty of nature. . . . [F]or the beauty of art is *higher* than nature. The beauty of art is beauty *born of the spirit and born again*.¹³

Here, at one stroke, Hegel confidently erases all the disastrous wrong turns of Kant’s third *Critique*; but he could never have succeeded if he hadn’t confronted the essential failing of transcendentalism itself. What dawns, therefore, is that the division between the transcendental turn and transcendentalism demonstrates that either Hume’s empiricism is as much occupied with transcendental questions as Kant’s are (as Kant himself was inclined to believe) or else Kant should have realized that his own transcendental turn was never more than a dramatic way of grasping the deeper possibilities of contingent

second-order reflections on whatever may be given in experience. Hegel sets us on the right path, as in a way does Hume; but we are hardly bound to follow either Hegel or Hume any more than we are bound to Kant.

This helps us understand what the redefinition of aesthetics now requires: it should, for instance, explain the sense in which Hegel's dialectical logic is also the key to the meaning of the global redirection of aesthetics that confronts us now — that might now elude the cultural and philosophical imperialisms of the past. I hope you will find this matter worthy enough for these otherwise strenuous details. They begin to collect a reasonably continuous brief from Kant's unmatched influence to the emerging needs of a global society. To be entirely candid, perhaps a bit frontal: I confess I find the disconnected indifference of our globalized markets toward weak states like Tanzania, or toward single-crop economies like those of West Africa stalemated by the protectionism of stronger economies, a valid symbol (and a valid anticipation) of what will surely be risked in a global market of cultural exchange — and I fear both. Both Kant and Hegel signify, in very different ways, the familiar hegemonies of the Eurocentric world. The correction of our aesthetics is bound to be a political act.

In any case, the antinomy of taste is a minor form of play. No more than that. Subjectivity is never made irrelevant where subjectivism is rejected; the antinomy's solution (Kant's solution) is pure subjectivism; and judgment never makes sense without supporting reasons and conceptually fine-grained analysis. There are, also, no fixed forms of substantive necessity in the analysis of thought or reality, and admitting that fact is not itself a paradoxical exception to the charge. Mimesis is a faulty philosophy when made to signify that the very conception of the fine arts, or of artistic genius, or of beauty and the judgment of taste, or taste itself, entails the priority of any would-be invariant norm of nature over the artifactual norms of historically diverse evolving cultures, or indeed the metaphysical adequacy of construing human creativity and the world of the arts in terms of the native powers of human nature.

Kant's intuition goes topsy-turvy here. Consider that all such elements are culturally formed and transformed. Baudelaire, for instance, who was greatly impressed by Edgar Allan Poe's essay on the composition of *The Raven*, was much taken with the idea of artistic originality *as* itself culturally acquired!¹⁴ Kant misses the obvious lesson completely. Merely to bear witness to the passing accidents of history (artworks, let us suppose) — to speak in Hegel's way — confronts us with an endless variety of *geistlich* saliences that may sometimes prove to have more than ordinary significance. For, there, easily enough, we tolerate perceptions in which the accidental and the universal, or the finite and the infinite, or the horizoned and the absolute, seem (for a time) to be the same — though never more than replaceably. That, I would say, is very nearly the most generous and accurate reading of Hegel's conception of the dialectical logic of cultural history. It is also as close as we could possibly come to a valid universalism or to a grasp of the inclusive totality of the world. Art is the celebration of experience reflected in the material utterances of encultured agents. There you have an answer, fitted to our own time, to the *Monatschrift's* original question.

It's true that the world of culture and history emerges from the natural world while remaining incarnate in it; but it also manifests its own *sui generis* features that cannot be adequately fathomed in terms of the categories of unassisted nature — emergent features subject to modes of formation and change utterly unlike those confined to the merely

natural world. The analysis of the world of the arts requires categories that evolve in distinctive ways — because cultures evolve in cognate ways; it needs a continually evolving revision of our mode of understanding artifactual structures, structures of meaning (let us say) — always embedding history itself — which stalemates universalism at every turn.

The would-be subjective and objective elements of inquiry are never separable as far as knowledge is concerned; the subjective can never be rightly cast as the sole or primary center of gravity of aesthetic interest (or of science); in fact, the aesthetic — whatever we take that to be — is always a publicly articulated space. Kant's dissatisfaction with his own efforts to impose some form of apriorist closure ranging over all of the categories of science hardly signifies the absence of science itself. If it signifies anything, it's the need to revise — drastically, in historied terms — our picture of what a science finally is; and then the chimera of universalism and rational necessity becomes too obvious to be permitted to discipline the laxer questions of the world of art and culture. Kant appeared too early in his century to grasp Herder's prescience.

In these regards, Kant was always dead wrong — and contemporary aesthetics has still to pay its dues. Nearly all of Kant's important missteps rest on a simple, neglected, easily corrected, but still philosophically strenuous misperception that we now realize is not only critical for aesthetics but for all empirically motivated investigation as well: namely, that inquiry entails the use of predicates that must be fashioned and continually refashioned *from* publicly shared, publicly evolving experience directly applied *to its own favored objects*. Successful predication, then, answers to a historically informed choice of exemplary specimens *and* a decision as to how its practices of application can be extended to new specimens and changing predicates. There's the subversive lesson of Foucault's and Baudelaire's reflection on Kant's logic — on the logic of modernity.

The only possible way to meet the paradox requires what may be called a dialectical grasp of our way of understanding our experienced world. Here, Hegel is undoubtedly the most far-sighted early theorist of the historicized world he helped to invent. Certainly, Hegel is closer to the truth than brittle Kant, although Hume was already aware of the paradoxes of predication. Even Kant admits the insuperable informality of “mother wit” in the practice of any mode of judgment.¹⁵ There's no rule, Kant says, for correctly applying the rules of judgment to the world experienced. But if so, then the “rules” of judgment applied to science or the arts *cannot* be formulated *a priori*, abstractly, in any necessary or invariant way, *wherever separated from the contingent referents and exemplars and informal prototypes of analysis and application* that, for a given span of practice, have proved to be productive while continually revisable *in medias res*.

There's the invisible problem the Idealists discovered: the great lacuna Fichte and the principal post-Kantians (including Hegel) realized Kant could never fill. To grasp that single lesson is to free aesthetics completely from Kant's thrall. But, more than that, it divides forever the mismatch between transcendentalism and the transcendental turn. For no inquiry can rightly claim to be autonomous or completely separate from the influence of historical experience.

Kant needed only to extend his discovery regarding the “rule of rules” *to* his transcendental categories, as (he admits) holds true of empirical concepts, to have anticipated the force of Hegel's fundamental insight. For, if Hegel is right about there being no science of science, then he's right as well about there being no principled

disjunction between categories and concepts; and if that is true, then there cannot be an essential difference between the transcendental and the empirical. The theory of history and the theory of predication — like the slayer and the slain — are now the same. Kantian categories are no more than the contingent posits of the very disciplines they pretend to legitimate. That alone counts as the *sine qua non* constraining any serviceable attempt to ground aesthetics in our time — a barrier, let me remind you, against philosophical and cultural imperialism and any retreat to cognitive privilege. *If* Hegel goes wrong here — I admit I find that well-nigh inconceivable, though he speaks very grandly of essences and absolutes — then the analysis of real-world predication that I've barely begun to sketch must be permitted to correct Hegel as well as Kant.

What I offer here has at least the virtue of familiarity; it also locates our global challenge within the terms of its accepted history. But it goes on to suggest a way of constructing a valid aesthetics free of the taint of *a priori* privilege and political hegemony. It accepts the defeat of the rationalism that fatally infected Kant's own proposals; and it is prepared (if needed) to apply correctives to Hegel's excesses as well. Our conceptual puzzles have become impossible to ignore: the global world confronts us at every turn; and we must abandon the false assurances of universalism, necessity, normative fixities, systematicity, and cognitive privilege. Something akin to Hegel's logic suggests our only option, but dialectical reasoning alone could never demonstrate the validity of any uniquely correct norm or *telos* within an openended history.

IV

The corrective clue that's needed is buried in plain view. Its lesson applies to any account of human understanding that respects the limitations of experience. There is, for instance, in every predicative continuum, a touch of charity, a bridge of tolerance, a risk of indeterminacy — practical, provisional, passing, consensual, idiosyncratic — that concedes sufficient similarity between two uses of "the same concept" sufficient to convert a seemingly blind leap into a reasonable extension. There's the theorizing discontinuity of Reason that animal exuberance continually overtakes by practical commitment. I take that to be the nerve of pragmatism: therefore, the nerve of my pragmatist continuation of Foucault. It validates, for the moment, the identity of the accidental and the essential, the finite and the infinite, the transient and the invariant, the critical and the creative, the particular and the singular, the horizontal and the absolute. For none of these pairs makes any sense at all without the leap of faith (or reason) that binds each to the other; it is for that reason that the first term of each pair holds the place it holds as a member of the ineffable space of the second, which human practice always successfully penetrates.

This is a lesson, I hazard, deeper than Hegel's dialectical logic, though not deeper than Hegel's understanding of that logic;¹⁶ for once we have the general argument before us, we realize that there must be an endless variety of ways of capturing the material flux of history. This, then, is merely one way of posing the lesson that exposes the radical mistake of Kant's third *Critique*, the deep opposition between transcendentalism and the transcendental turn, the point of Hegel's essential correction, the evidence that Hegel's own Kantianism is, finally, not unlike Foucault's (which, of course, Hegel made possible), the confirmation (therefore) of Foucault's subversion of Kant's system even as he expresses his admiration for Kant's daring.

It's a clue in favor of the redefinition of the aesthetic in our time: the definition of a sort of global justice among actual cultural histories, resistance to obvious hegemonies, the incipience of a new sort of membership that begins easily enough with our affection for the arts. Consider, for example, that, in *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer rather mysteriously (obliquely and without debate) recovers the primacy of the norms of Greek classicism from the seemingly open contingencies of what he calls "the fusion of horizons."¹⁷ We never learn how he turns the trick — but many of us feel unaccountably relieved. It's as if Gadamer had been frightened by the decentered normativities of his own hermeneutics: did he fear, then, the barbarian possibilities he knew no other way of disallowing?

Or consider Noam Chomsky's abandonment of the supposed universalism of his "universal grammars":¹⁸ Chomsky realized that his grammars were hostage to privileged guesses at Indo-European norms; hence, insisting on the *a priori* necessity of a Kantian-like universalism down to the present moment, he concedes the *a posteriori* standing of those same grammars: he remains *listo* but quite unable to formulate a suitable replacement. Or, more generously, think of Ernst Cassirer's candid rejection of Kantian transcendentalism in favoring a Hegelian version of the transcendental turn — applied to the large presumptions of the natural sciences (hence, irresistibly, to the modest claims of history and the cultural disciplines as well) — cast in Kantian terms no longer opposed to the Hegelian:

Of course [Cassirer says] it is implicit in the character of this unity formation [the unity of physics including the latest puzzles of quantum mechanics] that the objectivity toward which it progresses and aims can never be conclusively determined. Whereas the "thing" of naive intuition [that is, sensory perception] may appear [phenomenologically] as a fixed sum of definite properties, the physical object by its very nature can be conceived only in the form of an "idea of limit." For here it is not a matter of disclosing the ultimate, absolute elements of reality, in the contemplation of which thought may rest as it were, but of a never-ending process through which the relatively necessary takes the place of the relatively accidental and the relatively invariable that of the relatively variable.¹⁹

This is a remarkably irenic and courageous admission. But you cannot fail to see that; now, linear "progress" rests entirely on internalist grounds. Cassirer's "ideal limit" is a rhetorical flourish rather than a gain by Kantian regulation; furthermore, there are no analogues of the predictive and technological interests of the sciences that can be invoked in any comparably progressive ordering of the arts. *There's* the risky daring of Hegel's vision, coopted by figures as diverse as Cassirer, Foucault, and, even more daringly, Thomas Kuhn. Perhaps they are rightly regarded as Kantians, but they are also, of course, closet Hegelians. Kant's transcendental turn is openly managed here by a Hegelian sense of history. But to admit that is to favor the transient use of any array of meaningful order against the modal fixity of closed systems.

Closer to home, our reasoning signifies that Kant's solution of the antinomy of taste was never more than an academician's hopelessly contorted bit of play. Aristotle's and most of the medieval accounts of beauty emphasized selected, objective properties of things common to art and nature. On the whole, even when Kant's British and German precursors acknowledged the importance of the sense of pleasure prompted by beauty (Hutcheson and Leibniz, for instance), they opposed the adequacy of the first wherever completely separated from the second; and both Leibniz and Baumgarten viewed the complex experience of beauty as involving a cognitively pertinent contribution through perception.²⁰

There's little point in trying to fix the right recipe here, because Kant's sense of the "aesthetic" is an artifact of his system's executive needs; even his characterization of the beauty of fine art all but entails the collision of his conception of "free beauty" and his conception of the conditions under which we can be said to be aware of the beauty of art at all (that is, that, in the first, no concepts are ever directly in play and, in the second, they must be).²¹

All of Kant's well-known contributions to the analysis of the aesthetic: the nature of art, the relation between art and nature, the power of genius, the role of imagination, the sense of beauty and the judgment of taste, the link between the aesthetic and the moral — all these matters — are unworkably skewed as a result of Kant's need to preserve the universality of taste while not assigning it a normal role in the formation of aesthetic judgments. Brilliant, I admit, but also more than a little mad. That Western aesthetics should have followed Kant at all is an item of distinctly clinical interest. There is but one way to escape the disaster: give up universalism in Kant's strict sense — as well as "subjective universality."²² Once we succeed here, we free up the possibility of (endlessly) reinventing the function of aesthetic judgment (without abandoning the pertinence of informed pleasure), or the relative independence of art from the temptation to reduce art to physical or biological nature, in order to secure the bare pertinence of whatever belongs *sui generis* to the discourse of art and culture.

Once we admit that personal conviction and public consensus and rational discovery cannot ensure the universal, we see the misstep of Kant's subjectivism. But if the lesson holds for beauty, then it holds for art as well. That seems to be part of the extraordinary philosophical challenge of Duchamp's *Fountain*. For, if modernity lives in the conviction that the universal can always be recovered from the historical flux, then postmodernity is its effective subversion in the modernist world — both logically and politically. Nevertheless, it would be an even crueller mistake to think that we must finally choose between modernism and postmodernism. Reflecting on Foucault and Duchamp, I remind you, Thierry de Duve has put the point in a compelling way: "Sociology [he says] postulates that there is an *us*."²³ The "us," I take it, signifies the public, political, communicating society that lies behind all our representations.

1. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," *The Foucault Reader*, trans. Catherine Porter, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

2. See Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," §iv. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaedon, 1964); cited by Foucault. Speaking of Constantin Guys's sketches of changing fashions in dress, Baudelaire defines what he takes to be Guys's commitment to "modernity" this way: "He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory" (p. 12). In this way, Baudelaire links Aristotle and Hegel.

3. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," 46.

4. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols., trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978, 1985, 1986).

5. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977); and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3., trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), Section on Kant, in Section Three.

6. See George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1910).

7. See Thierry de Duve, "Kant after Duchamp," *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

8. I explore the idea in "Generality and Universality," presented at the Interim World Philosophy Congress, New Delhi, India, 15-18 December 2006; publication pending.

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9. See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Ch. 1 (which contains a running discussion of Kant).
 10. See Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
 11. Harry Redner, *Aesthetic Life: The Past and Present of Artistic Cultures* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 12, 17. Compare Guyer, *Values of Beauty*, 28-32.
 12. See John Zammito's judgment, though we need to put the matter in a context that bears on the "contest" between Kant and Hegel: John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Ch. 8.
 13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Trans. T. M. Knox, vol. 1. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 1-2.
 14. See Charles Baudelaire, "Further Notes on Edgar Poe," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Pheidon, 1964).
 15. See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A133/B172.
 16. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic (with the Zusätze)*, trans. T. E. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991); and, on the interpretation of the *Science of Logic*, the rather different accounts in Clark Butler, *Hegel's Logic: Between Dialectic and History* (Evanston: Northeastern University Press, 1998); and John W. Burbidge, *On Hegel's Logic: Fragments of a Commentary* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1995).
 17. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised, ed. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2002), 285-290.
 18. See Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
 19. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 475-476.
 20. See David Hume, "On the Standard of Taste," *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, revised ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987). It's worth noting that George Santayana's, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Nathan G. Hulzberger and Herman Saatkamp, Jr. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988 [1896]), which may seem close to Kant's account on aesthetic feeling, actually goes completely against Kant. See, for instance, Santayana's Introduction.
 21. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §§16, 43-45.
 22. See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §6.
 23. De Duve, "Art Was a Proper Name," *Kant after Duchamp*, 18.

Joseph Margolis. (Ph.D., Philosophy, Columbia University, 1953). Laura H. Carnell Professor of Philosophy at Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. He has recently completed the final volume of a trilogy reviewing American philosophy in the latter half of the 20th century and several books extending his analysis of the interrelationship between art, culture, and the human condition. His books include; *The Unraveling of Scientism: American Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 2003; *Reinventing Pragmatism: American Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 2002; *The Quarrel between Invariance and Flux: A Vade Mecum for Philosophers and Other Players*, 2001; *A Second-Best Morality*, 1997; *Life without Principles: Reconciling Theory and Practice*, 1996; *Historied Thought, Constructed World: A Conceptual Primer for the Turn of the Millennium*, 1995; *Interpretation Radical But Not Unruly: The New Puzzle of the Arts and History*, 1995; *The Flux of History and the Flux of Science*, 1993; *The Truth about Relativism*, 1991; *Values and Conduct*, 1971; *The Language of Art and Art Criticism: Analytic Questions in Aesthetics*, 1965; *11 Eylül Sonrası Ahlak Felsefesi*, Çeviren: Celal Türer, Elis Yayınları, Ankara, 2006.

