

# Beyond formalism: Kant's theory of art

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## Introduction

**K**ant's theory of art has been neglected to an extraordinary degree. In this discussion, I want to rectify the situation by arguing that Kant's theory reaches far beyond the constraints placed on his work by the familiar label of »formalist«.

To show this, I will adopt the following strategy. In Part One, I will outline the salient features of Clive Bell's and Clement Greenberg's approaches to art, as examples of both formalism's strategies and its problems. I will then indicate the basis of Kant's general aesthetic theory, arguing that it suggests a way beyond the limitations of formalism. In Part Two I shall explore this possibility in depth, by means of a detailed exposition of Kant's theory of art. In Part Three I will make a few critical revisions to the theory; and shall conclude that, unlike the formalist approaches of Bell and Fry, Kant's theory defines art *without* severing its connections to life.

## Part one

The basis of Clive Bell's aesthetic formalism is his attempt to define art in terms of »significant form« – which he defines as »relations and arrangements of lines and colours«.<sup>1</sup> This, it should be noted, does not of itself disqualify representational works from counting as art. As Bell remarks

*»... a realistic form may be as significant, in its place as part of the design, as an abstract. But if a representative form has value, it is as form, not as representation. The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant.«<sup>2</sup>*

Bell goes on to claim that the only sort of knowledge required for the appreciation of art is a sense of form and colour, and, to a lesser degree, a knowledge of three-dimensional space. We must also, of course, be aesthetically sensitive. Again, in Bell's words

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1. Clive Bell, *Art*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1931, p. 68.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

»... to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life.«<sup>3</sup>

On these terms, then the experience of significant form provokes aesthetic emotion – an emotion wherein we are distanced from the concerns of practical existence. A work only counts as art to the degree that it can arouse such an emotion in us.

Now the apparent strength of Bell's theory is its seeming capacity to establish art's distinctness from all other human activities and experiences. It is, indeed, this affirmation of the *autonomy* of art which is responsible for aesthetic formalism's profound influence on twentieth-century theory and practice in the arts. Bell's approach, however, is seriously flawed in a number of respects. One area of difficulty is as follows. Every visual object *qua* visual object has a formal aspect i.e. it can be viewed as a configuration of line, shape, and colour. But why is it that we do not view *every* such object in these terms? Why is it that some configurations of form arouse aesthetic emotion, but others do not? One presumes that Bell would say »because only some objects (i.e. artworks) have *significant* form«. But again we must ask what is it that makes such forms significant? Bell's only answer would be »because they have the capacity to arouse aesthetic emotion«. This, of course, makes the argument into a logically vicious circle. Bell cannot, in other words, provide us with adequate criteria for distinguishing significant artistic form from insignificant non-artistic form.

At the heart of Bell's problem here is the fact that he argues art's autonomy at the price of a far too rigid distinction between art and life. With the formalist theory of Clement Greenberg somewhat different considerations come into play. Greenberg argues that

»Quality, aesthetic value, originates in inspiration, vision, 'content', not in form. Yet form not only opens the way to inspiration; it can also act as a means to it; and technical preoccupations when searching enough and compelling enough, can generate or discover 'content'.«<sup>4</sup>

Now as I interpret him, Greenberg's approach here holds that the aesthetic value of a work resides not simply in the formal configuration as such, but in the way in which the configuration exemplifies the artist's having had some original ideas about the employment of his or her medium. However, in a recent symposium Greenberg has also emphasised the central role of »taste« in the experience of art. By taste he means »unanalysable« acts of »aesthetic intuition«. Yet, at the same time he also holds that »Value judgements

3. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

4. Clement Greenberg, »Necessity of Formalism«, *Art International*, October 1972, p. 106.

constitute the substance of aesthetic experience«, and that »taste at its best, in its fullest sense, likes whatever is good.«<sup>5</sup>

On the one hand, then, Greenberg wants to link aesthetic value to a complex appraisal of the formal configuration's relation to broader developments within the medium, and on the other hand he wants to say that judgement's aesthetic value are unanalysable acts of intuition. These two claims are clearly in conflict. Greenberg does, indeed, go one step behind Bell in allowing that aesthetic judgements are logically complex – involving historical factors; but like Bell he is bewitched by the psychology of such judgements. He sees them as private experiences, wholly disconnected from the continuum of life. This is the great problem of all aesthetic formalism in its attempt to comprehend art. To explain why form is aesthetically significant we must account for the aesthetic judgement as a logical complex involving the interplay of perceptual and, in the broadest sense, socio-historical factors. But at the same time we must be able to relate this to the psychology of the experience i.e. its capacity to distance us from the demands of everyday practical existence. Aesthetic formalists such as Bell at one extreme, and Greenberg at the other, fail to make this connection in any adequate way. They dramatically overemphasise the gap between art and life. Kant's theory of art offers a way of bridging this gap. Before addressing it, however, I must first say something about his own version of aesthetic formalism.

The very essence of Kant's position can be grasped in terms of a few basic points (which I shall outline in a different order from that adopted in the *Critique of Judgement*). The first centres on the claim that pure aesthetic judgements have the »form of finality« but are »apart« from any definite »end« or concept.<sup>6</sup> By this Kant means that the aesthetic judgement is simply and solely directed to the relation between parts and whole in phenomenal configurations i.e. ones which are immediately present to the senses. Now an object's relation to the senses can also give rise to pleasure in two other ways. First, when the pleasure is determined by what kind of thing the object is. We might enjoy the look of an object or animal, for example, because they seem to be perfect specimens of their kind; we might enjoy the look of a tool because it promises an efficient performance. In these cases our pleasure arises from the conformity of a particular item to some external »end« or standard. Kant describes this as our pleasure in the »good«. In other cases, our pleasure in the way an item relates to the senses is determined by a purely causal relation. For example, our enjoyment of one particular colour or flavour rather than another is based solely on personal preference – on what one's eyes or taste buds happen to like coming in contact with.

5. Clement Greenberg, »Art Criticism«, *Partisan Review*, vol. XLVII no. 1, 1981, p. 36.

6. Kant's main discussions of this are in the First, Second and Third Movements of the Analytic of the Beautiful, in *The Critique of Judgement*. All further citations from Kant in this paper refer to *The Critique of Judgement* trans. J.C. Meredith, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973.

The pure aesthetic judgement, in contrast, is determined neither by conformity to a concept or end, nor by mere causal impact on the senses. We may, for example, simply enjoy the relation of balancing shapes and colours in some formal configuration for its own sake. This means that in order to enjoy an object's formal relations, it is not presupposed that we know what kind of thing the object is, nor even whether it is real or not. Kant thus describes the pure aesthetic judgement as being »apart from any concept« and »disinterested« – in a way that judgements of the good and the agreeable are not. But if this is so, how is it possible for us to enjoy the disinterested play of the cognitive faculties upon the aesthetic object? Kant's answer is that our perceptual interaction with such an object is one that brings the understanding and imagination – broadly speaking our capacities to comprehend and to attend and recall – into a harmonious, mutually complementary relationship. The bringing of these capacities into such a relation is of extreme significance. For according to Kant, it is the understanding and imagination whose joint function makes all communication possible. Hence, when the formal richness of a perceived configuration, stimulates these capacities into heightened co-operation, it is, thereby, enhancing our general cognitive hold upon the world. It furthers our »sense of life«. This is why, the formal configuration appears to have structure and purposiveness over and above that which is determined by the kind of thing it is.

Now I have discussed the merits and demerits of Kant's general theory of the aesthetic at length elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Putting it concisely, he is right in the essentials if not in the details of his theory. However, for present purposes it is crucial to say something now about the theory's scope. First, what Kant is describing are the logical and phenomenological outlines of a very fundamental experience. But he is describing the experience in its simplest and purest state – giving us, as it were, the prototype. This is, in part, why his account gives so much emphasis to nature. Artifacts, and human and animal forms, are things which appeal directly to our practical and instinctual needs, whereas purely natural forms tend not to. It is nature, therefore, which is most amenable to the pure aesthetic judgement. Given this, however, we must not suppose that aesthetic experience arises exclusively from our intercourse with nature. In this respect, Kant offers examples of artifacts of a decorative kind – such as wallpaper – whose function is such that their artifactual status is entirely overlooked. We engage with them as purely formal configurations.

And this at last brings us to the work of art. Kant's treatment of this topic is kept separate from his main aesthetic theory because the demands which art makes upon us cannot be reduced to those of the pure aesthetic judgement. Kant is aware of this, and after the main exposition of his *Analytics of the*

7. In my *The Kantian Sublime; From Morality to Art*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989. See especially chapters Three and Six.

Beautiful and the Sublime, he gives systematic treatment in a way that brings out both the kinship and difference between the pure aesthetic judgement and the aesthetic experience of art.

Before addressing that, however, I shall conclude this section with a brief comparison between Bell and Greenberg on the one hand, and Kant on the other. First, Kant does, I think, do justice to the pervasiveness of the aesthetic by tracing its root to the enjoyment of formal configurations as such, and most notably, those of nature. Greenberg in contrast, has nothing to say about nature; and Bell's dismissive remarks concerning it, seem to unwarrantably reduce all enjoyment of nature to that which Kant terms the »agreeable«. It should also be noted that not only is Kant's theory more comprehensive in scope, it is also more comprehensive in structure. By linking pure aesthetic judgements to the harmony of understanding and imagination, Kant is able to explain both why we find such judgements pleasurable and why this pleasure is of such existential significance. This latter point is precisely what highlights the common weakness which I noted earlier in relation to Bell and Greenberg. The latter thinkers fail to tie the cognitive complexity of the aesthetic judgement to its elevating psychological effects. But why should the enjoyment of form »transport« us from everyday life (Bell); why should it be felt as »intuitive« and »unanalysable« (Greenberg)? Kant's answer is that as the outcome of an achieved harmony between the two capacities which are the basis of all cognition and communication, aesthetic pleasure further stimulates these functions; it enhances our sense of life. Ironically, enough, through its distance from the pleasures of everyday existence, the aesthetic both lifts us above and relates us back to that life. Let us now investigate the special conditions which, for Kant, govern art's role in this process.

### *Part two*

I shall expound Kant's theory of art by presenting his arguments in substantially the same order as they appear in § 43-50 in the *Critique of Judgement*.

Kant's first major claim is that fine art is a distinctive and privileged mode of artifice which is intrinsically »final« – an end in itself. It is to be contrasted with handicraft which (although there are ambiguous cases – such as watchmaking) is only attractive »by means of what it results in (e.g. the pay)«. <sup>8</sup> Fine art must also be contrasted with two modes of artifice which are commonly regarded as art. The first of these is »mechanical art« which seeks »to actualize a possible object to the cognition of which it is adequate«. <sup>9</sup> What Kant probably has in mind here are representations which are created solely with a view to conveying factual information, and which make no demands on

8. Kant, p. 164.

9. Kant, p. 165.

us beyond that. The other mode of artifice commonly regarded as art is rather more difficult to comprehend. Kant suggests that when art is intended to arouse pleasure it is called »aesthetic«. Fine art is the major example of this but there is also another mode – which Kant terms »agreeable art«. This applies

*»... where the end of the art is that the pleasure should accompany the representations considered as mere sensations...«<sup>10</sup>*

As examples of this, Kant cites such things as the »entertaining narrative« and *»... play of every kind which is attended with no further interest than that of making the time pass by unheeded.«<sup>11</sup>*

Kant's characterization of this as »agreeable art« is rather unhelpful since he has earlier made it clear that the agreeable is linked to the causal impact of stimuli upon the subject's sensibilities. Clearly such a relation is not involved here. However, Kant's point is that some representations, in effect, function like this. All we ask of them is that they amuse or entertain. We are dealing with, in other words, *kitsch* – though Kant himself, of course, does not use this term.

In § 45 Kant takes his first major step in the definition of fine art proper. We are told that

*»A product of fine art must be recognized to be art and not nature. Nevertheless the finality in its form must appear just as free from the constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of mere nature.«<sup>12</sup>*

Kant's point here is not that art must represent nature, but rather that artistic representation must appear free from contrivance and »laboured effect«. It must have the quality of – let us call it – *naturalness*. On these terms, the work of fine art is recognized as the product of artifice, but, insofar as it conceals the rules and techniques which governed its production and thence appears natural, it will be more amenable to aesthetic appreciation.

This first major point is of extreme significance in terms of defining art *qua* object. For the naturalness of the fine art object means that it will appear different from products of mechanical and agreeable art. One presumes (though Kant does not remark upon it) that works in these latter categories are produced, by and large, according to familiar rules and formulae, and that these rules will be manifest in their appearance.

Having defined, then, what is distinctive about fine art at the level of reception – our engagement with the artwork *qua* phenomenal object – Kant proceeds in § 46 to trace the origins of this, at the level of the artist's creative

10. Kant, p. 165.

11. Kant, p. 166.

12. Kant, pp. 166-167.

subjectivity. Fine art, we are told, is the product of »genius«. By »genius« Kant does not mean something ineffable and extraordinary, but rather natural talent i.e. that element in the creative process which cannot be acquired by simply learning the technical rules of artistic production, and which, conversely, cannot be adequately explained by the artist to others in terms of such rules. Indeed, it is *originality* which is genius' »primary property« – in the sense of being a necessary condition. It cannot, however, be a sufficient condition, since, as Kant rightly points out, there can also be »original nonsense«. The originality of the fine artwork, therefore, must be »exemplary«. It must serve as a model to stimulate the creativity of other artists.

In § 47, Kant clarifies and deepens several of the points made above. First, genius is the province of fine art alone. This is shown by means of a contrast. In Kant's words

*»... all the steps that Newton had to take from the first elements of geometry to his greatest and most profound discoveries were such as he could make intuitively evident and plain to follow, not only for himself but for everyone else. On the other hand no Homer or Weiland can show how his ideas, so rich at once in fancy and in thought, enter and assemble themselves in his brain, for the good reason that he does not know himself, and so cannot teach others«.*<sup>13</sup>

Hence the conclusion that

*»In matters of science, therefore, the greatest inventor differs only in degree from the most laborious imitator and apprentice, whereas he differs specifically from one endowed by nature for fine art.«*<sup>14</sup>

Kant's point, then, is that since all the steps in the formulation of a scientific theory can be sufficiently explained, whereas those in the creation of a work of fine art cannot, we must infer, accordingly that scientific creativity is of a different order from that of art.

Now Kant is, I think right in his conclusion, but somewhat misguided in his argument – which pushes in a different direction. For the fact that the construction of a scientific theory is sufficiently explicable in terms of the following of logico-mathematic rules whereas for art there are no analogical rules, simply indicates that scientific theories and artworks are different kinds of artifacts. To posit a difference at the level of subjective creativity as well requires a supplementary argument – which I shall provide in Part Three of this discussion.

Kant's other main point in § 47 is an elaboration of his previous claim that the originality of the fine artwork must enable it to serve as a model for others.

13. Kant, p. 170.

14. Kant, p. 170

This is not simply a case of such works being imitated. Rather they are »followed« – in a kind of creative dialogue.

As Kant puts it

*»The artist's ideas rouse like ideas on the part of his pupil, presuming nature to have visited him with a like proportion of the mental powers.«<sup>15</sup>*

However, this being said, Kant insists again that originality is not a sufficient condition of fine art. Again in his words

*»there is ... no fine art in which something mechanical, capable of being at once comprehended and followed in obedience to rules, and consequently something academic does not constitute the essential condition of art.«<sup>16</sup>*

Now it might be thought that in making this stipulation Kant is simply asserting the prevailing late eighteenth-century ideology of neo-classicism, against the wilder innovations of the *Sturm und Drang* tendency. That this may be a part of Kant's meaning is shown by the fact that in the course of the earlier contrast between scientific and artistic creativity, he notes that, despite not being grounded in genius, science admits of continuing progress, whereas

*»genius reaches a point at which art must make a halt, as there is a limit imposed on it which it cannot transcend. This limit has in all probability been long since attained.«<sup>17</sup>*

In these remarks, Kant is possibly exemplifying the neo-classicist view that the highest standards of creativity were attained in classical antiquity. However, even if in his discussion of originality Kant is indeed giving neo-classicism its due, there is certainly more to his position than just that. For if an original work is, as Kant holds, to be exemplary, and able to stimulate creativity in others, then it will only do so insofar as there is some common ground between artist and pupil. Technical issues and the academic system of rules provide such a shared starting point for dialogue.

I am arguing, then, that in making originality *and* academic rule following into necessary conditions of fine art, Kant is both making obeisance to contemporary values *and* setting forth a position with claim to more general validity. The awkward relation of these two strategies reaches a crisis point in § 48 – which is entitled *»The relation of genius to taste«*. Here Kant makes the crucial claim that

*»A beauty of nature is a beautiful thing; beauty of art is a beautiful representation of a thing.«<sup>18</sup>*

In order to enjoy the beauty of nature we do not have to know what kind of thing the object which sustains the beautiful form is. The enjoyment of artistic

15. Kant, p. 171.

16. Kant, p. 171.

17. Kant, p. 170.

18. Kant, p. 172.



beauty, however, is rather different. Here there are two mediating factors. The first is as follows

*»If, ..., the object is presented as a product of art, and is as such to be declared beautiful, then, ..., a concept of what the thing is intended to be must first of all be laid at its basis.«<sup>19</sup>*

Kant's point here is that if we are to judge a work of art to be beautiful *qua* art, then we must be able to recognise it as, say, a picture of a landscape, or a poem about love, or a sonata in a minor key, or whatever. However, as well as being able to recognize the work's format and subject-matter, Kant stipulates the mediation of a further condition as follows

*»... since the agreement of the manifold in a thing with an inner-character belonging to it as its end constitutes the perfection of the thing, it follows that in estimating the beauty of art the perfection of the thing must also be taken into account...«<sup>20</sup>*

Kant's argument here is ambiguous. By »perfection of the thing« he could mean either that of the kind of subject-matter being represented, e.g. the perfection of the landscape itself, or ideal love itself, or he could mean the perfect or ideal standard of achievement for artworks addressing that kind of subject-matter e.g. such works as Claude Lorraine's landscapes or Shakespeare's Sonnets. Actually, there is evidence that he means *both*. For in an important passage Kant now formally defines what he means by the »beautiful representation of an object«. It is

*»the form of the presentation of a concept, and the means by which the latter is universally communicated. To give this form, however, to the product of fine art, taste merely is required. By this the artist having practised and corrected his taste by a variety of examples from nature or art, controls his work and, after many, and often laborious, attempts to satisfy taste, finds the form which commends itself to him.«<sup>21</sup>*

This is a strange passage. For in it Kant stresses how the artist must draw selectively upon examples from both nature and art. But surely this is not a question of taste – as Kant explicitly suggests. It is rather the striving for perfection, a feature which enables art to transform what is ugly in nature. Significantly, Kant goes on to describe the process involved here in the following terms. The achievement of the beautiful artistic form – the *artistic* function of taste

*»... is not, as it were, a matter of inspiration, or of a free swing of the mental powers, but rather of a slow and even painful process of improvement,*

19. Kant, p. 173.

20. Kant, p. 173.

21. Kant, p. 174.

directed to making the form adequate to his thought without prejudice to the freedom in the play of those powers«. <sup>22</sup>

This yields an apparent contradiction. In § 46 Kant traces the achievement of naturalness in art to the effect of genius. Yet here he ascribes it to the effect of patient and systematic study. It may, of course, be that Kant is simply wanting to give the neo-classicist aesthetic of perfection its due, but again, there is a case for saying that he is also trying to make a more universal claim. In this respect, we must remember that, for Kant, naturalness is a property of the art object, and genius is a property of the creative subject. To get from the latter to the former in such a way that the art object will be exemplary, demands that the artist has not only assimilated the most perfect products of nature and tradition, but is also able to embody these in original artifacts. Taste in art, in other words, is the *process* whereby genius is *refined* by mastery of perfection. It is the ability to *achieve* the quality of naturalness in an artifact.

What Kant has been doing so far, then, is moving from the naturalness of the artworks' appearance, to a detailed analysis of the demands which this imposes on the creator. What he has not yet done is to show in any depth what enables the reception of the work of art to be regarded as aesthetic. He addresses this task in earnest in § 49.

The key concept here is that of the »aesthetic idea«. Kant formally defines it as

*»... that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. concept, being adequate to it...«<sup>23</sup>*

Further on he offers a much richer description –

*»the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, annexed to a given concept, with which, in the free employment of the imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it – one which on that account allows a concept to be supplemented in thought by much that is indefinable in works, and the feeling of which quickens the cognitive faculties, ...«<sup>24</sup>*

On these terms then an aesthetic idea is a concept whose embodiment in an image or sensible form, serves to energize that concept by allowing it to be taken up and imaginatively developed by the receiver. This does not simply mean that the aesthetic idea evokes a trivial play of associations. In its highest function, imagination can »remodel experience« in two ways. First, by

22. Kant, p. 174.

23. Kant, pp. 175-176.

24. Kant, p. 179.

addressing fictional subjects, or, in the case of material which does occur in experience, to make that material present to the senses »with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel«. <sup>25</sup> The upshot of this re-modelling is that we are no longer tied to familiar empirical laws of association. Artistic form does not simply present the world, it re-presents it, so that it is known and responded to in a new way.

Now it is artistic form's capacity to take familiar material and to overwhelm our customary understanding of it that is, as I read Kant, the basis of its aesthetic character. The pure aesthetic judgement – addressed to nature – places understanding and imagination in a *generally* harmonious relation. The diversity of a formal configuration – its imaginative richness offers different ways of perceptually exploring i.e. unifying it. In the work of art, a particular way of unifying – the artist's presentation of his or her material – opens up a diverse play of imagination. Art, in other words invites a more focused form of aesthetic judgement. It's narrower scope, however, is, as we have seen, by no means a disadvantage.

To summarize, then, Kant argues that fine art consists of artifacts which have the quality of naturalness – a quality which is both a function of a unique mode of creativity – namely genius, and the capacity to refine such talent through the mastery of artistic and natural perfection i.e. taste. The artifacts which embody this relation are sources of aesthetic ideas. They instantiate concepts in a way which stimulates the imagination in creative directions. Given the theory, I shall now offer a critical review of it.

### Part three

A first point to note is the usefulness of Kant's general outline of fine art. He clearly identifies it as a mode of artifice in whose exercise and in whose finished product, both producer and consumer find enjoyment for its own sake. Kant is, therefore identifying art with *unalienated labour* i.e. a mode of artifice wherein the creator achieves self-recognition, and through which his or her audience can *share* the artist's view of things. Kant is also right to separate this from mechanical and »agreeable« art, which simply relate information, or provide mere distractions from everyday life.

These distinctions are given their force by Kant's detailed analysis of fine art. His notion of naturalness is central here, but requires very careful appraisal. Clearly there are works wherein the artist has mastered tradition, but whose work does not declare itself as derivative or academic. However, this »absence of laboured effect« cannot have quite the fundamental role which Kant assigns to it. Within the category of fine art itself we need criteria of both good and bad works. Naturalness is *one* such criterion. To insist that all works *qua* fine

art must have this quality, would be to restrict the class of fine art works to an unacceptable degree. For surely we need to be able to talk of good art, bad art, and non-art. Kant's approach, however, would leave us with the distinction between art and non-art as such.

Given this, we should look for the *real* basis for distinguishing fine artworks from other artifacts, in the direction of Kant's other key notions starting with genius. The »primary property« of genius, we will recall, is originality. We must, however, also remember that Kant does not mean originality *per se*, for, as he puts it, there can be original nonsense. Hence the quality of originality in art, essentially involves the mastery of perfection in terms of both natural form and the tradition of the medium. Originality, in other words, must be tasteful. Now Kant's claims here cannot be accepted quite as they stand. For one thing, the concept of originality is itself complex. It has two opposite poles. On the one hand, there is its use in the sense of innovation, literally the invention of new things; on other hand there is the case where, an item refines some existing genre to an exceptional degree of sophistication. A single work can, of course, combine elements of both these. Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus*, for example, is radically innovative in one sense *vis-a-vis* its handling of violent subject-matter, yet in another sense it can be seen as a sophisticated refinement of *Rubeniste* painterliness. Kant's failure to define originality in terms of both innovation and refinement *and* the overlaps between the two, is again symptomatic of the tension between proposing a general theory of art, and ratifying a particular neo-classical ideology. In particular, his stress on originality's link to taste means that, he is in effect privileging originality in the sense of refinement, at the expense of originality in the sense of innovation. This affirmation of the neo-classical ideology is unacceptable; for there can clearly be art which is original in the innovatory sense, but without being either original nonsense or, a mere refinement of tradition. The greatest achievements of *Sturm und Drang* such as Goethe's early novels are excellent examples of this.

Now if we insist that originality be understood in this more complex sense, what is of general validity in Kant's theory of art beings to stand in clearer relief. The original artwork – the work of *fine* art – is one which breaks with traditional rules of production, or which refines them to an unexpected degree, or which combines elements of both these. Whichever case applies, the key point is that what defines art is not simply an artifact's possessing an appropriate form (a topic which I will address in a moment), but also the form's relation to other works – and that means, in effect, its historical situation.

Now whilst being a necessary condition of fine art, originality cannot be a sufficient condition. For clearly other kinds of artifact can be original in the senses just described. We must, therefore look for further conditions which, in

conjunction with originality can serve to demarcate fine art from all other modes of artifice. The first of these is to be found in the notion of the »aesthetic idea«. This (we will recall) is a sensible or imaginative manifold which presents a concept or symbolic content in such a way as to engage the imagination in a non-arbitrary and explorative play. In such an engagement, the symbolic content is taken up in a way that »remodels« experience. This is where the link with originality proves crucial. For the »entertaining narratives« of »agreeable« art can also involve the sensible presentation of symbolic content, as is the case in T.V. »soap operas«. But here experience is not remodelled. We are simply lifted into a world that is an alternative to our own. It furnishes us with a route to voyeuristic escapism. If, however, the sensible or imaginative manifold generates its symbolic content in an original way, this arrests our normal relation to things. We view the content in a way opens out new ways of assimilating it, and indeed, which places us in a sharing and empathic relation to the creator.

We thus reach a final fascinating point, which is a function of the relation between originality and the aesthetic idea. In this respect, it will be recalled that in Part Two I argued that Kant's attempt to separate art and science on the basis of genius is not wholly successful. The fact that all the steps in the creation of a scientific theory can be sufficiently explained, and taught, but those involved in the creation of fine art cannot, means only that we are dealing with different kinds of artifact – and not different kinds of creativity at the subjective level. To establish this latter claim requires an additional argument. One might provide it briefly as follows. Scientific theories are founded on principles of inference, deduction, and measurable quanta. This means that, in principle, a scientific theory could be devised by someone *other* than the person or persons who did in fact formulate it. The identity of the work of fine art *qua* original aesthetic idea in contrast, logically presupposes the existence of just that person or persons who is or who are responsible for its production. The creativity involved in art draws directly on the creator's personal orientation towards history (in the broadest sense) and upon what is distinctive about that person's view of the world, and his or her capacity to handle material. In science and other modes of technological production, the identity of the creator is contingent *vis-a-vis* the objective meaning of the end-product. In the work of art, in contrast the piece's objective meaning – its general human significance – flows decisively from the particularity of its origins and articulation. Kant, of course, did not explicitly propose this argument. It is, however, not only consistent with his position, but is, in effect, also pointed towards by his contrast between scientific and artistic creativity.

### Conclusion

In Part One of this study I argued that, in its most general terms, Kant's general aesthetic theory is more comprehensive in both scope and structure than those of Bell and Greenberg. Kant's theory of art consolidates this superiority to an extraordinary degree. He offers general criteria whereby fine art can be clearly distinguished from other modes of artifice and the aesthetics of nature. But much more than this, he clarifies and explains something of art's existential *depth*. This achievement is grounded on his analyses of genius and the aesthetic idea, which, with the modifications proposed in Part Three, do justice to fine art at the level of its object, the psychology of its reception, and the artist's creativity. Of especial significance is Kant's willingness to stress that what defines fine art is not just the possession of an appropriate kind of form, but the fact that this appropriateness is actively determined by the work's relation to rules and standards established by other works. This relational context is the very flesh of artistic form. It is through this emphasis that Kant's approach is able to overcome the tensions and restrictiveness of Bell and Greenberg's formalism. He overcomes the unwarranted gap between art and life by making social and psychological dimensions a part of art's full definition. We are thus led *far* beyond aesthetic formalism.