THE SEMINARS

THE PARTICIPANTS:
The 2010 Stone Summer Theory Institute had five Faculty, thirteen Fellows, and ten graduate students from the School of the Art Institute. They are shown on the panorama on the following pages.

THE FACULTY:
Diarmuid Costello (University of Warwick), Eve Meltzer (New York University), Hal Foster (Princeton University), Jay Bernstein (New School for Social Research), and James Elkins (School of the Art Institute of Chicago).

THE FELLOWS:
Gustav Frank (University of Nottingham and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München), Michael Kelly (University of North Carolina), Sven Spieker (University of California at Santa Barbara), Joaquín Barriendos (University of Barcelona), Sunil Manghani (York St. John University), Karen Busk-Jepsen (PhD candidate, University of Copenhagen), Harper Montgomery (PhD candidate, University of Chicago), Joana Cunha Leal (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal), Nadja Millner-Larsen (PhD candidate, New York University), Martin Sundberg (Postdoctoral Fellow, Eikones, Basel), Gretchen Bakke (Wesleyan University), Stéphanie Benzaquen (PhD candidate, Erasmus University, Rotterdam), and Beáta Hock (Central European University, Budapest).

THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE GRADUATE CLASS: Abigail Wilson Lauren Ross, Aaron Richmond, Omair Hussain, Meredith Kooi, Brandon Evans, Abraham Ritchie, Rebecca Hernandez, Walker Thisted, Elise Goldstein.

AUDITORS: Katherine Desjardins (University of Chicago), Dakota Brown, Esther Sanchez-Pardo (Complutense University, Madrid), Andrew Blackley.

The panorama was taken by Dakota Brown and James Elkins. People in the panorama: (*left page, at the table*) Joana Cunha Leal, Gretchen Bakke, James Elkins, Beáta Hock, Sunil Manghani, Jay Bernstein, Michael Kelly, Joaquín Barriendos, Andrew Blackley, Karen Busk-Jepsen, Martin Sundberg, Harper Montgomery, Dakota Brown, (*seated behind*) Brandon Evans, Esther Sanchez-Pardo, Meredith Kooi, Lauren Ross, (*right page, at the table*) Omair Hussain, Hal Foster, Nadja Millner-Larsen, Stéphanie Benzaquen, Diarmuid Costello, Eve Meltzer, Walker Thisted, Rebecca Hernandez, Abraham Ritchie, Elise Goldstein, Sven Spieker, Aaron Richmond, (*seated at window*) Gustav Frank, (*seated in corner, with crutches*) Justin B. Williams.

The following conversations were recorded during the week of July 18–24, 2010, at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago.

1. INTRODUCTORY SEMINAR

The opening seminar was an informal attempt to sketch positions in relation to the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic. The five faculty, Hal Foster, Jay Bernstein, Eve Meltzer, James Elkins, and Diarmuid Costello, introduce some of their interests in the theme. Diarmuid Costello and James Elkins were co-organizers of the week's events.

JAMES ELKINS: Welcome, everyone. Diarmuid and I thought we'd begin in a simple way, by speaking first about some senses of the aesthetic, and then some senses of the anti-aesthetic.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Let me start by saying something about Kant, because he is perhaps both the last person you'd expect to hear about in this context, and the first. Both depend on senses of the word "formal."

Kant is the last person you might need in the context of the problems we're concerned with because Kant's aesthetics, more than any other, is far removed from art. His project is essentially to inquire into the grounds of justification for a certain kind of judgment. He has very little to say about our subject, art, and his project is properly *formal* because it is about the forms of such judgment, and the formal conditions of such judgment. With respect to the second possibility, that Kant is the first person to whom we should look given our concerns, Kant's account *may* be formal in the sense that term takes on in formalist art criticism. Indeed, Kant was read in this way, notoriously, by Clement Greenberg. I would say, and here I am in accord with Thierry de Duve, that Greenberg's formalist reading of Kant has had a huge effect on modern and contemporary discussions.

One way to get at the difference I have in mind would be to distinguish between the formal grounds of a certain kind of judgment being the kind of judgment that it is (such that these grounds are a necessary condition of all judgments of that kind) and the empirical forms of the objects of such judgments (such that some objects may have the form in question—"good form," for want of a better term—but whether they do is an empirical question, not something that can be settled *a priori*). The former would be the first sense of formal I have in mind, the latter would be the second. These are the two respects in which Kant's account might be read as formal or formalist.

There is a question in my mind as to whether the anti-aesthetic is fundamentally a reaction to that second sense in which Kant's aesthetics might be labeled

In these seminars, the notes have been added by the speakers, except in the italicized introduction to each seminar, where the notes are the editor's, or where otherwise indicated.

formal or formalist. This reception history has been mediated by art critics, art historians, cultural theorists, and not predominantly by philosophers: if you include broader philosophical traditions, then a first question is, Why not include Hegel?

Jay, you've worked on this post-Kantian tradition. Would you like to come in at this point?

JAY BERNSTEIN: I've been interested in this debate, and I have a certain anxiety about it, because I'm afraid the baby will be thrown out with the bathwater. I'd like to say a little about what the bathwater is.

JAMES ELKINS: You care about the bathwater?

JAY BERNSTEIN: Well, okay, the baby. I think of aesthetics as part of a debate about modernity in general. Kant wrote three critiques; on just about everyone's view, the three critiques together sketch out a theory of modernity in conceptual terms. If you are Jürgen Habermas or Clement Greenberg, you will consider this a progressive understanding of the modern world in which science, morality, and art are purified and shown to be autonomous from one another. If you are Schiller or Adorno, you are going to consider the separating of knowing, morality, and art a form of destructive fragmentation, a rending of the fabric of subjectivity and society under the governance of a deformed conception of reason.

So the obvious question is, Why three critiques? The first is notoriously about a theory of knowledge. It asks the question, What is it to be a modern subject who is both a knower of and inhabitant in a world whose true contours are given by Newtonian physics? Kant's modernity begins with his emphatic acceptance of the truth of the Newtonian system, and so his account has nothing to do with God or gods or social practices. For Kant the world is radically disenchanted and emptied of meaning because it is taken to be solely causal and mechanical in its operations. The second critique is about morality. It says something like, modern morality is about—in my language, not in Kant's—universalism: because every human being must be regarded as a self-determining agent, as autonomous, it follows that each must be regarded as possessed of inviolable dignity. Out of that Kantian insight come the discourses of individual liberty, human rights, and the idea that the individual has a claim and standing apart from society.

Hence the first critique tells us what is, and the second tells us what we ought to do; the first comprises the grounds of all of knowledge, the second gives the framework for all of morality. For Kant, theoretical reason and moral reason together exhaust reason. If what is and what ought to be are already taken care of, what remains for the third critique? It seems nothing is left over. The third critique therefore arises as a puzzle. It is the puzzle character of the third critique that the Habermas-Greenberg understanding fails to see; for them, the third critique just is the story about what beauty and taste now are for us moderns. But if you are baffled by what beauty and taste could be about, the way Schiller

and Adorno are, then you are going to suppose that something significant for human experience has been left out of the story of the world given by the first two critiques, that some abiding aspect of the human has been repressed. What is missing, broadly speaking, is the world as it appears to us, the world of sensuous particulars, and, what is nearly the same, the way individuals appear *as* individuals.

On this account, aesthetics is the spaceholder for something that gets left out of these new authoritative practices of reason. Therefore, from the very beginning, aesthetics is about our dissatisfaction with modernity, with this now disenchanted world, with an account of the meaning of the world that leaves no space for loving it.

Each artwork is unique, and yet each artwork lays a claim on us. Art is the interrogation of a possibility of how ordinary items, just things, can be demanding in themselves; how something merely factual, just this complexion of paint on canvas, can not only be meaningful, but lodge a claim. Artworks interrupt our merely instrumental engagement with objects, and further, demand a form of knowing that is also a feeling, a knowing by feeling, and feeling that is already a matter of knowing. If this account is anything like right, there is no distinction between the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic: there are merely different ways of elaborating the autonomy of modern art.

I therefore disagree radically with Jim's picture, which he drew yesterday, that Modernism is about aesthetic claims, and anti-aesthetics is about politics.[1] Whatever politics are involved, there is still the question, What kind of art-thing is it? What features are constitutive of our experience of modern, autonomous works of art? I think the question of the aesthetic—and this is present in Rancière and in Deleuze—is about the *kind* of experience such works provide, and so I do not see there is much difference between works that are overtly political and those that are not, nor between those aesthetic theories that are explicitly political like Rancière's and those that are more epistemological or phenomenological like Deleuze's.

MICHAEL KELLY: Jay, if the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic are different ways to respond to art's claims on us, and if they implicate rather than cancel one another out, there is some important distinction between them for you, which you rightly say is not politics (as if politics were only on the side of the anti-aesthetic, as is sometimes said or assumed).

JAY BERNSTEIN: I don't have a big theory about this, nor do I want to claim that with respect to the phenomena, the artworks, that there is a difference. I think the best way to handle the difference between the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic is to think of them as two opposing ways of construing the same artistic stuff: the conservative way of late Greenberg, art purifying itself and discovering its true essence and all that, versus the radical Schiller-Adorno way, where art is the return of the repressed. Of course, taking those different stances matters

1. See the introduction for a summary.

enormously both aesthetically and practically, but both concern autonomous modern art, whose radicality or significance depends on its categorial relation to modern knowing and morality. And in that guise I am minded, perversely, to say that every achievement of the aesthetic bears within itself the anti-aesthetic: the excessive, the interruptive, the more, the return.

EVE MELTZER: Most of my formulations of the aesthetic are arrived at by way of the anti-aesthetic, so I'll have more to say when we come to that. But Jay, a lot of what you talk about in terms of the puzzle, and the gap between the two critiques, and what might exist in it—sensuous particulars, love, appearances—all that could be thought of in terms of affect. That is a category or term that people like Brian Massumi, Rei Terada, Lauren Berlant are thinking of *after* structuralism and poststructuralism.

JAMES ELKINS: In historical terms, the turn to affect is recent.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Happiness is an affect.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, but you couldn't get a university job teaching about affect until the 1980s. There's a distinction to be made between a philosophic lineage and an art-historical plausibility.

EVE MELTZER: That must be due to the claim that the affective doesn't exist or isn't available after poststructuralism, that it—as Jameson pronounced—"has waned."[2] Much of the artwork that gets categorized under the term "anti-aesthetic" could be said to reflect, refract, consider, or contest this claim. Perhaps the academy's recent turn towards affect is something of the same gesture: a questioning of its suppression or repression within available discourses.

HAL FOSTER: Can we back up for a moment? Diarmuid, in the formulation of "the anti-aesthetic" thirty years ago, we weren't *so* stupid as to conflate Kant with Anglo-American formalism. In our superficial reading (we were young then and not widely read), what bothered us about aesthetic discourse à la Kant was this: as you suggest, Jay, it did seem to be a space of mediation, but one that was concerned above all with reconciliation—of judgments of fact and judgments of value, in the first instance, but soon enough of other kinds of conflicts and contradictions, too. That's what bothered us: we construed the aesthetic as a space of resolution—of subjective integration and social consensus—and we wanted to question this conciliatory dimension. Certainly the art practices that had come to interest us were pledged *against* this kind of reconciliation. There was also a redemptive imperative in such definitions of the aesthetic ("art to heal art," as Schiller says somewhere), and, like Leo Bersani, we felt that this was to cast our everyday experience as always already fallen, as just not worth a damn.

2. Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 1–54.

JAY BERNSTEIN: I just don't see the difference between taking experience to be fallen and to be pledged against social consensus. To me those are two sides of the same coin. How not? I'm interested then in understanding the worry about consensus or redemption. Traditionally, aesthetic art has either mourned some lost past, or it's been utopian. Both those moves deny the possibility of reconciliation *now.*

HAL FOSTER: What examples do you have in mind concerning mourning or utopia?

JAY BERNSTEIN: I'm thinking of Schiller on aesthetic education, or of Yve-Alain Bois's reading of Mondrian. It's both redemptive and antiredemptive. It has a notion of reconciliation, just not for the present.

HAL FOSTER: Right, as a figure of potential reconciliation, a given Mondrian painting might actually speak to the impossibility of that reconciliation in the present.

I agree with you about the imbrication of the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic. I also have to admit that we totalized the aesthetic and reified it as a bad object for our own purposes. *Mea culpa*! But we were critics, not philosophers, in a very contested field of discourse and politics (which might be hard to imagine now).

JAY BERNSTEIN: Modernism, with its idea of the new, has consistently been the history of the repudiation of its own past objects as too easily reconciled, too redemptive. Was the anti-aesthetic thought of as a continuation of that? If the logical form of Modernism is, by being an achievement, already a reconciliation, and therefore requiring a break, and therefore dynamic—

HAL FOSTER: Right—

JAY BERNSTEIN: Then what you say about the anti-aesthetic would be perfectly continuous with the history of Modernism.

HAL FOSTER: It's true: the version of postmodernism presented by the nefarious *October* group was an attempt to break with one model of Modernism, that associated with Greenberg above all others, but also to recover other models, ones displaced by the prestige of Greenberg. You need to say exactly what Modernism you mean there.

The moment of *The Anti-Aesthetic* was also the moment of Reagan, and it was hard not to dissociate the cultural manifestations we opposed—neoexpressionist painting, postmodern architecture, etc.—from that political reaction.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER [*question from the audience*]: I'm interested in Jay's characterization of the idea of carving out a separate sphere of art, distinct from science and natural history. Eve, I thought when you mentioned affect, you might be questioning that separation in a polite way, because if the aesthetic and morality are parts of the realm of affect, and if science also can't escape it (after all, we're all human), then perhaps the separation isn't possible. Eve, maybe you didn't mean that, but I'm interested in whether you think the distinction will hold.

EVE MELTZER: Actually, I was thinking less about a way to question the distinctions drawn between art, science, and natural history and more about a way to reframe the questions and debates that have organized our thinking about the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic—as paired, opposing terms. How might we get "beyond the dichotomy," as Jim has called us here to try to do? Even if some of us don't think the dichotomy exists in the first place, recent discussions of affect certainly situate us to approach the matter from a fresh vantage.

JAY BERNSTEIN: A wonderful question. Everyone who has written about Kant after Kant has been taken up with exactly that worry. That's what Schiller, the Schlegels, and Nietzsche are all worried about. Let me just make the worry worse. I cannot imagine a moment, in a foreseeable future, in which natural science is not authoritative about human knowing. Nietzsche is, I think, overly optimistic: he doesn't *get* why modern science is so remarkable, and how intransigent its achievements are. I can also make the worry worse in the case of morality. Even if we agree that morality cannot simply be a set of rules and laws, the notion of equality under the law (a simple translation of Kant into social practice) is the condition of any modern society, the structuring principle for any imaginable modern society. So whatever it is art is banging its head against, modernity has deep commitments that are very formal, that go along with the growth of technology, and with a bureaucratic society, and that depend on these distinctions. We don't know quite how to effectively challenge those frameworks—although a theory of pleasure might be a start. Art, where knowing and feeling, or appreciating and feeling, absolutely go together, is thus one of the places where that kind of critical thinking seems to happen.

GUSTAV FRANK: Jay, you're avoiding the question of affect here, probably for the sake of the sublime. I think it's important to understand that Kant's critical project is a reaction to what he might have felt to be a provocation of the Enlightenment and its program of a far-reaching rehabilitation of sensuality and emotion. The problem with taking Kant to be the instigator of the aesthetic is that he's afraid of the senses and the body taking command over reason and understanding. To get beyond the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic means to go back before Kant's critiques.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Ugh. I have fudged a little. You are right about Kant. Danto chides Kant's notion of disinterested pleasure by calling it "tepid gratification" and, even worse, "narcoleptic pleasure"! However, I am not sure how moving backward or forward will help much. After all, the issue, which Kant highlights perfectly even if he squirms while doing it, is how pleasure is related to cognition, how pleasure provides a form of encountering things, how a pleasurable response to them that is not merely causal—the pleasure of the taste of a ripe strawberry—is possible. If affect is part of the story of the return of the repressed, then it is that notion of affect that is at stake.

OMAIR HUSSAIN: I'd like to return to the exchange between Hal and Jay on the aesthetic as redemptive, or as a placeholder. I want to raise the thought-figure that reappears in Adorno of the aesthetic not as carving out or securing an autonomous space, but as marking an attempt to do so in the face of a recognition of its failure to do so under modern capitalism. It's not about art being a "pure" sensual experience, but it's an attempt to *insist* on such an experience denied by the instrumental and oppressive character of modern society, to attempt to *assert* an autonomy that does not exist as such. So rather than art being the realm of reconciliation, for Adorno it is precisely the arena where antagonisms are raised, where the impossibility of reconciliation is made apparent. The idea that all modern art is an interesting failure could find some resonance, I would think, with the anti-aesthetic.

JAY BERNSTEIN: That's a nice place to mark the difference between my sense of the aesthetic and Greenberg's. For me, for Schiller and Adorno, the notion of autonomy in art is a disaster—art losing its place in the world, being excluded from its role in the reproducing of everyday life. Modernist art is the kind of art that both fully acknowledges that it is constituted by this exclusion and, at the same time, rebels against it. So I agree that all Modernist works fail: they can only attain their worldly place, insinuating what a non-disenchanted thing would be, by acknowledging their autonomous existence. Artworks want to be things in the world, but they can only have their explosive power, their claim to authority, by being semblances. Art that is just art and nothing else thus begins in a calamity, namely its autonomy. Greenberg has always been unintelligible for me in that respect. I understood that autonomy belongs to the *strength* of art; but the thought that autonomy should be *celebrated*, rather than being a refuge, is incomprehensible to me.

HAL FOSTER: Here again we encounter the difference between a philosopher and a historian (not that Jay has to represent all philosophers, or I can speak for all historians!). Jay, just then you supposed that autonomy was a given; for me it had (has) to be achieved: the autonomy of art, good or calamitous, was (is) a long struggle. Frank Stella says somewhere that the patron saint of painters in the West was the mason who figured out how to support windows in cathedrals to the point where light could penetrate the interiors, thus permitting painting to be to distinguished from the architectural ensemble, and so (we're skipping a few steps here) to become an art in its own right. So even if we agree that autonomy was a disaster, it had to be achieved first, and then undergo a long period of critique, which is the fundamental project of the historical avant-garde according to Peter Bürger. (I still want to use the term "avant-garde" to distinguish that critical project from the autonomy project of Modernism.)

Omair, to respond to your point about Adorno: he never ceases to be attractive despite his difficulty (or maybe because of it). Thirty years ago, however, he was not so attractive: the subtleties of the critical dimension of autonomy as

such seemed overwhelmed by the brute realities of Reaganite reaction, the AIDS epidemic (especially ferocious in the art world), the first moves of neoliberal economics, and so on. As Lukàcs once said, nastily enough, of Adorno, it didn't seem like a good time to hole up in "Hotel Abyss."

JAY BERNSTEIN: So Hal, you say Adorno's move was not good enough. I take it the reason is that it simply makes that position of exile *sufficient* for political significance. If you're just thinking that what makes art political is that it's been thrown out of the political, then that is a wholly formalist move, without any particular social content. Adorno's insistence that that is the *only* way modern art can be political is certainly something that is deeply insufficient.

GUSTAV FRANK: I see a lot of confusion in these traditions about the autonomy of art. To play the role of the historian here, I'd say we should go back to the mid-eighteenth century. That is when autonomy emerged as a logical consequence of the rehabilitation of the sensual world. Art was the place of this emancipation. It offered the space where intellectuals could experiment with what it meant that the hierarchy of senses, bodies, and reason was inverted. Under these auspices art as an activity responsible for the empirical everyday world and as itself appealing to the senses became a dominant sort of discourse, questioning the predominance of theology and philosophy. Autonomy therefore means art is no longer mere illustration of these dominant discourses, but free to deal with them in whatsoever way or even ignore them, mix them up, or reverse their relations. This sort of autonomy is not *l'art pour l'art*, though it is only completely political when it works together with such discourses.

LEVI SMITH [*question from the audience*]: We've been mentioning Greenberg, but we haven't been mentioning the other side, which is kitsch. The notion of autonomy needs to be continuously rehistoricized in relation to all the other products of culture that don't get treated in aesthetic terms.

HAL FOSTER: "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" is a place where Greenberg is not so far from Adorno. Just a few years before, Adorno writes to Benjamin that art and mass culture "are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up."[3] In "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," though, Greenberg talks less about autonomy than about keeping advanced culture alive and moving, in the face of the automatisms of kitsch (whether academic or political). "To keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion": I think that's the line. It's not entirely clear what he meant, but it's a more open proposal than a total commitment to autonomy. A year later, it's true, with "Towards a Newer Laocoön" (1940), he does talk about autonomy, so the hardening happens fast.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: That's right, Greenberg does talk about the avant-garde in 1939. The early account asks a social question: *Why* does the avant-garde arise? But that quickly calcifies into a more formal question: *How* does Modernism perpetuate

3. Letter to Benjamin, March 18, 1936.

itself?[4] But even in the earlier account, what's lacking is any recognition that this is not a one-way process. Tom Crow's account seems more nuanced to me, because it recognizes a feedback loop between the avant-garde and the *terrain vague* of kitsch. For Crow, the avant-garde perpetually reinvigorates itself precisely by drawing on the terrain of kitsch, popular culture.[5]

But at this point I'd like to move us on to our second topic, the anti-aesthetic. I'd like to introduce it by way of a series of questions.

First: What kind of concept of the aesthetic was in play in the conceptualization of the anti-aesthetic? Was it an antipathy for what might be called the most general, underlying claim of the aesthetic, the separation of art from social and political projects? Or was it something more specific, an antipathy for the most recent manifestations of the aesthetic in the art world? If it's the latter, what kind of critique of that previous conception of the aesthetic was entailed? If you read *October* in the late 1970s and 1980s, there is talk about the deconstruction of Modernism, of strict separation of media, of distinctions between art and non-art, art and kitsch, high and low art—there are attacks on those kinds of oppositions. But was that a deconstructive operation—an opening of those discourses on their own internal contradictions—or was it more an inversion of the aesthetic?

A second question: To what extent is the anti-aesthetic one thing? Is it a set of loosely allied tendencies, predicated on different targets?

Third, and more generally: What is the relation between the anti-aesthetic and more general historical or critical terms like Modernism, postmodernism, and the historical and neo-avant-gardes? Is the anti-aesthetic an inheritance of Modernisms? (In which case it might be the shadow of the avant-gardes.)

Fourth: What, specifically, is the relation between the anti-aesthetic and postmodernism? In 1981, Hal set up a now-famous opposition between a "postmodernism of reaction" and a "postmodernism of resistance."[6] Is the anti-aesthetic one expression of postmodernism in art, or is it, conversely, a theoretical discourse or set of discourses that take issue with various forms of postmodernism in art, for example, those captured in Jameson's formulation?

Finally, and most generally: Does the anti-aesthetic leave open any possibility that aesthetics and criticality might not be opposed? What are the prospects, if any, for thinking that one might not have to choose between the two?

HAL FOSTER: I don't really want to be the anti-aesthetic answer man here; I feel distant from the kid who proposed that opposition, and I was just one of many critics. But I'll say a few things nonetheless.

I don't think we simply ran together the aesthetic and the Modernist. There were conflations, to be sure, some of which were stupidities, but some were strategic, too, in a polemical way. And it wasn't just autonomy that concerned us

4. For more on the "how" and "why" of Greenberg's Modernism, see Thierry de Duve, "Silences in the Doctrine," in *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

5. See "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," reprinted in Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

6. Discussed in Section 3 of the Seminars.

about Kantian aesthetics, however reified it had become for us. There was also its tendency to hypostatize one idea of art (that has run through our discussion this morning, and I imagine it will carry on through the week: the tension between the imperative to hypostatize and the imperative to historicize concepts of art), in particular to hypostatize art as disinterested, as "purposiveness without purpose." That just didn't fly with work of the time (think of Barbara Kruger and Hans Haacek, for example) that was explicitly feminist and interventionist.

Diarmuid, you're right that at times we inverted the aesthetic and the Modernist more than we deconstructed them. The rigidity of a Modernist notion of medium-specificity did prompt the laxity of a postmodernist medium-hybridity, and often that was simply a banal reversal, a mirror image. This is a claim that Michael Fried has made many times: that Modernist "objecthood" was confirmed by random acts of postmodernist "theatricality." Critics involved in *October* were aware of the problem, and aimed to be as deconstructive as possible, but, again, the situation was polemical, and that often favors rhetorical oppositions.

I don't think the anti-aesthetic was (is) a coherent project. My title *The Anti-Aesthetic* was not deeply thought through (I was twenty-seven). It wasn't like "I will now rally the forces of the anti-aesthetic and make war on the empire of the aesthetic." Most importantly, the positions in the book aren't coherent as a group; that's what makes the book still interesting, at least for me.

Finally, postmodernism was in part an effort to recover Modernisms, not to foreclose them, an effort to open up this reified category. Here some of us (Benjamin Buchloh in particular) did come to use the Bürger model of a historical avant-garde that emerges to challenge aesthetic autonomy. But we were also critical of his dismissal of the postwar neo-avant-garde as mere farcical repetition of that initial project. It dissed so much of the work that interested us—Rauschenberg and Johns, Manzoni and Fontana, Fluxus, Happenings, Oldenburg, Minimalism, Postminimalism . . . Equally important, at least to some, as such precedents of this work as Dada and surrealism were avant-gardes like Constructivism and the Bauhaus. I was formed above all by the Minimalists, and they recovered a Constructivism that Greenberg and others had made marginal or banal.

We have already seen that most of us want to hedge a little on this old opposition of aesthetic and anti-aesthetic: certainly I do at this point.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Do you think that even talking about these discourses in terms of the anti-aesthetic gets the conversation off on the wrong foot? When I reread the original texts for our seminars by Crimp, Owens, and others, I was struck by how often they used terms such as "aesthetic practices." They're not just talking about aesthetic practices that could have been understood in medium-specific or formalist terms. Retrospectively, it seems apparent that they were still concerned

with the aesthetic, just not the aesthetic as understood as its then most recent and influential—i.e., Modernist—art-world expression.

Do you think that labeling a set of practices too quickly as "anti-aesthetic" falsifies them?

HAL FOSTER: No. Yet, again, it was reductive at times because it was polemical at times; you can't revise that now—and certainly I wouldn't want to. Plus, I think there are still stakes in this argument.

EVE MELTZER: In relation to your question, Diarmuid: what does the anti-aesthetic *do* in relation to the thing called postmodernism? We need the terms "poststructuralism" and "structuralism" to elaborate the meaning of postmodernism in the context of your query. After all, structuralism is really what theoretically underpins the claims and polemics put forth in *The Anti-Aesthetic.* In my work I have been trying to think about the discourse of systems, specifically in conceptual art of the late 1960s and 1970s, sort of in a way that parallels Pamela Lee's attempts to think about systems and structures—though she does it in relation to cybernetics, systems theory, and information theory.[7] But it seems to me we haven't really thought about how the figure of the *system* became so important for both structuralism as well as so-called anti-aesthetic art practices. Such practices had a particular relation to postmodernism and by extension to structuralism and poststructuralism: they represented a kind of phantasmatic field, we might say. That is to say that one could view the work of Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler, or Mary Kelly, for example, as variable expressions of anxiety, celebration, fantasy, embrace, rejection, etc. of poststructuralist claims—the very claims worked through in Hal Foster's volume. I am thinking of Owens's essay, in particular, or Krauss on the expanded field.

So we can't just say that anti-aesthetic practices represent the claims of postmodernism. The relationship, I think, is much more fraught than that. Take, for example, *Post-Partum Document*, a work often offered up as exemplary of the anti-aesthetic. In large part what the work shows us is Kelly's affection for structuralist, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic discourses—well, really for discursivity itself and the kind of affects that those discourses were often couched within. Thus her affection, I would argue, is in fact for the aesthetic of *disaffection* (another way of characterizing the anti-aesthetic). That is what I mean when I say that the relation between the anti-aesthetic and postmodern discourses is fraught.

MICHAEL KELLY: Eve, would this be an example of an aesthetic, in this case Kelly's, that is "arrived at by way of the anti-aesthetic," as you put it earlier? And how do you see the rise of affect connected to the aesthetic determined by the anti-aesthetic—say, affect in the form of disaffection, though combined with affection, as you've suggested?

7. Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

EVE MELTZER: You mean precisely because we are still talking about attachment, cathexis, love—right? Even as we are caught up in the disavowal of such things. It is something like the return of the repressed, I guess, or at least the copresence of seemingly conflicting positions, which in fact are both of a piece. It is like Barthes said: the dream of structuralism, the fantasy of a masterful, disaffected scientism, was in fact "euphoric."[8] We were affectively attached to the promise of *disaffection*. So yes, affect doesn't go away.

JAMES ELKINS: Just a comment about our positions, as they are beginning to appear in this conversation. I mentioned yesterday the James Meyer and Toni Ross intervention in the aesthetic/anti-aesthetic question.[9] They briefly acknowledge that their position is itself a development of the anti-aesthetic, that the problem they pose is made possible by developments within and after the anti-aesthetic. This is true, I think, of other texts. Why is it that criticality seems to inhere only in the anti-aesthetic, or is enabled by the anti-aesthetic, or needs to proceed from the anti-aesthetic? The few instances of authors who work on critical judgment from versions of the aesthetic—for example Thierry de Duve—often fail to figure in these discussions. I don't mean their accounts are to be preferred; I am just noting that we are speaking of two traditions from a point of qualified allegiance to just one of them. So I wonder if some of the questions we mean to pose about criticality might be unanswerable.

I am also concerned that we keep the reception of the anti-aesthetic as broad as possible. *The Anti-Aesthetic* is also read opportunistically, as a license to resist whatever forms of capitalism, or instrumentalized art practices, might be around.

EVE MELTZER: I don't think it's a resistance to whatever is around. It's the idea that meaning is contextual to an extreme; it's resistance to particular humanist ideals about the subject, the productions of the subject, how we should think of them, and how we should make them intelligible. And I use that word thinking of Rosalind Krauss, for whom the intelligibility of something that seems unintelligible—in 1970s sculpture—was the central issue. So there were fairly specific things that the anti-aesthetic was working against.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes. I was talking about the later reception, up to the present, and the wider readership and uses of the book.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: What do you mean by saying that if you pose the question of aesthetics and criticality in that form, they're unanswerable?

JAMES ELKINS: Whatever we mean by criticality seems to require some identification with positions we are thinking of as anti-aesthetic or postmodern. Meyer and Ross, for example, assign critical successes to people working in the field of the anti-aesthetic.

8. Barthes, "Réponses," *Tel Quel* 47 (Autumn 1971): 97.

9. See the introduction.

HAL FOSTER: This might not be helpful, but let me sketch a historical typology of some terms privileged in Modernist and postmodernist criticism. Put super-rapidly, for Greenberg and others "quality" was the key value; among other things it meant that a work in the present had to stand the test of the best work in the past. It thus involved an aesthetic judgment referred to tradition; a model of Modernism that privileged quality was not a break with history at all: it was an attempt to preserve it. Then people like Donald Judd came along and claimed that a work need only be "interesting," and interest displaced quality as the favored criterion. Interest does not necessarily refer to tradition or even to aesthetic judgment proper; often just the contrary. It was an avant-gardist term, a provocation, but it still had to refer to other paradigms it wanted to challenge. (Come to think of it, this might be when talk about "paradigms" kicks in, a borrowing in from Thomas Kuhn on the history of transformations in science.) In a third moment, the anti-aesthetic or postmodernist one, interest is displaced by "criticality" as the central value. No one is exactly sure what *that* is, but, like pornography, we know it when we see it, right? That now seems to be displaced by various pretenders—"beauty," "affect," "celebration," or some other opiate of the art-world masses.

JAMES ELKINS: In the studio, "interest" is one of the code words for aesthetic appreciation, and "critical" would often be a code for things other than aesthetic. If you're a student and your work is said to be interesting, and if the faculty member who says that isn't just being lazy, it might mean is that your work has qualities other than verbal, conceptual ones.

HAL FOSTER: That's not how Judd meant it really, although there was more room in the aesthetic for interest than we thought at the time.

JAMES ELKINS: I still don't hear "beautiful" except in academic events like this one, and I haven't heard "sublime" except in heavily modified forms. "Interest," in the wider but possibly aesthetic sense, is very common. But anyway, in your schema and in the one I've experienced, aesthetic judgment gives way to several non- or anti-aesthetic criteria (Judd's "interest," "criticality"), and then to a wider field that might include returns of the aesthetic.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Regarding this move from quality to interest to criticality to its various inheritors, a couple of questions arise. Would you make any distinction between "quality" and "conviction," the former being Greenberg's preferred term, the latter being Fried's? Though both clearly require an evaluative judgment of the critic, the latter is arguably much more explicit about the historical location of the judgment at stake, namely, that a given work "compels conviction" in its ability to rival the highest achievements of past painting, sculpture, etc., *now*. And would you want to make a distinction between "criticality" and "complicity"? I'm thinking of the attempts made, in the mid-1980s, to float so-called Neo-Geo or Simulation artists on a kind of crypto-criticality, according

to which they worked within existing structures with which their work seemed complicit, but with some residual claim to criticality.

HAL FOSTER: Well, the term "conviction" is an important one for Fried, who is much less categorical than Greenberg about medium and indeed art. He often said that the test of quality is that a work compels conviction as art. That doesn't presume a set definition; that needs to be posed and posed again. I took issue with "compel conviction" at one point because the art that interested me then was not at all about conviction: it was about skepticism and doubt. In a long introduction to his essays of the 1960s, Michael revisits this little argument we had, and says in effect that doubt and skepticism are weak moments of thought and feeling, and what really matters is conviction. He dismisses our concerns as trivial—and they're not.[10]

But to your second point: the lines between deconstruction and complicity were blurred, in part because of that Derridean shibboleth that one can only work within a language to deconstruct it. That allowed all kinds of complicit work to pass (or to pretend to pass) as critical.

10. Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

2. THE ANTI-AESTHETIC IN THE 1980S
CRAIG OWENS'S "THE ALLEGORICAL IMPULSE"

This seminar was led by Hal Foster. It centers on Craig Owens's essay "The Allegorical Impulse" from The Anti-Aesthetic. *The seminar took Owens's essay as an exemplary moment in the original anti-aesthetic, and asked how it had been read in the 1980s and how it might be read today.*

HAL FOSTER: I take it as my brief to represent the anti-aesthetic position of thirty years ago. That's hard: I no longer have a dog in that fight. I also feel somewhat distant from the speculative nature, even the wild theorizing, of these texts. I'm interested to know where they hold up and where they fall apart for you.

I asked you to reread three texts in particular: Craig Owens's, Douglas Crimp's, and my own introduction, because they are the ones that relate most clearly to the anti-aesthetic. Owens and Crimp are also the most ambitious in terms of the reordering implicit in postmodernism, and in terms of the crisis of institutions we felt at the time. Let's begin with Owens's "The Allegorical Impulse."[1] This was a signal text in the theory of postmodernism, and its anti-aesthetic allegiances are clear. I'm especially interested here in the differences and commonalities between the postmodern and the anti-aesthetic.

I think the extremism of the rhetoric is difficult to understand without a sense of the first moment of Reaganism, the cultural politics of which was pitted against "the 1960s." This had effects in the art world, too, which soon divided between those who wanted to stay loyal to the advances of that time and those who wanted to overturn them. The debate got strident, the rhetoric strained.

This was also the moment of the American importation of principally French theory, which we were getting drunk on. Rosalind Krauss wrote a text in the late 1970s called "The Paraliterary" in which she argues that the great writers of that moment were not novelists or poets but critical theorists.[2] So, too, if there was still an avant-garde, then, weirdly, it was not so much in art as in critical theory. If you were in graduate school at that point, the theory battles were intense and sectarian; whether you were a this, a that, or the other thing really seemed to matter.

In "Three American Painters" (1965) Michael notes a displacement from politics to art in the avant-garde after the war—that the Trotskyite idea of "permanent revolution" had moved from the one the other.[3] According to his lights

1. Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," pt. 1, *October* 12 (1980): 67–86, pt. 2, *October* 13 (1980): 58–80.

2. Rosalind Krauss, "Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary" (1981), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994): 291–95.

3. Michael Fried, "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella" (1965), in *Art and Objecthood*: (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 213–65.

the project of radical innovation had stalled in politics but not in art. (In a way, it's a version of the "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" argument, in which the avant-garde keeps culture moving.) Well, if this is true at all, there was a further displacement, in terms of radicality for my generation, from art to theory. Without a sense of that (deluded) avant-gardism, it is also difficult to understand the rhetorical heat of the texts in the *Anti-Aesthetic.*

I haven't reread these texts myself in a long time, and I'm a little unsure about how to approach them. Eve Meltzer said she doesn't like to use the word "postmodernism"; that resistance might be interesting to explore. These texts might also have a bit of anti-aphrodisiac effect of the just-past. They seemed like catnip at one point; they may seem like cat poop now.

So, to begin: the first thing that struck me is the ultra-leftism of the Owens text, right away, in the first sentence, where Owens presents Robert Smithson as the "liquidation" of an aesthetic tradition.[4]

JAMES ELKINS: It's the liquidation of a ruin: two disasters in one sentence.

HAL FOSTER: Yes, but on the next page he speaks about the allegorical as a mode of rescue.[5] This seems very different from the Benjaminian idea of the allegorical as always already ruined.

Another way in which this text is indicative of its moment is the way it moves through various theoretical universes, as if one could move with ease from Benjamin to Derrida and De Man and onward from there. Different approaches are confused, sometimes productively, sometimes not.

JAMES ELKINS: What struck me reading was the question of his awareness of those jumps. The margins of my copy are annotated "illegitimate conclusion" (when he asserts that "the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest"), "unnecessary move" (the idea that "allegory becomes the model for all commentary"), "wildly unconnected" (the move from allegory as appropriation to appropriations in contemporary art).[6] Some of these discontinuities are willed or hypothetical. Others, it seems to me, are not proposed as such, and I can't distinguish the two.

On page 71, for example, Owens says that the impermanence of site-specific work "suggests" photography has "allegorical potential." That "suggestion" excludes the reader, and so at that moment the essay declares either a logic that readers won't be sharing, or an obliviousness to connections that is itself baffling.

HAL FOSTER: Those texts that concern Owens came to him, came to most of us, without context and simultaneously. They were put in play together, not processed, and connected to artistic practices, which were often also various. Sometimes it made for a killer punch, sometimes for a witches' brew. But it did get lots

4. "In a review of Robert Smithson's collected writings, published in this journal in Fall 1979, I proposed that Smithson's 'genius' was an allegorical one, involved in the liquidation of an aesthetic tradition which he perceived as more or less ruined." Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 67.

5. Owens writes that what is "most proper" to allegory is "its capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear." "Allegorical Impulse," 68.

6. Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 69.

of people—artists, critics, curators, students—thinking. This is a typical early *October* essay in the sense that it moves less by argumentation than by juxtaposition. In a way it performs its object: it is an allegorical text, too. From start to finish the text is read through other texts.

JAMES ELKINS: What would have been the models for that kind of text? Benjamin would have been another kind of model for an assembled text, but—

HAL FOSTER: Not at that point; at least the *Arcades Project* was not well-known. You also have to remember how young these people were. Craig was twenty-nine when he wrote this amazing text, as a sometime graduate student but also as a public critic.

JAY BERNSTEIN: The original site of these arguments is the field between Romanticism and literature. I take it that the strategy is to see if the notion of the aesthetic can be treated the way in which Benjamin, De Man, and others treated Romanticism, especially the notion of the Romantic symbol: that was the dominant ideology that needed undoing in the literary world. The use of allegory just made obvious sense. I take it the structure of the argument is just "Let's see if we can."

JAMES ELKINS: That's interesting, because if the object of critique is Romanticism as it was understood by De Man and others, then this essay might have had other models in romantic literature itself. I'm just unsure about the idea of saying this is just the way graduate students built papers.

HAL FOSTER: Jay, that sounds right. In a way, the money shot comes right at the end, with the quotation from Barthes about the need to challenge the symbolic.[7] That was the mandate—to challenge a tradition, Romantic and Modernist, whose ideal was symbolic totality. In De Man, though, the symbolic is always already allegorical.

BEÁTA HOCK: Hal, maybe this is just the practice of the text, as you and Jim are implying. The task of the reader is the same as the task of the viewer of the artwork.

SVEN SPIEKER: Maybe the divisions are not that sharp. There is a performative aspect to the text. And it's interesting that the author does not see what he discusses as being theoretical: he sees it as purely practical. In fact, he accuses traditional critics of excessive theorizing. On page 79 he writes, "These examples suggest that, in practice at least, Modernism and allegory are not antithetical, that it is in theory alone that the allegorical impulse has been repressed." I think he is talking about the way we perceive theory as something abstract and decoupled from practice. The opposite is the case here: being theoretical is being, on the contrary, very practical and hands-on.

7. The quotation that ends Owens's essay is "It is no longer the myths which need to be unmasked (the doxa now takes care of that), it is the sign itself which must be shaken; the problem is not to reveal the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning, is not to change or purify the symbols, but to challenge the symbolic itself." Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 80, quoting Barthes from *Image, Music, Text*.

There is in Owens's essay a rather simplistic understanding of the opposition between Modernism and historicism, which appears to be the organizing principle of the text. Historicism is not the same as traditionalism. With its insistence on presence and present, historicism is in a sense the opposite of the fixation on the past that we commonly associate with traditionalism. And in this capacity, historicism is in many ways the organizing matrix for Modernism and *its* obsession with presence. But Hal, given your contextualization of this essay, it appears that at the time historicism implied little more than traditionalism.

HAL FOSTER: I don't know. We took the Benjaminian theses on the philosophy of history quite literally: historicism was bad, and there had to be another way to do history (Nietzsche on "the uses and abuses of history" was also read furiously at the time). In *The Anti-Aesthetic* and in *October* generally, historicism was the bad object. Rosalind Krauss says so, emphatically, in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."

One critique of the Owens essay was that it led Craig, in his attempt to theorize postmodernism, back to the origins of Modernism; he gives us a Modernist genealogy of the allegorical impulse. Here again we should remember that this postmodernism was also concerned to recover a different sense of Modernism. For me that was a merit, not a fault, of the text.

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: But you can't help feeling that he ends up showing the exact contrary of his argument.

HAL FOSTER: Not if you understand postmodernism less as a *post* than as a revision that allows artists and critics and others to move forward. That was really the project, and that may be where the project is different from the rhetoric. The rhetoric is all about rupture.

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: His references go back to the emergence of Modernism. He brings in Baudelaire, Courbet, Manet, and even collage, mentioning the possibility of an alternate reading of Modernist works, one that would fully acknowledge their allegorical dimension.

SVEN SPIEKER: But why should the difference between postmodernism and Modernism be absolute?

HAL FOSTER: Yes, the text comes across as *both/and*, but not the author, oddly enough. That is especially the case at the very end, when Craig gives his influential exposition of Modernist critique versus postmodernist deconstruction.

JAMES ELKINS: I wonder if we're developing a reading of this text that does not permit us to say exactly how it positions itself between the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic: I mean we have a sense of how some claims work to distinguish and relate the two, but we don't have a sense of how the rhetoric supports that. The text is "practical" and perhaps "performative," but I'm assuming we wouldn't want to

say that is an optional illustration of ideas in the text. I worry that if we can't find a way to think about that, but at the same time we take the rhetoric and narrative as indispensably part of the text, then we're effectively saying that we cannot locate the position of the argument.

HARPER MONTGOMERY: As an undergraduate during the early nineties, I read this text repeatedly. It opened up an incredible number of ways to analyze works. It was not so much a matter of argument as of providing us with the rhetorical resources we needed to reposition artistic practices that had been considered marginal. The terms Owens groups under allegory—especially "appropriation" and "hybridization"[8]—opened up entirely new possibilities for arguing for the importance of works that had been devalued by the cultural politics of the 1980s.

JAMES ELKINS: And that is why it's so important to ask about what models—even peripheral ones—enabled this particular constellation, palimpsest, accumulation, juxtaposition of theoretical sources, applications, and assertions. It is, in many ways, a central model for the possibilities of serious academic art-historical writing, even, especially, by scholars who would never identify themselves as inheritors of that moment, or of *October*.

MICHAEL KELLY: But this is a curious model for critics or theorists interested in critique, for argumentation is said to give way to rhetoric or performance, and normative concepts are used descriptively and strategically without any sense of accountability. Not that we cannot juxtapose concepts (for example, the anti-aesthetic itself), but we can't lose sight of their normativity when we do, especially because we juxtapose them strategically in order, among other aims, to generate new norms or destabilize old ones.

JAMES ELKINS: But you're assuming art history and theory aren't always losing sight of what you call "normativity": they do; they don't even know the word.

HAL FOSTER: Normative? I don't know if these texts are still part of any normativity. And at the time, in 1980, this one was just a musket shot in downtown Manhattan.

JAMES ELKINS: I am also curious about the ways texts like this are currently read in seminars, and how they have been read over the last thirty years. This may be another inappropriately slow reading on my part, but in my experience some students read this opportunistically, by which I mean paragraph by paragraph, usually skipping paragraphs. In my experience, in graduate seminars, it is read carefully at first, but then larger issues emerge, as they have for us, and there is no longer much citation of individual passages and transitions. The passages on page 71 that I was mentioning, for example, are openly, declaratively, associative, and that gives readers the license to read accordingly. (Are photographs allegorical

8. "Appropriation, site specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, hyridization—these diverse strategies characterize much of the art of the present and distinguish it from its modernist predecessors." Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 75.

"because what they offer is only a fragment"? That seems almost a dare to the reader to float above the text rather than plowing through it claim by claim.)

HAL FOSTER: Yes, the text is associative. A chief problem in art for a number of critics then was its randomness. In this text, Craig wanted to find a term that might provisionally hold together a wide range of practices. It seemed that the allegorical might be a great metatheoretical concept, but in fact it didn't have much effect—not in the way that the indexical did vis-à-vis photography, for example.

A key moment for me is when Craig writes of a text as an allegorical doubling of another text.[9] That suggested that textuality was spatial, which was a helpful way to think about any number of art practices of the period as they moved into questions of discourse and institution. Also, this is the first text that uses the concept of appropriation as a way to think the relation between propriety and property; that, too, was key.

JAMES ELKINS: So perhaps there are two forms of reception. One is an intermittent reading, which is itself intermittently performed; the other is the question of the text as a whole, which licenses certain discussions about Modernism and other terms. The relation between those two levels is itself not thought of.

JAY BERNSTEIN: That is actually part of the text. It is a polemic, an intervention, and so it is unsurprising if it is that.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: The structure of the text is very similar to the Rauschenberg *Allegory* that Owens analyzes. I forgave him a lot when I found that similarity. When you're inside a complicated system, it's easy to reproduce yourself in that system—

There is a way in which the stitching in the text and in the image is very un-Lacanian. It isn't finding just one quilting point; it's stitching. I am glad to hear that allegory wasn't taken up from this text, because I came out having no idea what allegory is, except that it's the one colored thread by which we can compile a world. The question is, What kind of world can be built out of this?

HAL FOSTER: That's brilliant, although I am not sure how reflexive it was. This is one of the vicissitudes of the textual. On the one hand, it can be just *assemblage*; on the other hand, it can be a new performative space where new voices are put into play. The Barthes quotation about the text was a Rosetta Stone for many of us.

SVEN SPIEKER: This is a reading of collage through Saussure. Owens quotes Benjamin selectively: on page 84, he says, "allegory . . . proceeds from the perception that 'any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else.'" That's a very Saussurean claim.

9. Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 69: "as Northrop Frye indicates, the allegorical work tends to prescribe the direction of its own commentary. It is this metatextual aspect that is invoked whenever allegory is attacked as interpretation merely appended post facto to a work, a rhetorical ornament or flourish. Still, as Frye contends, 'genuine allegory is a structural element in literature; it has to be there, and cannot be added by critical interpretation alone.' In allegorical structure, then, one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest."

JAMES ELKINS: But I would still be concerned that a Rauschenberg collage, or metaphors of stitching, or the notion (which I think is more recent than Owens's text) of the text as performative, or the idea that we can't help mimicking what we represent, doesn't explain this text too much. If it were simply those things, if those metaphors were adequate to account for the text, then "The Allegorical Impulse" would be a text where arguments and form have a determined relation.

I think it matters that we don't have a model that accounts for the relation between argument and rhetoric in texts like "The Allegorical Impulse," because large swaths of art history are modeled on something generically similar—successions of theory sources, abrupt transitions, suppositional connections with practice, putatively self-evident connections with practice . . . it may have been a model for practice and theory, or even theory as art, but it has become a model for academic art-historical practice, so I think we need more work on exactly how the text has been read, from its inception to the present.

Sorry to insist on this: it seems to me the lack of connection between talk about theory in the text, and the forms of that theory, are part of the reason our subject this week is so difficult.

GUSTAV FRANK: Jim, I think you are right to decipher the textual architecture of Owens as a sort of forerunner that has legitimized the design of theory ever since. The text is influential above its own shattered intentions, and it's the text's momentum that deserves our attention. Hal was quite right when he quoted Rosalind Krauss from the "The Paraliterary" earlier—she demanded that the great artists of that moment be critical theorists. What was new around 1980 was this strategic acceptance of the Schlegelian claim on the part of the theorists: theory not only as art but as the only possible art practice. Thus, the blind spot in Owens is probably the anxiety that the empire of art may strike back and theorize about all that artful theory. Doesn't the *Post-Partum Document* to some extent embody that anxiety?

SUNIL MANGHANI: I think a lot of people now feel an affinity with Owens's kind of writing, but they don't know exactly how to place it. There is a tendency to write (and think) as Owens does, but still it is difficult to place it in terms of scholarly status, and also quite literally in terms of where such writing gets published. Books such as Susan Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*,[10] for example, which offers rigorous enquiry, yet bravely refuses to close down its arguments (which are often highly visual at times), seem extremely rare.

Personally, I feel Barthes's line at the end has remained really enigmatic. Culturally we get it, we have assimilated its logic (that was Barthes's point, that "myth today" had become part of the *doxa*). But professionally and critically we've yet to fully grasp or articulate an operative mode. It is easy to read Barthes's line "the sign itself . . . must be shaken" as a battle cry, but I think it is as much a plea simply to catch up with what is already going on. Owens captures

10. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

something valuable in this sense, yet it reads as distantly now as Barthes's line itself.

GUSTAV FRANK: I want to add an extrinsic perspective to that logic Hal reconstructs. When postmodernism came to Germany, in 1982 or 1983, an experience summarized in Wolfgang Welsch's *Anästhetik*, it was the first time that we tried to catch up with American sources and thought.[11] By and by they replaced French grand theory as the usual corpus of reference. Basically, we used examples from the Anglo-American context. Later it was new historicism, and now it's visual culture.

Hal, do you think this visual episteme is a particularly American coming-of-age in theory? If you think of literature from France from the period, Régis Debray or others—they are weak in theory. You have mentioned political developments: but can the change we are discussing also be located on an epistemological basis? For example, how it might be possible to deal with European traditions? Was the moment we are considering a provocation?

HAL FOSTER: The celebration of the epistemological break was a French disease that many of us contracted. It is rife in "The Allegorical Impulse" and other texts. This celebration of rupture now seems long ago and far away; many of us seem more interested in narratives of persistence and survival.

Gustav, earlier you said Kant should be considered to be the end of a tradition, rather than the beginning of the modern subject of the aesthetic. One thing that has puzzled readers of "The Allegorical Impulse" is its insistence on the melancholic, on a very bleak picture of the postmodern. One critique of this text concerned the passivity of this melancholia: even as Craig gives us marching orders for postmodernism, he also enjoins us to contemplate the ruins of modernity.

SVEN SPIEKER: The melancholic aspect might be the part that is most difficult to assimilate to the American context.

GUSTAV FRANK: Sven, the motivation for my claim was not melancholy, it was polemic. Kant, more than anyone else, felt the threat that the alliance between sensuality and the arts put on philosophical discourse from the 1770s onward. He wanted to regain and secure control over this alliance. So there is no puzzle, as Jay assumes. Kant systematically, throughout his three critiques, dismissed all attempts to construct an independent art.

JAMES ELKINS: In this context, I think it may be worth noting that the quotation from Benjamin that introduces melancholy, on page 70, presents it as something that

11. Jean-François Lyotard was translated in 1982 as *Das postmoderne Wissen: Ein Bericht* (Bremen: Verlag Impuls, 1982). Wolfgang Welsch, *Ästhetisches Denken* (Stuttgart: Reclam 1990). I think Jonathan Culler's reception in Germany is a good indicator here. While his *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) was seen as just another contribution to a well-known field, his *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) was received as something fresh and original; it was translated and published in paperback as *Dekonstruktion* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1988).

generates allegory. The line is "the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy." But in Owens's text, allegory is a *strategy*, a response to pre-existing conditions. In my reading, that misuse speaks for an intense desire on Owens's part to have something happen.

HAL FOSTER: He resists this melancholic mode at moments. But it is hard for me to hold those two modes together.

Another odd thing about the text is that Craig is able to talk about the allegorical without mentioning capital. This is a situation where the poststructuralist in Owens could not abide the Marxist.

3. THE ANTI-AESTHETIC IN THE 1990S
THE BODY

This seminar was led by Hal Foster. The participants read Foster's preface to The Anti-Aesthetic; *an essay by Yve-Alain Bois on the* informe, *published before the book* Formless: A User's Guide *(1996); and Foster's essay "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," which was an early study for his book* The Return of the Real *(1996).*[1] *The subject of the seminar is the development of the anti-aesthetic from its initial form in the 1980s into a theory centered on Bataille, the* informe, *and representations of the body and materiality.*

HAL FOSTER: I used age as a defense for Craig, who was twenty-nine when he wrote his text; I was twenty-seven when I wrote my introduction, so you could say I didn't know better. In my text, too, there is a slippage between ideas of Modernism and ideas of modernity, and there is no reference to the relation between Modernism and modernization, even though I argue for periodization in the preface. Those are just two of the problems that leap out at me now.

Regarding the opposition between resistant and reactionary postmodernisms, which had a little life of its own: two years after this preface, I wrote a text that argued that both sides demonstrated the same logic of reification and fetishization, that they were not so dissimilar after all. (That was typical of the ultra-leftism of theory then—to denounce a position one moment that you held the moment before.) As much as I shared many of the same theoretical references with Owens and Crimp—the smattering of Benjamin and others—there was a Jamesonian dimension in my thinking, evident here, that they did not have.

I suppose for us today the interest of the preface is the last bit, where I stumble on the term "anti-aesthetic." I already mentioned that the title was not thought through, and yet, though some of the things in this passage are clichés of postmodernism now, they weren't then—they seemed very important.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: When I was at art school in the late 1980s—at least during the time I spent at NSCAD,[2] a remarkably cosmopolitan and clued-up art school on Canada's isolated Eastern Seaboard—the prominent book on reading lists was not *The Anti-Aesthetic* so much as *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, fondly referred to by students as "the Bible."[3] In the context of a

1. The participants read Bois, "To Introduce a User's Guide," in the grouping of texts "Formless: A User's Guide: Excerpts," *October* 78 (1996): 21–37, which is slightly different from the text in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," *October* 78 (1996): 106–24; and Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

2. Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

3. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited and with an introduction by Brian Wallis (New York: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984). In this volume, see Hal Foster,

conversation about shifting theoretical allegiances, it's interesting to recall Hal's contribution to that collection, reprinted from a 1982 issue of *Parachute* (but according to a note written in winter 1980), titled "Re. Post." In other words, prior to the publication of *The Anti-Aesthetic*, right? In that paper Hal is already taking issue—referring to Owens' *Allegorical Impulse* in particular—with what he calls the "orthodoxy of the purloined image." So as early as 1982, or even 1980, the critical discourse surrounding appropriation and postmodernism, the so-called "postmodernism of resistance," was being internally critiqued in turn.

JOAQUÍN BARRIENDOS: Concerning the dissemination of the book in Spanish, it is interesting to note the translation, done in 1985, is simply *La Posmodernidad*.[4] Despite its early publication (in Barcelona, in 1985) and generalized reception, in the academic circles of cities such as Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, and Barcelona, the "postmodern" debate and the critique of the "grands récits" of Western philosophy of art ran pretty much independently of the political agenda of the aesthetic/anti-aesthetic debate as it was sketched in the States during the early 1980s. So in Spanish, the debate concerned postmodernity, rather than the anti-aesthetic.[5] It was only very recently, after the translation of diverse texts related to the *October* group by the Spanish publishing house Akal, that the poststructuralist Anglo-American anti-aesthetic debate was incorporated as such into the agenda of Spanish-speaking critical theory.[6]

This makes me think we should reconsider the concept of rupture in the *longue durée.* Postmodernity, in Latin America in the 1980s, had to do with modernity, from the sixteenth century onward: colonial domination, proto-racisms, the epistemic inferiorization of the non-Western world, the transatlantic capitalist/mercantile order, and uneven development among other issues. Thus, the aesthetic/anti-aesthetic debate has two different forms: a long account and a short one. That's why it requires a geocultural as well as a decolonial analysis.[7] Maybe these are terms in which we could consider the anti-aesthetic debate today.

HAL FOSTER: Thanks for those important differences. I didn't track the dissemination of *The Anti-Aesthetic* too closely, but it did disturb me when the English publisher retitled it *Postmodern Culture*, because it wasn't about that primarily: it was about a particular idea of postmodernist practice. Even though I sometimes

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"Re-Post," 189–201, reprinted from *Parachute* 26 (Spring 1982): 11–15. According to a postscript added for its republication in this volume, it was drafted in New York in winter 1980, that is, shortly after "The Allegorical Impulse" first appeared.

4. *La Posmodernidad*, edited by Hal Foster (Barcelona: Kairós, 1985).

5. Beyond the editorial reasons and marketological impulses which motivated the elimination of the idea of the anti-aesthetic in the title, we have to acknowledge that the election of the term "postmodernity" when the original elaborates on the idea of the "postmodern culture" suggests a very different point of departure. While postmodernism is usually perceived as a reaction against a series of aesthetic, literary, political, and social Western traditions derived from the European Enlightenment, "postmodernity" tends to be understood rather as a global historical condition, that is, as the overcoming of modernity as a "*longue durée*" period and expanded cultural geography.

6. Krauss, *Pasajes de la escultura moderna* (Madrid: Akal, 2002); Foster, *El Retorno de lo real: La vanguardia a finales de siglo* (Madrid: Akal, 2001); *Arte desde 1900: Modernidad, antimodernidad, posmodernidad*, edited by Foster (Madrid: Akal, 2006); Douglas Crimp, *Posiciones críticas: Ensayos sobre las políticas de arte y*

regret *The Anti-Aesthetic* as a title, it did capture the antisymbolic imperative in such practices.

There was a particular model of Modernism in the book—as noted, a Greenbergian one—which we might have made more central than it was through our sustained opposition to it. And that understanding of Modernism didn't make sense in Spain and Portugal, to be sure, but even in France, Germany, and elsewhere (it is not, for example, what *modernismo* means at all).

Lyotard published his book on postmodernity in France in 1979, and you see its effects, for example, in the Owens text "The Discourse of Others": he wanted to put the critique of grand narratives in play in his advocacy of feminist art. But the *longue durée* of modernity was not really on our minds; the twinned fates of Modernism and postmodernism were. In retrospect *The Anti-Aesthetic* is a parochial book. Habermas appears, and Baudrillard and Said, but it is Manhattan-heavy.

JAMES ELKINS: The dissemination of *The Anti-Aesthetic* can be traced, in part, by the later dissemination of Greenberg worldwide, because interest in Greenberg has followed interest in Anglo-American postmodernism.[8]

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: There is no Portuguese translation of *The Anti-Aesthetic*—

HAL FOSTER: It is not in French, or German either—

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: I therefore had to read the Spanish translation. Today it is well-known; everyone cites it. But where I come from, apart from very rare exceptions, nobody knew who Greenberg was at least until the early nineties. It was through the reading of *October* criticism that Greenberg became an issue in Portugal. He didn't exist before in Portuguese accounts of Modernism. It was through *October*'s writing that Greenberg became reified.

JAMES ELKINS: That is excellent!

HAL FOSTER: For you, maybe; it makes me want to jump out the window.

But on to the *informe*, our second topic for this afternoon. Bataille began to appear in the theoretical mix in the mid-1980s, as I recall. Rosalind Krauss staged her exhibition of surrealist photography in 1984–85, which, despite its title (*L'Amour fou*), was Bataillean in spirit. *October* published a special Bataille

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la identidad (Madrid: Akal, 2005); Benjamin Buchloh, *Formalismo e historicidad: Modelos y métodos en el arte del siglo XX* (Madrid: Akal, 2004), among others.

7. On the decolonial critique of the aesthetic thinking see *Arte y estética en la encrucijada descolonial*, edited by Walter Mignolo and Zulma Palermo (Buenos Aires: Del Signo, 2009); Walter Mignolo, "Decolonial Aesthesis," *Calle 14* 4, no. 4 (2010): 10–25; Joaquín Barriendos, *Geoestètica i transculturalitat: Polítiques de representació, globalització de la diversitat cultural i internacionalització de l'art contemporani* (Geoaesthetics and transculturality: Global cultural diversity, politics of representation, and the new internationalism in contemporary art) (Girona: Fundació Espais d'Art Contemporani, 2006); Joaquín Barriendos, "The Coloniality of Seen: Visuality, Capitalism and Epistemic Racism," in *Arte, Estética y Decolonialidad* (Quito: OEI, 2010).

8. Some examples are discussed in my *Master Narratives and Their Discontents*, with an introduction by Anna Arnar, Theories of Modernism and Postmodernism in the Visual Arts 1 (Cork, Ireland: University College Cork Press; New York: Routledge, 2005).

issue, and Denis Hollier's crucial book on his thought was translated.[9] As the philosopher of the *informe*, Bataille was the final nail in the formalist coffin (or so we thought); he also provided one way to come to terms with the turn to the body in art and theory alike (Bakhtin offered another). This may seem like ancient history, so I'm interested to know what remains of this fascination with Bataille for you all.

JAMES ELKINS: I found that when *Formless: A User's Guide* first appeared, it had an enormous impact on student arts, young artists, in art schools and art departments. That appeal has somewhat declined, but the book continues to be used. I find that artists do not always make a distinction between the *informe* and the abject, even though *Formless* of course contains a trenchant critique of the abject.

HAL FOSTER: The abject, for Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, was on the side of meaning, of the semantic; that was the problem, from a Bataillean point of view, for them. The *informe*, on the other hand, was an operation, not a meaning; in fact it was an operation of un-meaning, of unmaking meaning.

SVEN SPIEKER: I am interested in Bois's linkage of violence with indifference, and the idea that there may be such a thing as "violent indifference." This reminds me of Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon, which makes a similar claim.[10] This is part of the deconstruction of the form/content distinction that *Formless* is partly about. Bois calls Manet's indifference literally an "attack": "Manet's indifference is not a simple retreat into the ivory tower of 'purely formal experiment'; it's an attack."[11]

HAL FOSTER: I think he means that the draining away of meaning from a historical event, like the execution of Maximilian in the hands of Manet, can be construed as an act of violence.

EVE MELTZER: Interesting that you should bring up indifference, because of course "indifference" as well as "difference" are key terms throughout the essays that comprise *The Anti-Aesthetic*. With respect to "difference": there is the notion of sexual difference, the difference that constitutes the so-called "other," all of which derives from the fundamental, linguistic concept of difference that Saussure brought to light. We can't have the "postmodern" without difference. So what is worth thinking about here is how we might conceptualize "difference" when it appears over and against the less stable figure of "indifference." They form a strange sort of binary, one which I hesitate to even call a binary. Sven, you pointed us to "indifference" in certain contexts; in Owens's essay, he writes about it in this way: "Pluralism, however, reduces us to being an other among others; it is not a recognition, but a reduction of difference to absolute indifference." What's interesting to me is the way the meaning of indifference vacillates between the idea of

9. "Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Unknowing," special issue, *October* 36 (Spring 1986); Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Krauss, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985); Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

10. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), translated by Daniel Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

11. Bois, "To Introduce a User's Guide," 17.

"equivalence, interchangeability," as Owens says, as well as the affective state of indifference, whereby all things are equal, interchangeable, equivalent, amounting to a lack of affective investment. To me, this term, then, reopens discussions of difference in interesting ways.

MICHAEL KELLY: Eve, can you say more about the links between difference, indifference, and the anti-aesthetic?

EVE MELTZER: The anti-aesthetic seems to me—at least in its conceptualist iterations—to be all about the experience and/or image of "indifference," even as difference, as I defined it above, is in play. Think about Hans Haacke's aesthetic strategies from this period—his quasi-documentary mode—or Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*. One could describe them as the intertwining of notions and images of indifference (i.e., disaffection), indifference (i.e., interchangeability), and difference.

HAL FOSTER: The complication of difference was one reason why Bataille became important—though for some feminists all he did was collapse difference. A key Bataillean notion is *altération*, by which he intends an operation of oscillation rather than inversion that renders unstable all terms involved. Think of Giacometti's *Suspended Ball*: a ball form is suspended on a string, and cannot touch a wedge form that it seems to want to glide along, but the ball is also cleft and the wedge form is also like a banana. It renders signifiers of sexual difference unstable. Rosalind Krauss used that work as an example of this idea of *altération* in action, and it's neither difference nor indifference.

SVEN SPIEKER: More simply, if Manet is the beginning of Modernism, then to say Manet isn't only purely ornamental isn't to say that he is, on the other hand, expressive. He is neither the one nor the other: but that doesn't make him nothing.

HAL FOSTER: That's right. It might be useful for us to consider the four major examples in the *informe*, which Bois and Krauss go on to pressure. They are posed as "debasements" of Modernist tenets: "horizontality against the primacy of the visual (and the verticality of its field); base materiality against the tyranny of form and idea (high) over matter (low); pulse against the exclusion of materiality as permeated by desire; entropy against structure and totality."[12]

At the time some of us were interested in the nature of that *against.* Was it opposition, deconstruction, sublimation, desublimation, or some form of declassification? What kind of operation was it, and was it different in each instance? We were especially concerned because we did not want this *against* to be simple oppositions. I don't think that was ever resolved, but logic takes you only so far with material like this.

JAMES ELKINS: I think logical analyses of these terms run into very confused moments, when Rosalind Krauss has necessarily to use connected argument to propose

12. Bois, "To Introduce a User's Guide," 32, in italics following the body of the text.

nonlogical concepts.[13] But in reference to this passage, I wonder if asking what kinds of operations these are doesn't reconceptualize the text, because if the *informe* is an operation, the *against* is an operation of the operation.

HAL FOSTER: Simply put, my concern was that Yve-Alain and Rosalind were mining the underside of Modernism and, weirdly, elevating it, even resublimating it, in the process, even though the watchword then (and still now, in some quarters) was "desublimation."

OMAIR HUSSAIN: Following on Jim's point, I wonder how much of a distinction there is between these "operations" and similar notions of art as rhetorical that were popular in the early moments of the anti-aesthetic. It seems that though the *informe* talks about "visual" work, it's not really about the aesthetic or visual experience of the work itself, but about a rhetorical inversion the work is understood to be embodying. You could understand the "operation" at play in the work without needing to even see it.

HAL FOSTER: I think I disagree: in part the *informe* grew out of a fatigue with the rhetorical model or at least the textual model. It was all about the actuality of the material and the corporeal.

OMAIR HUSSAIN: But how far does the *informe* actually move from the textual? The visual or the bodily is treated as merely the objectification of a rhetorical intention. Call it an operation, foil, maneuver . . . all these terms suggest the work's criticality is located in the fact that the work is *against* something, treating the work as reducible to a conceptual ploy. Despite using a variety of "visual" artwork as examples, this essay is an example of how the anti-aesthetic has had a tight grip on how we can understand works of art to be critical. This model of criticality is fundamentally textual.

JAY BERNSTEIN: I see this as a very modest essay. Bois wants a more capacious Modernism, one that can effectively acknowledge whatever one takes Pollock or de Kooning or Cindy Sherman's horror pictures to be doing.[14] Whatever the *informe* was, Bois gave it an emphatic visual sense, which is one I resonate with. So a broader kind of visual Modernism.

HAL FOSTER: That's right, and this advocacy is by nature polemical and so, at least in part, rhetorical. Krauss, for example, is a very agonistic thinker, and her reading of Pollock, say, through the Bataillean notion of a base materialism does not purport to be a total reading. Her insistence on the messy horizontality of the drip paintings is made against the Greenbergian account of those works as pure

13. I argue this about the attempt to define "pulse" using Lyotard and Freud in *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

14. Bois, "To Introduce a User's Guide," 29: "For us it is thus a matter of redealing modernism's cards—not of burying it and conducting the manic mourning to which, for many years now, a certain type of 'postmodernism' has devoted itself, but of seeing to it that the unity of modernism, such as it had been constituted through the opposition of formalism and iconology, is fissured from within and that certain works can no longer be read as they were before (one will not forget the fried egg when faced with a Pollock, for example)."

optical mirages, set perfectly in front of you. The theory is a way to be as true as possible to the experience of the work; it is not simply imposed, Omair. (If I had a dollar for every time I have heard that criticism, I could retire.)

DIARMUID COSTELLO: So what's wanted is just to retrieve what's missing?

HAL FOSTER: Yes, to retrieve, not necessarily to substitute, but also not merely to fill in. I wish Krauss and Bois had borne down a little more on the concept of *altération*, which is not substitution, inversion, or opposition.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: Yes, and there is a motion, an emotion, to *altération*, that substitution, inversion, or opposition lack.

JAMES ELKINS: In terms of thinking about where this text is today, there's something necessarily insufficient about talking about the text in terms of what works as criticism, theory, or argument. That's because the text, *Formless*, has presented itself as a set of operations, a "user's guide," and artists perform the entries in a literal sense. The *Nachleben* of the text is also played out in studios, where the enlarged "Dictionary" is used "against" any number of practices.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: So what started out as a text about a supposedly desublimatory impulse in art has ironically now degenerated into a kind of School of Desublimation.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Realism was experienced, in the past, as fully uncoded, as the world set free of any kind of order. The text is a theory of the continuation of modern art.

HAL FOSTER: Everything's modern art to you!

JAY BERNSTEIN: I mean Modernism as self-conscious; this text is a set of moves that has little to do with Bataille. For me, Bataille is about mistakenly thinking Kojève was right about the end of history, and that there had to be more to life than Japanese tea ceremonies.[15] Bois doesn't seem to be a crazy Bataillean, but someone searching for a sense of Modernism that goes back to Manet. When I read this text, I didn't think it was radical.

JAMES ELKINS: Do you think Matisse would have liked *Formless*?

JAY BERNSTEIN: I think he would have loved it. I do. I just don't see the edginess.

HAL FOSTER: Jay, according to your idea of Modernism, it's all edge . . . and so no edge at all.

JAY BERNSTEIN: No, not theoretically. But practically, in art, the edge is always being blunted, so it has to be continuously reproduced. It is not an easy operation, I agree. I'm not devaluing it: I'm wondering what is the right way to embrace it, a nonagonistic way. The notion of the anti-aesthetic is too agonistic in its rhetoric, and this book strikes me as what we, having gone through this history, think

15. See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, translated by James H. Nichols (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 159–62n6.

of as having permeated Modernism. So it is not a moment of rupture, but of a new capacity to understand what was there in the first place.

HAL FOSTER: I don't think Yve-Alain would disagree. Bois and Krauss are committed Modernists, after all.

OMAIR HUSSAIN: I want to follow up Jim's comment about how the book plays out in art school contexts now. It is used as a manual, often as a way of making visual work, and justifying the work's criticality. An artist may be visually interested in an object, but then leans it against the wall so that it fits the contemporary understanding of underplay as rhetorically critical. This text has supplied a default understanding of critical for contemporary art . . . theatrically celebrated modesty as pitted against hegemonic ambitions of the past. I'm thinking of the *Unmonumental* show put on at the New Museum,[16] or more recently, *(Lean)* at Nicole Klagsbrun.[17]

JAMES ELKINS: I wanted to ask about *Formless* as a book. It is a very strange book in terms of disciplines: it is written by people who identify themselves as art historians, and it proposes itself as radically, impeccably scholarly. That beginning, on Manet, is dense with footnotes and scholarly references. And yet, at a certain point, they say, We are not going to follow Bataille: we need to correct certain things, we need to enlarge and add things. That scene, as a self-reflexive operation of criticism on art history, is not repeated in the rest of the book.

HAL FOSTER: Well, the first version of the book was a catalogue, and the four operations were stations in a show.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, but as a book, in its life as a book, it's strange.

HAL FOSTER: That "operation of criticism on art history" was never a problem for anyone in the *October* group. Its project was to hold criticism and history together in a manner that might cut both ways. The whole point was to think about what the present calls up from the past and how the past can be summoned to clarify the present.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, but this is a very extended example of that, with a very clear distinction between historical research and critical intervention which is then permitted to dissolve. It's not the same, in that respect, to any number of shorter essays in which criticality and what Rosalind Krauss called "method" are continuously suspended, or mixed. It bears on how we take terms like "against," and "operation."

HAL FOSTER: Shall we move on to the abject? This text of mine, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," was a first version of material that became *The Return of the Real.* In part it was an attempt to think contemporary art via realism, but a realism thought

16. *Unmonumental: The Object in the Twenty-First Century,* newmuseum.org/exhibitions/4#artists_panel (accessed August 27, 2010).

17. *(Lean)* at Nicole Klagsbrun, as featured by the *Contemporary Art Daily*, contemporaryartdaily.com/2010/03/lean-at-nicole-klagsbrun/ (accessed August 27, 2010).

in the Lacanian register of the Real. In the final version, I pulled it back towards Warhol, rethinking his *Death and Disaster* silkscreen in terms of a traumatic realism.

JAY BERNSTEIN: One worry about Lacan's Real is that it is totalizing: it leaves nothing in its wake. (Apart from that, I have deep anxieties about Lacan. In his early work, he did think of the Oedipal structure as historical and contingent. I think a lot of what is going on in Lacan's making the Oedipal structure transcendental in the 1950s is an attack on Simone de Beauvoir, on her idea that female sexuality is a historical construction.)

The issue here, for me, is the relation to history. This seems like a traumatized end of history, and therefore a version of a notion of the sublime outside of history. So I guess my interest here is that there are more historical ways of reading Cindy Sherman and other artists.

HAL FOSTER: Well, I used Lacan, perversely, to track a trajectory in art. Perhaps it could be described in other terms, but this helped me to understand the marked turn not only from language toward the body, but also from the complexities of desire to the vicissitudes of the drives (I have in mind the moment too quickly and too completely dubbed "abject art").

JAMES ELKINS: I wonder about the afterlife of that moment of the body. Like any number of people, I contributed to that theorizing, but my own book, *Pictures of the Body*, came later and didn't, as far as I know, find a public among artists.[18] (It doesn't engage yours or Bersani's work; my interest was connections with premodern practices and ideas.)

Current theorizing about the body seems to me to be divided between an unquestioned general phenomenological understanding of the body and a sense that digital, posthuman, informational, and genetic representations of the body have decisively atomized previous conceptualizations. In a way, psychoanalysis has been lost: it's either been diluted to homeopathic strengths in the phenomenological frames of current discourse, or it's been cut into tiny unrecognizable shreds (tiny bits of part-objects) in the new technological interests.

That isn't to say the theme of the anti-aesthetic has been lost: I think that the current writing is just as determinedly non-aesthetic, but the chances of persuading people engaged in this new work that their projects owe anything to discussions of the anti-aesthetic, let alone the Lacanian senses of the body current in the 1990s, are vanishing.

18. *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

4. THEORY AND CRITICISM

Here the subject was what counts, in this problematic, as theory and criticism. The discussion was led by Diarmuid Costello; he aimed to bring out certain features of the philosophic claims of anti-aesthetic texts, with the objective of determining what kind of conceptual relation they had to the Modernism against which they reacted. This seminar and the next one are discussions of the relation of theory to contemporary practice: here, the question regards philosophic criticism in general; in the next seminar, the subject is more specifically Adornian critical theory.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: To get things going I want to pose the question, Is critical postmodernism a deconstruction, as was routinely claimed by anti-aesthetic theorists, or is it an inversion of Modernism? That is, does it bring out Modernism's internal contradiction or insufficiency or reinstate its negative after-image? To get at this, I want to open with two examples: the essay "The Use Value of 'Formless'"[1] and Douglas Crimp's response to Michael Fried in "Pictures."[2]

Take *l'informe* first. What is the relation of the formless, as theorized by Bois and Krauss, to what they want to use it to oppose, namely the "foundational myths" of Modernism? Although it is said to desublimate or lower various central tenets of Modernism, in practice it tends to result in the valorization of whatever Modernist theory denigrates: the horizontal (together with its associations of the animal) is celebrated *over* the vertical (with its associations of humanity); base matter or material (the tactile or unformed) is valorized over the optical (with its suggestion of transcending the body); pulse or repetition is held up *against* the instantaneous (and other Modernist exclusions of temporality); and against all systems and structure, the entropic is proposed as the great leveler. I want to suggest that insofar as this set of revaluations inverts a previous set of positive terms, it remains trapped within the conceptual space marked out by the terms against which it is pitched.

This brings me to my second question. What does a text like "The Informe" do? Is it doing art criticism, or is it making a certain theoretical or conceptual move? It seems to me that *as criticism*, it is quite brilliant. Krauss's reading of Pollock is compelling.[3] But how would you advance debates conceptually, if that is what you were interested in doing? You would need to show that rather than merely replacing a given term, such as opticality, with its antithesis, you were

1. Yve-Alain Bois, "The Use Value of 'Formless,'" in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1997).

2. The participants also read Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75–88, and "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* 15 (Winter 1980): 91–101.

3. In addition to the section "Horizontality" in *Formless: A User's Guide*, see also Rosalind Krauss, chap. 6 of *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

unpacking the exclusions of opticality itself. You would need to show that writers who propose a theory of opticality, without doing justice to vision's substrate in the body and embodiment, say, have yet to secure their account of the former. That would be what I mean by an internal or immanent, rather than an external, criticism.

JAMES ELKINS: It might be useful to correlate your position on the *informe* text with other similar ones, from 1996 to the present. *Formless*, the book, was widely criticized for simply inverting Modernism: that's an argument that was there, as Hal noted, even in *October*.[4]

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Okay, that may be, but I want to use the example to flush out what I take to be some deeper differences around this table about the relation between criticism and theory. Let me propose, somewhat polemically, a strong distinction between criticism and theory. On this understanding, theory should be well in the background. It will ultimately, if at a remove, underpin all claims about specific works, but it will not illuminate any particular work or set of works. And that is so for a very simple reason: if a theory is true, it is true in general. If Freud and Klein, say, are right about the structure of the mind, they are right about everyone's mind all of the time, not about some people's minds some of the time. So if either theory has implications for artistic production, say, those implications will generalize necessarily. On this account, competing theories will have different implications for *all* works of art, not for some local set of works that seem to best illustrate them. If art in general is reparation, rooted in guilt for aggression acted out in fantasy, then this will be as true of Chardin as it is of Bourgeois. That's the test case. This, I take it, is akin to Jay's project with respect to Deleuze and Matisse, but would be one difference between myself and Hal, because that is not how you would use theoretical terms.

HAL FOSTER: If kept to your criterion, not much theory could be produced, let alone used. Philosophy might be supposed to be true in general, but that might be one reason not many people read it anymore.

JAMES ELKINS: I understand where you're going with this—I can see the importance, even the necessity, of reading the texts for their arguments. After all, the texts are what is given, and they do imply certain positions. I am also on board with the idea of distinguishing criticism and theory in these texts, although I am not sure I would do it as you're doing it at the moment. But what bothers me is that by saying things like "if a theory is true, it is true in general," you are straying so far from the self-understanding of art historians that you might not be able to develop your argument. Wouldn't it be possible to say, in this case, "the *informe* texts are dependent on a figure of theory that does not appear in them." In other

4. A less widely known source is *Formless: Ways In and Out of Form*, edited by Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, European Connections 11 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

words, why not be agnostic, here, about the existence of theories and their relation to truth?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Well, I guess my sense is that these texts often want it both ways. They trade on the authority of various thinkers or theories, both to motivate their claims about various stretches of artistic practice and to give those claims weight, whilst refusing to take on board the full implications of the positions they depend upon. I'm not persuaded you can have one without the other.

Here's my second example. Douglas Crimp's "Pictures" is generally remembered today for its invocation of Benjamin; but the prehistory of Crimp's position is an engagement with Fried's notion of theatricality. There are two aspects to the latter. One is the argument from *theater*, to the effect that what falls between specific media cannot be art. The other is the argument from theatricality, which is, among other things, a critique of the temporality and mode of address of Minimalist works. I do not claim that Crimp simply inverts Fried's position: Crimp traces a certain legacy of temporality from Minimalism, which he sees as a literal temporality (which is consistent with Fried's view), and brings it through performance (which would be theatrical with a vengeance on Fried's view) into a certain psychological temporality that Crimp proposes as a way of staging pictures.[5] But these pictures—Crimp uses the word *tableaux*, which is loaded in relation to Fried's arguments—are conceived in non-medium-specific terms. So, against an account that locates value exclusively in terms of medium-specific categories, Crimp champions a non- or anti-medium-specific conception of the *tableau.*

In both these examples, Bois's "The Informe" and Crimp's "Pictures," I suggest that antimodernism does not break with Modernism just as, more generally, the anti-aesthetic does not break with the aesthetic. Each is the negative afterimage of its precursor. The more it is predicated on overturning its precursor's terms, the more closely it is constrained by what it contests. In my view, arguments that break with, or at least complicate, Modernist theory are to be found elsewhere, where the relation between their terms and those against which they are pitched is less overdetermined. I am thinking of Thierry de Duve and Steve Melville in particular.[6] But my interest in all these cases is less in their specific claims than in the *relation* of their claims to the objects of their critique. My claim that anti-aestheticism cashes out as an inverted Modernism is a claim about the relation between certain conceptual moves in these texts, and moves in the texts that they take issue with. My goal is simply to disturb received wisdom about some of these relations.

5. Diarmuid Costello, "Pictures, Again," in "Post-Medium," special issue, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 8, no. 1 (2007): 11–41.

6. Thierry de Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," chap. 4 of *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) (also published in Serge Guilbaut, ed., *Reconstructing Modernism* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990]); Melville, "On Modernism," in *Philosophy Beside Itself: On Deconstruction and Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

GRETCHEN BAKKE: So your interest *is* in relational aesthetics, just of a very different sort than that we have come to expect with the sorts of gallery-based, convivial projects described by Bourriaud.[7] The relationality you describe is that of texts with their objects (and vice versa) as a sort of careful aesthetics of critique.[8]

JAMES ELKINS: That ambition is itself interesting in relation to your theme of distinguishing theory and criticism. You provide theory by rereading Kant, Benjamin, Cavell, Fried, and others; but until those accounts are developed, I would read your texts more as criticism—and as such, by your own terms, they occlude their theoretical content. I wonder, too, how mutable, how capacious, "theory" and "criticism" are in this account. After all, both terms were in play in the original moments of the anti-aesthetic, as Hal noted, and their terms have been contested in the literature you're looking at ever since.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I doubt this will satisfy you, Jim, but let me conclude by saying something positive about what I take an immanent critique to be, using my own critique of Fried as an example.[9] It bears directly on how I understand the relation between theory and criticism.

My goal was to show that Fried has two distinct, but entangled, arguments—the argument from theater and the argument from theatricality—and that one undermines the other. The argument from theater expresses the *theoretical commitment* that artistic value can only be located in relation to specific media. The argument from theatricality expresses a *critical judgment* about Minimalism's address to its intended audience. Whereas the latter rejects Minimalism critically, for having, in Fried's view, a meretricious relation to its beholder, the former looks like a theoretically motivated refusal to make that very judgment. It says that no work located between media *could* be in candidacy for such a judgment in the first place.

In the paper I try to show that the reformulations of Greenberg that ground Fried's version of Modernism preclude making the latter move according to his own theory. I argue that, given Fried's revisions of Greenberg, there is no reason not to count Jeff Wall as a painter and Gerhard Richter as a photographer. If according to the theory at issue one can make photographs by painting, and paintings photographically, then there are no longer any substantive empirical constraints on what *may count* as a work in a given medium. At that point, the argument from theater unravels—I say—on Friedian grounds. This is what I mean by an immanent critique.

7. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2002).

8. Žižek writes, "A short circuit occurs when there is a faulty connection in the network—faulty, of course, from the standpoint of the network's smooth functioning," and asks, "Is not the shock of short-circuiting, therefore, one of the best metaphors for a critical reading?" Žižek, introduction to *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), ix–x; and the Short Circuits series, edited by Žižek (MIT Press).

9. Costello, "On the Very Idea of a 'Specific Medium': Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell on Painting and Photography as Arts," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2008): 274–312, in response to Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: It would fail completely in terms of an essentialist account of the media, but it would hold up in terms of an historical appreciation of what has been counting as work in that specific media, wouldn't it?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I think the best defense of Fried has to be along those lines—

JAMES ELKINS: This comes back to the senses of *theory* that are at work in your reading. I also think it is easily possible to demonstrate that Fried's account is compatible with interests far beyond his own, ones that would end up contradicting his own values.[10] But I would tend to question any sense of argument that begins to require more solidity and coherence of "theory" than the text itself proposes.

DAKOTA BROWN: Can you say more about the relation between deconstruction and what you're calling inner or immanent critique?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I think deconstruction has to be a form of immanent critique. A thoroughgoing deconstructionist would no doubt want to resist the opposition of internal and external critique on which I'm trading, but in my understanding deconstruction has to open a text to something internal that prevents the text from making certain claims that it wants to make.

HARPER MONTGOMERY: And along those lines, can you say more about how you would understand rupture? How does that figure in discussions of immanent and external critique? Rupture strikes me as something that must necessarily assert pressure from *outside* the text. How can the alliance between rupture and deconstruction be accounted for?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: But exerting pressure from without doesn't preclude exerting it on some fault line within a text. Texts typically don't do this for themselves, after all! In this (trivial) sense my critique of "Art and Objecthood" is external, but it at least aspires to ground itself on internal features and arguments of the text. An external critique, by contrast, might begin by dismissing the kind of work Fried champions out of hand. But that need not worry Fried—it doesn't even begin to engage with his arguments.

More generally, I don't have strong intuitions about this, other than that various claims for rupture tend to be overblown in academic discourse. Arguably, what happens in the *informe* texts is not some dramatic rupture or break, but the rejection of certain kinds of art or at least of certain grounds for valuing those kinds of art, in favor of valorizing other kinds of art or other grounds for valuing the same art. (I'm thinking of Krauss's reading of Pollock here.)

So the deflationary response might be: all the Bois and the Crimp texts finally show is that critical sensibilities have changed, and this is what Crimp is

10. I argued this about the openness of Fried's sense of Barthes's *punctum* to the study of kinds of non-art images that don't interest Fried, but raise many questions about medium, spectatorship and beholding, and other criteria. See Fried, "Barthes's Punctum," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (2005): 539–74, and my response, "What Do We Want Photography to Be?," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 4 (2005): 938–56.

trying to capture when he writes about "Pictures" generation artists. The question for me is how you try to ground or account for those changes theoretically.

I guess my thought is a really simple one: if a term is so thoroughly determined by what it is opposing, then it won't succeed in what it's trying to do.

SUNIL MANGHANI: I sense a slight slippage. Your position is very logical, but when you ask about the consequences of Fried's arguments, you say it undermines the concept of the medium. Are you then holding on to the idea of what painting is, or shifting the sense of medium?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I would like to arrive at a theoretically justified position according to which judgments of value need not be grounded on media categories. If I can show, by pushing hard on this conception of a medium, that it cannot lay down substantive claims about what constitutes a work in a given medium, then it follows that Fried himself should not be making claims about what falls between media. Precisely what differentiates him from Greenberg deprives him of the basis to make such claims. I want to get away from claims that tie value to media. This is not to say that I want to do away with claims about artistic value—on the contrary—just with grounding such claims on medium categories.

SUNIL MANGHANI: But then you say, "The consequence is that you've lost the medium," and I'm not sure you have. Structuralism, as you know, has no positive terms. If one were to feel uncomfortable with Richter being a photographer, then that discomfort identifies a subject position, an ideology of practice. I'm wondering whether those positions might still be signs of subject positions. When you say, "The consequence is . . . , " then you're revealing a position, an ideology; you're doing it in a very neutral way, but it feels like something's gone wrong there.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I'm not sure I fully follow you, Sunil: all I'm trying to say is that it's an entailment of this account of a medium, if you take the argument seriously, that such-and-such follows.

Fried is not happy with the paper we're talking about, I can tell you.[11] But though he is not embracing it with open arms, if what I say is correct, he can't rule out the consequence.

SUNIL MANGHANI: See, that's not on an ontological basis, but an ideological basis.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Okay, but is that more than trivially true?

SUNIL MANGHANI: That gets to the heart of the problem of the aesthetic/anti-aesthetic debate. It makes a lot of your case absolutely right: you're undoing the position *between* the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic. It is useful, because it reveals an ideological basis in the whole.

EVE MELTZER: Let me go back to a question you posed yesterday, regarding philosophy and history. You said something like, "Can they be friends?"

11. Costello, "On the Very Idea of a 'Specific Medium.'"

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I said one of the challenges is getting them to speak to one another.

EVE MELTZER: It is hard for me to even begin this conversation, because I do not understand why one would want to prove, say, that a theory holds up to a test. That would seem to presuppose the rightness or usefulness of a theory, that theory needs to be from the outset "right" or "useful," that that is its purpose. I am not accustomed to reading theory in that way. Why does one have to be committed to the sense that something has to be true *all the time?*

GUSTAV FRANK: I think this has to do with method. You have outlined a paradox, and I think that is where you are going. You claim you are doing immanent critique. Fair enough. You show, in Kantian terms, that there are categorial mistakes in the existing texts. But the question is, Why do they only occur to you? And not to the people who write the theory?

What makes your understanding superior to their own sense of themselves?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: That's what every theorist does to every other. It's just the normal way to perpetuate the discipline.

EVE MELTZER: I meant that if art history is going to be a friend of philosophy, then we may have to start this friendship by questioning how they are going to address or see one another, according to what modes of engagement. The arguments you have mobilized don't seem to even make thinkable some of the things I think art history is concerned with—for one thing: particularly expansive and exploratory ways of reading images, objects, texts. You privilege a mode of thinking that is predicated on a reified notion of truth and logical procedure.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: You're surely not saying that the claims of art historians are not even open to question!

EVE MELTZER: No, absolutely not.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: So if I had not made any remarks at all—

[*Laughter*]

JAY BERNSTEIN: When I think of doing philosophical criticism of the arts, I would be horrified if my philosophical position gave me an immediate access to the object. I think that would be the worst possible case. I think of philosophy as being way up here. [*Gesturing at the ceiling.*]

[*Laughter*]

But as absolutely dependent on art history—

HAL FOSTER: Really? A major philosopher in this debate, Arthur Danto, would seem first to rectify it and then to subsume it: having achieved philosophical self-consciousness, art doesn't need art history anymore; maybe it doesn't even need art because it's now . . . philosophy!

JAY BERNSTEIN: Well, for me the way to test an account is not against criticism, but against another theory. I always assume a relative theoretical autonomy. The relation to the object is massively mediated. For me the thought that a theory could explain an object is horrendous, because criticism cannot be gotten out of theories. Theories should be able to acknowledge criticism, and make it intelligible, but not explain it, reduce it, or give an algorithm.

In Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, there is no art criticism. That, for him, would be just crazy: to think that from a meta-theoretical claim you could derive deep insight into a particular work of art. You get orientation—

HAL FOSTER: "Orientation": how different is that from "truth in general"?

JAY BERNSTEIN: A theory of art is always part of a broader philosophical outlook that includes epistemological, moral, and metaphysical aspects. Philosophical thought is not strategic. If you have one theory in your life, that's good. If you have two, great. If you have three, you're probably a tramp. You're being opportunistic. Philosophers have a different relationship to the apparatus, and therefore a much more distant relation to the object.

HAL FOSTER: That's very helpful, but it also suggests why Barnett Newman once said, "Aesthetics is for artists is what ornithology is for birds."

JAMES ELKINS: This is the opening to a much longer discussion, an entire field of thinking. Eve, I think that a helpful next step would be to acknowledge the degree to which logical argument in art history is stressed, and the moments it is bypassed in favor of other sources of meaning. What Diarmuid is doing is reading "as a philosopher," which here, to him, means reading for logical argument, and drawing inferences. In fact art history is deeply inimical to that sort of reading, but the ways in which art history resists purely logical readings are themselves not theorized in the discipline.[12] Notice that when we read "The Allegorical Impulse" we shifted back and forth from locating local arguments to describing the overall form of the text, and we did not theorize those moves except with overall metaphors like weaving and collage. From my point of view, Diarmuid, if you want your readers to include art historians of the sort who do not read consistently for argument—the kind who supposedly don't read philosophy, or don't read philosophy *as* philosophy—then you need to also watch the moments where Fried isn't arguing, where he isn't watching that he isn't arguing. And of course that is much easier in other art historians, where the argument can seem, from a philosophical standpoint, nothing more than an accumulation.

MICHAEL KELLY: Yet the difficult issue here is not the role of logic, which I don't see as a source of meaning but as a set of formal constraints on the articulation and understanding of meaning, whether in theory or criticism. Rather, the issue is

12. My book *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), paperback edition, with new preface (New York: Routledge, 2000), is devoted to this question.

the role of theory, as we saw earlier, or rather the type of normative theory that art historians engage in, if only indirectly, when they adopt conceptual resources from Benjamin and others—such as *aura*—that continue to have normative force, even outside their original historical contexts.

SUNIL MANGHANI: Diarmuid, there is the possibility, for example, that two positions can be right at once. As in particle physics, your engagement in the experiment can get in the way of seeing things clearly. Philosophy and art have different ways of getting used to that.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Adorno thinks philosophy cannot deliver what art delivers. When I go to the Art Institute, I am not going there to get a bit of philosophy.

GUSTAV FRANK: But finally, that implies philosophy doesn't matter.

JAY BERNSTEIN: It's the opposite: art is the one thing worth living or dying for.

GUSTAV FRANK: I find in this discussion a replay of the eighteenth century, and that is probably why we have been intermittently wondering about Kant, and why Diarmuid has written a paper proposing Kant can be reread for current debates.[13] Theory is outside and above: that is the Kantian position.

MICHAEL KELLY: Diarmuid didn't put Kant on the table. The anti-aesthetic did. The question is, what reading of Kant has enabled the anti-aesthetic? There are other things in Kant we may want to appeal to: not to rescue Kant, but to do serious work on the entire anti-aesthetic debate.

GUSTAV FRANK: I completely agree, Michael, we should ask why the sublime was the focus of the anti-aesthetic, and not beauty or ugliness, which mesmerized post-Hegelian aesthetic. If it's pathetic—in the etymological sense—to talk about beauty again, and if there is an obvious consensus in our seminar against recent accounts like Elaine Scarry's, then what does it mean to reassess the sublime?

JAMES ELKINS: In terms of this discussion, a discussion of the inheritance of Kant, the Schlegels, and others would be a good way to proceed. I can think of three other things that might help. First, we might return to uses of *theory*, *criticism*, and Krauss's word, *method*, in the literature of the anti-aesthetic, because they have been vexed from the very beginning.[14] Second, we could look at some recent texts about anti-aesthetic moments in art—for example Eve's—and see how, and where, they argue, and what they do when they are not arguing, and how those nonlogical moments are understood in the discipline. Third, we could look at philosophic attempts to rethink the relation between logical argument and art,

13. Costello, "Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (2007): 217–28. See also "Retrieving Kant's Aesthetics for Art Theory After Greenberg: Some Remarks on Arthur C. Danto and Thierry de Duve," in *Rediscovering Aesthetics*, edited by Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen, and Tony O' Connor (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 117–32. [—D.C.]

14. "Method" in Krauss, as a word for criticism that sees as its purpose the meditation on the conditions of judgment, is discussed in *The State of Art Criticism*, edited by James Elkins and Michael Newman, The Art Seminar 4 (New York: Routledge, 2007).

for example Alain Badiou's "inaesthetics," which has been so well critiqued by Jacques Rancière.[15]

I think it is significant that we have not explored Diarmuid's claims. We have been more interested in the *idea* of reading to extract claims. I don't think this has anything to do with the anti-aesthetic specifically, but it has a lot to do with poststructuralism, and the differing reading habits in the humanities. Whatever *theory* and *criticism* are in texts around the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic, they are not *only* the ways Diarmuid has described them, but also often their opposites.

15. Rancière, "Alain Badiou's Inaesthetics: The Torsions of Modernism," in Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2004), translated by Steven Corcoran (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 63–87.

5. THEORETICAL POSITIONS
CRITICAL THEORY

In this seminar, Jay Bernstein developed his own account of Adornian Modernism, and was challenged by several other participants, who felt that the perspective he presented didn't speak to contemporary concerns. The seminar developed into a discussion of the relevance or irrelevance of critical theory for current practice.

JAY BERNSTEIN: As Stanley Cavell said, it is in the nature of modern art that there are no criteria that tell us when something is a work of art or not. Therefore the possibility of fraudulence is endemic in modern art. I take it that Bill Viola, James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, Dan Flavin, and others may be frauds in that particular sense. My intuition is that, apart from Flavin, they probably are. What I want to do is register some comments out of the readings, which might show how a theory of Modernism might address that situation.[1] So I—

MICHAEL KELLY: Before you continue, isn't Cavell's point that there are no *essential* criteria determining what is or is not a work of art, not that there are no criteria at all? And isn't the claim of fraudulence immanent to modern works of art because of this issue of criteria, so it's not a claim made by an external critic or theorist of such art? If so, being fraudulent (as distinct from being a fraud) is a good thing, since fraudulence is endemic in all modern art.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Michael, I agree with you about the absence of essential (*a priori*) criteria, rather than the absence of criteria per se—such that each work has to seek out those criteria that will enable it to count as a meaningful extension of the tradition at a given moment. But it can't be right, on Cavell's account, that fraudulence is a good thing. Cavell's point, I take it, is that it is the standing fate of modern art to run the risk of fraudulence, given the absence of binding conventions or essential criteria. Under such conditions, the work puts the critic in question as much as the critic does the work: for the sincerity or fraudulence of the critic's own judgment is just as much at stake as the claim of the work to be taken seriously. So fraudulence certainly cannot be a term of approbation

1. Jay Bernstein set the seminar the following readings: Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 79–100; Bernstein, "Significant Stone: Medium and Sense in Schiller," *International Yearbook of German Idealism* 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 162–82; Gregg Horowitz, chap. 2 of *Sustaining Loss* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Bernstein, "In Praise of Pure Violence (Matisse's War)," in *The Life and Death of Images*, edited by Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (London: Tate, 2008), 37–55; Arthur C. Danto, chap. 2 of *The Abuse of Beauty* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003); Deleuze, chaps. 6–9 and 12 of *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated by Daniel Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, translated by Steven Corcoran (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2009), especially chap. 1, "Aesthetics as Politics."

for Cavell. All modern works run this risk: but it is only the modernizing as opposed to Modernist—avant-gardist as opposed to genuinely avant-garde—works, those that are meretriciously innovative, that succumb to it.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Michael, you are certainly right about the question of criteria, but I would state the inference more indirectly: because we lack essential criteria, then Modernist art is the kind of art for which the question of fraudulence is intrinsic. It is not an accident that when not being lauded, Modernism is being despised as the kind of art "my child could make." However, from the fact that question of fraudulence can always arise, it doesn't follow that being fraudulent is a good thing; on the contrary, it is the worst thing since it trades on the look of the modern and its actuality can be conflated. Keeping these kinds of worries in mind, I want to defend three theses: first, that works of art are necessary failures; second, that the anti-aesthetic belongs to the aesthetic, is essential to it and not external; and third, that art has a redemptive moment. (I will distinguish two notions of redemption, one of which I will repudiate.) I think these three theses are coordinated. They might even jointly define the aesthetic.

In response to the question, Is Modernism alive? I would say, No, it isn't. Adorno thought it was dead or at least dying when he wrote his *Aesthetic Theory*. But we keep open the *possibility* or potential of a future for it, by drawing these distinctions.

Let me begin with the question of the return of the repressed. On page 23 of the *informe* discussion, Yve-Alain Bois says *Olympia* "refused the various ideological and formal codes regulating the depiction of the nude." All the writers who are part of what I am calling the aesthetic agree in one way or another with this thought: they all think that tearing away materials from ideologies, languages, and formalisms is the primary gesture of modern art. In the beginning, in Dutch realism or in Caravaggio, this tearing away is emancipatory, a freeing of art from religious and related frames of reference, of letting representations become immanent in gesture rather than exemplifying some presumptively eternal idea. In this respect, modern art was a part of the secularizing of the world. However, those critical gestures become increasingly harassed and defensive as modernity itself became an ideology, a series of forms of closure and domination. At that moment, conventionally located in 1848 with the failure of the bourgeois revolutions, modernity itself becomes the problem. Of course, for some, like Rousseau and Schiller, modernity had become a significant problem much earlier. Nonetheless, the notion of decoding as Bois depicts it is, broadly, what Rancière means by the shift from the representational régime to the aesthetic régime; it is what Adorno means by the retreat of form in the face of the materials that are to be in-formed; it is what Deleuze means by the shift from representation to sensation. All of these are rifts, variations, on the Kantian notions of disinterestedness, of unity without a concept, of purposefulness without purpose.

For an exemplary version of decoding, consider the shift from Caravaggio's 1599 *Sacrifice of Isaac* to his 1603 treatment of the same event. In the first painting the way in which Isaac is being sacrificed to God is the way the painting as a whole is, formally, being sacrificed to the idea of holy sacrifice. The painted figures are for the sake of idea. In the later painting, Caravaggio brings both the religious notion of sacrifice and the painterly one, the sacrifice of reality to idea, into crisis. The fierce image of the terrified Isaac, looking at you the spectator in horror, not only ruins the picture as representation, transforming the viewer from spectator to witness, it ruins the religious ideology that made the picture possible in the first place. The shift from Isaac as pacific victim of a sacred rite to Isaac as horrified boy is the return of the repressed, while blowing the whistle on the very idea of the sacrifice of the sensuously particular individual to the abstract universal. Not for nothing did Poussin claim that Caravaggio had come to destroy painting.[2] Allegorically, it is tempting for me to think of each and every moment of Modernism as the equivalent of the movement from the 1599 *Sacrifice of Isaac*, call it the moment of the aesthetic, to the 1603 *Sacrifice*, with its affective charge, its destruction of representational order, its naturalism or realism or materialism, its wild anti-aesthetic.

Contemporary critical theory, then, is trying to provide a general account of what the *stakes* of that movement are, how it matters, how it continues to matter and happen.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: You started by asking, Is Modernism alive? And you answered, No. So maybe you're talking about Modernism and we're talking about what's alive.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: If you're saying Modernism isn't alive, then I'd like to know why you want to bring it back.

DAKOTA BROWN: But why would that matter to you? If we're all so alive, why would the dead concern us? It seems like there's a tension here between a dismissal of Jay's position as anachronistic and a desire for it to be more inclusive.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I'm just trying to bring some of the concerns I have heard from the other students into the discussion.

OMAIR HUSSAIN: It seems some of the argument is stemming from different understandings of the term "semblance." Jay, could you discuss your understanding of semblance, and its relationship to emphasis on the particular, as against the conceptual and universal?

JAY BERNSTEIN: Omair, too many different questions there. Pressing a little harder on the second part of your question, the issue is how modern rationality—the rationality of mathematical physics and universalist morality and bureaucratic rationality and technology and the domination of use value by exchange value—how all those social forms create a reified social reality, a world that does not live. For me,

2. See the wonderful book by Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, translated by Mette Hjort (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

the wild Isaac moments of Modernism, its anti-aesthetic, are a rebellion against all that, a return of repressed life against a dominating rationalization of everyday life. Now, the claim is not that stretches of sensuous aliveness and particularity do not happen all over the place in everyday life; they do. Although it matters for this telling of the aesthetic, of Modernism, that it presumes a far darker, more repressed, more deformed picture of the everyday than seems to be had by those in this room. That said, the claim about art is not that it's the only place where life lives; rather, it is the thought that it is the only systematic and ongoing practice in the modern world that is opposed to the *rationality* of other types of practices. So the investment in it is an investment in the validity of a claim for the possibility of a different form of rationality, and hence in the possibility of a form of living that would contest those reified forms of practice that dominate late capitalist modernity. Because art promises a different form of practical reason and so a different form of life, it is, inevitably, redemptive in its structure.

BRANDON EVANS: If art is a placeholder for the *promise* of redemption—and this seems like a gratuitous and precarious level of remove—then why do we keep delaying our redemption by continuing to make artworks? Or rather, what is the value for human life in limiting art by saying it is the only field to lay claim *uniquely* to a certain kind of sensuousness? Why not seek to codedicate other spheres to this aliveness as well?

JAY BERNSTEIN: That is where critical theory began: it started because there was no revolution, no way to escape, no way to transform everyday life into a fully human one. As Schiller said, the interest in art is nostalgia for a certain form of life. He was thinking of ancient Greece; we might be thinking of something futural, something more emphatically democratic and less exploitative of people and things than our form of life now is.

JAMES ELKINS: There's a truce developing here, between your account, Jay, of critical theory, as you're reading it through Adorno, and a kind of consensus of students and some Fellows, who are registering various kinds of disengagement. But I wonder if this can be a lasting truce, because the terms must be different on the two sides. On your side, the claim—again, through Adorno—has to be that these issues continue to matter, coupled with a difficulty in demonstrating that necessity. On their side, there's a nonchalance, an insouciance.

This is an instance of one of the central questions of the week, whether the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic are connected to contemporary concerns or not.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: I am very happy with the conflict. I don't have a problem with that. But for a lot of people around this table, there's a sense of being torn apart by the difference between practice—contemporary art practice—and theory. If the theory is actively doing the tearing, leaving practice in this kind of vibrating, gelatinous state, then it behooves us to think about what sorts of theories might not allow that to happen. That isn't to say it's not a delight to spend time with the tearing, ripping theories.

If we were to just use Dewey, for example, to talk about semblance coming out of experience, we'd get a different and far less antagonistic sense of what counts as art.[3]

JAMES ELKINS: Is that what it is, *just* a different accounting? Or is one normative, and the other marginal?

GRETCHEN BAKKE: I was trying to be peaceful about it.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I would be happy to say that what we're asking for would be a different discussion altogether. On the other hand, it would be good to clarify some of the underlying assumptions and claims having to do with the function of art.

JAY BERNSTEIN: That is right.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: You started out by saying Eliasson and Turrell were frauds. But what is being asked of them that they are not fulfilling?

JAY BERNSTEIN: The project of Modernism began with the idea of a series of practices, with *dispositifs*, a language of criticism, and stakes. I think the interest of art is the preservation of a rationality, about sensuous particulars as having a standing claim that we can address in their particularity, and not sacrifice them to the universal. In our experience of that, in artworks, we feel a moment of release. It can be felt as disgust, or beauty . . .

OMAIR HUSSAIN: Jay, how would you respond to practices, popular within contemporary art, that seek to find and frame the sensuous and particular in the everyday? How can such practices be understood as symptomatic of modernity? It seems that efforts to insert art into the everyday can be traced back to the beginnings of Modernism, despite the insistence today on understanding such practices as existing apart from that history.

JAY BERNSTEIN: That, again, is one version of the classic avant-garde as opposed to Modernism. At least in this bit of the world, I am always surprised by those efforts because they are always such hopeless failures. Less even than not interesting. But that is irrelevant: people not only have a right to experiment, I think it is healthy that there be ongoing experiments in art and living, even if they all fail. I'm with Mill on that. My objection to avant-garde practices is that they focus on the wrong issues: what are needed are practices dedicated to elaborating an alternative *rationality* of the ordinary that would make a truly different form of life possible. I take it that the problem of the everyday has been the project of modernity.

My students often ask me, What do you think Adorno's aesthetic theory is about? Is it about art? Not really. It's about critical epistemology, about an alternative form of reasoning, making, and knowing the world, of which art is our only ongoing practice.

3. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; New York: Penguin, 2005).

JAMES ELKINS: I am still puzzled by the terms of this truce. I have no problem understanding why you don't need to be concerned about the terms of the contemporary practices the students are describing, because I can see the ongoing force of the project of critical theory. But I have a harder time understanding why Elise, or the other students, do not worry that they might need to have an account of their position in relation to your terms. How do they know the contemporary practices they're engaged in are outside the terms of the Adornian critique, no matter how jellylike it might make them feel?

JAY BERNSTEIN: Let me introduce a new distinction that might be helpful: the difference between the anti-aesthetic and anti-art. I understand the anti-aesthetic pretty much as Bois does: as those things that are excluded by particular art practices, but turn out to be essential for them. So the anti-aesthetic is the return of the repressed *within* art, its own materials coming back to haunt it.

Anti-art is concerned with the fact that art practices don't want to produce mere artworks, semblances; art wants to be *world*: it wants to be the thing in the world that is living. Art cannot exist, in my reading, without the continual temptation to take its inner practice and see it as part of the world. Therefore anti-art, which is art repudiating its own institutional frame, is part of Modernist practice. (This is really Peter Bürger on the avant-garde, but I think Bürger is just hatching out a bit of Adorno here.)

JAMES ELKINS: So in that case, the contemporary practices we're associating with Elise really do speak a language they are not aware of speaking.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Yeah, I do think this is the classic avant-garde returning; and I do think of that as being a perpetual temptation that is intrinsic to modern art: the rebellion against autonomy and formalism and emptiness. There is a lot there to despise and rebel against!

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I'll give you an example of an anti-art practice in Jay's sense of that term. A young artist at my undergraduate college made a piece consisting of perfect facsimiles of the line diagram you find posted in the London Underground, except that he removed all the stops and transfers on his daily journey between home to college, giving himself a clear run. He then installed (without permission, obviously) the same number of maps as the stops he had removed on different trains and sent them on their way. I take it this practice is anti-art in Jay's terms: it seeks to function outside art's institutional frame, in and as the world itself, but it was probably all but invisible—nothing more than an inexplicable anomaly in an otherwise seamless system of public information—to everyone apart from those viewing it from within that frame.

HAL FOSTER: At this point the burden might be on the artists to tell us how anti-art and other practices count, and not simply charge us with exclusion or repression. (This is another claim I've heard a thousand times.)

DIARMUID COSTELLO: What claim?

HAL FOSTER: That what we do as critics or philosophers doesn't speak to art practice. You might not find what you want or need in what I say, or what Jay or Diarmuid says. But we can reverse the demand, and say, Tell us how your work counts.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I'm not looking for that.

HAL FOSTER: Really? When we all introduced ourselves at the beginning of the week, all the artists who spoke were looking for connections or complaining about the lack thereof: "I feel excluded here, I feel silenced." So speak, and tell us why your practice matters.

JAMES ELKINS: Or, to be neutral about it, you could also speak and say why the discourses Jay is asking us to read don't matter to you: why you're content to drift.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: What I've seen in art academies tells me the kinds of practices that interest us have gone beyond being anti-aesthetic. They are institutionalized, they have their own language, they have rules for reception and documentation, they are part of the aesthetic: they are old hat. My view of the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic is as a thing that presents itself and then becomes part of history. It is only an aesthetic issue. So talk about semblance and fraudulence don't make sense to me, because they seem like they are something from the Modernist past being artificially extended to the present.

JAY BERNSTEIN: But doesn't fraudulence matter to you? Would a logic of fraudulence matter to you?

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: Well, I can't feel alive in the face of rationality as you do. So at that point I don't know, I'm not sure.

AARON RICHMOND: My practice is committed to semblance, which I understand as a matter of putting all your energy into something finite, that calls for a kind of speech that doesn't happen in this world (as Barthes put it), but *through* the Modernist inheritance of the work as semblance. So when I leave art school, I feel like my button is up, and I feel like this . . . nineteenth-century . . . *thing*. [*Laughter*]

But the space that is involved is a lived space, and in that sense I wonder if the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic is not as important as the category of performance.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I think performance is a part of the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic.

JAMES ELKINS: That is true if you look at texts from the 1980s, but it is paradoxically not true if you look at recent texts by Irit Rogoff, Peggy Phelan, Amelia Jones, and others, who are not directly engaged in the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic. You could use your point to further your claim of isolation from anti-modernist concerns.

DAKOTA BROWN: I'd like to know why it seems Jay doesn't want anyone to experience pleasure.

[*Laughter*]

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: The pleasure you describe in relation to art, Jay, seems very far from Adorno's negativity.

JAY BERNSTEIN: For Adorno there are two notions of experience. The *thick notion* of experience, *Erfahrung*, means the experience itself is the articulation of your orientation in the world. Your undergoing of that experience becomes a new way of encountering the world. An example would be falling in love.

SVEN SPIEKER: Adorno didn't know much about the experience of falling in love.

JAY BERNSTEIN: I don't think there's anything *else* in Adorno. Adorno's deepest thought is about love of the world: how the rationalization of lifeworld practices eviscerates it, how the world appears under its disappearance, how it might be renewed. That is what I think he is thinking in his talk about identity thinking versus mimetic rationality—it's all about love.

But let me return to the problem of experience. In opposition to the thick notion of experience, there is ordinary experience, *Ereignis*, just our ordinary sensory engagements with the world: seeing, touching, tasting as we ordinarily do. What Benjamin and Adorno are worried about is the thick notion of experience. The rationalization of the lifeworld just means the loss of experience as the central means for the transmission of human meaning and orientation. Hence, their question is, What are the possibilities of thick experience now? Is experience still possible? Parenthetically: both Benjamin and Adorno think affect is important only as it is bound with thick experience, *Erfahrung*; not just raw feelings, but feeling laced with cognition is what they want to defend. And art, of course, for both, is the central bearer of experience in late modernity. And what Modernist artworks routinely do is to provide us with an emphatic experience about the absence of experience in everyday life; that is plainly Benjamin's story about Baudelaire and Adorno's about Proust.

Beauty was important to art because it was a bearer of experience: an entwining of form, meaning, and value. One could argue that beauty just is that entwining, which is how it has mattered to us. Now Adorno says we gave up beauty because it seemed like a lie or a deceit. An art of beauty in a fervidly ugly world, say the world just after World War I, doesn't even rise to the level of critique; it becomes fantasy and escape. That's what Adorno meant by his obscure saying that it is for the sake of the beautiful that there is no longer beauty: because it is no longer beautiful. Beauty became questionable as an ideal or value. Artists had to construct other ideas—disgust, negativity, the sublime—that would do the same thing, namely deliver the experience of the work that allows us to understand the absence of experience in everyday life. I hope I have not lost the negativity of Adorno.

And why the return of beauty? I have no clear idea about the revival of beauty, although as a wild guess it could be thought of as a rebellion against an art world that has championed ugliness, disgust, the abject. Maybe they are now the clichés and acting on the beautiful feels like a courageous critical stance. Or maybe it has something to do with giving up on the very idea of art as having a critical relation to the world. I truly don't know.

HAL FOSTER: Jay, your views on everyday life are so dire that they can only position art as redemptive or at least compensatory.

JAY BERNSTEIN: I mean for my views on everyday life to sound dire. In part, I think such views are truer than the opposite, and in part it is an Adornian conceit: only the exaggerations are true. Redemption, for me, is about modes of caring. I am trying to understand why art might be the sort of thing about which one thinks that it matters absolutely for the fate of culture. Whether or not there is a next move is not a parochial matter, but a question of whether or not we can keep culture moving at all. If these aren't the stakes, then I am not sure what they might ever be.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: We have had two different readings of Benjamin this week. One has validated substantive, emphatic, distinct experience, distinct from everyday experience. The other had supported a positive nihilism, a destruction of part of the cultural tradition. We might then ask whether either of those are substantive demands to be made of art, and whether they are reasonable demands.

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: It might be clear if we think what we do *not* want from art. We don't want spectacle, and subjection to ordinary politics.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: So we can only ask what we want of art by asking what we do not want?

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: This connects to the importance of the historical avant-garde, which showed that anything can be art. Some of the events that have occurred within relational aesthetics may be outside the field of art, but I recognize it's impossible to assume that as an all-inclusive statement.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: But who are "we" to want or not want something from art? We follow art; we come after. If artists embrace spectacle, then who are "we" to not want this?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I just meant the kind of demands that I have heard entertained around this table. I don't say we are all making the *same* demand. Indeed, I don't think it's at all clear between us what we do or *don't* want from art, if anything. Is it even clear that we don't want spectacle, for example?

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: Well, there is the formative distinction between reactive and resistant postmodernism—

DIARMUID COSTELLO: But I think we've also said that setting up the debate in that way makes it unresponsive to contemporary concerns. Conversations we've been having about criticality—whether it's a live notion, whether it makes sense to use the term—suggest the issue is not at all clear. Hal, earlier you expressed some internal frustration with the way of setting up spectacle as a single, negative term.

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: If only we could know what resistance looks like.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: But is resistance what some people are asking for?

HAL FOSTER: It seems the philosophers here talk about demands artworks place on us, but often that philosophy places a demand on art, too—that it be, for example, an expression of normative authority. It seems the historians and practitioners here don't work with that assumption (maybe that's naïve, but it's the case); I think in terms of different paradigms myself. And I don't share your confusion about what art wants from us because I don't presume that it always wants the same thing. It's important to return to the disciplinary difference between philosophers and art historians, and not to confuse, as Jay said at the beginning, discourses of art, anti-art, aesthetics, and anti-aesthetics.

MICHAEL KELLY: But there's a sense in which it's not only philosophers who assume works make normative claims on us. Why else write about art? There's a normative dimension even in insisting on writing about art in a descriptive way. We differ as to how we unpack the kinds of claims we make. Mary Flanagan's book on video games, *Critical Play*, argues that computer scientists need to know about how play has worked in art, and in Modernism, in order to be in a position to create immersive experiences. Flanagan thinks artists are the best source for the information they seek.[4]

JAMES ELKINS: The distinction between asking for resistance and wondering whether resistance is still an operative word is a conventional form of the difference between the anti-aesthetic and the aesthetic. I suspect the distinction between art that makes demands, or seems to contain normative claims requiring philosophic investigation, and art that is understood differently, is also a version of the difference between the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic: not because it needs to be, necessarily, but because in effect what we're asking about is a difference between art that seems to have propositional structure and art that seems not to. So as I see it, we have once again made a wide circle and ended near our starting point.

4. Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

6. THEORETICAL POSITIONS
RANCIÈRE, DELEUZE, RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

Although affect theory emerged as the principal possibility for describing art outside the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic, the Seminars ranged over a number of other possible texts, concepts, and disciplines. Here the participants discussed the unexpected absence of Rancière from the week's discussions; the reasons that most participants did not want to discuss relational aesthetics; and the possibility of expanding Deleuze's reading of Bacon beyond its application to Bacon's paintings.

JAMES ELKINS: I wonder if we might spend a few minutes on the question of Jacques Rancière. He is, I'd say, the theorist *du jour*, but I am unconvinced of the use of his arguments. When he writes "art is not . . . political because of the messages . . . it conveys," nor "because of the ways it represents society," but that "it is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to those functions," then he is in a position that does not correspond to the self-description of politically engaged artists, for whom political meanings constitute the agency and the legible content of political art.[1] At the same time he doesn't speak for artists who *don't* think of their art as especially political, because his position entails a political content *equal* to other art.

JAY BERNSTEIN: For Rancière, politics is not the same as governmentality. Ordinary politics, for him, is the police, which is the absence of politics. For Rancière, politics only happens when there is a dissensus, a disagreement about the distribution of the sensible world. When people who have been made invisible become visible—only at such moments is there politics. Politics proper concerns making count what has not counted in the past by making visible what has not been emphatically visible in the past. Politics cannot happen unless the world begins to appear differently. Think of this as occurring in accordance with what Wittgenstein calls aspect-blindness and aspect dawning. You see only the duck but can't see the rabbit; that is the same drawing seen differently. Politics occurs through the dawning of sensible aspects: At one moment what appears is the duck of white middle-class contentment; at the next moment what appears is the rabbit of black working-class suffering.

Politics is therefore essentially aesthetic. Conversely, art is equally about dissensus, about reconfiguring the sensible world so it appears differently: instead of Abraham's faith we perceive Isaac's terror. Rancière sees aesthetic art as, precisely, a contestation over the distribution of the sensible, letting the everyday, the mundane, the material stuff of the world into art essentially. The aesthetic

1. Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2004) (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 23.

artwork is more democratic, more egalitarian, than everyday life; it is the becoming of everyday life as the locus of human meaningfulness.

I have many disagreements with Rancière, but the great picture here is that art and politics are two different practices targeted at the same problem. There is a politics of the aesthetic, and an aesthetics of politics, and they have to be seen as mirror images of one another. Two very different practices, with different means and different concrete ambitions; but both are fundamentally concerned with redistributing the sensible, making the sensible world appear differently, appear more democratically and equally.

JAMES ELKINS: I understand his claim that politics and art aren't "separate realities," but "two forms of the distribution of the sensible."[2] But what are the conditions under which you might find this to be a plausible solution to the perennial problem of the *distance* between aesthetic artistic practices and politics? What are the circumstances under which artists read Rancière and say, Great, now I don't need to worry about aesthetics and politics?

JAY BERNSTEIN: In one way he is like Adorno: his engagements with visual art are sporadic and mostly bad; he is more convincing with film. But he does not think theory replaces criticism. You aren't going to get a satisfactory accounting of artworks without criticism.

SVEN SPIEKER: To me, Rancière is a bizarre concoction of eighteenth-century aesthetics, Russian Constructivism, and 1950s Brechtian *Verfremdung*. You're absolutely right: he is weak when it comes to exact examples. At one point he claims, essentially, that there is something inevitable about the confluence of abstract painting and revolution during the October Revolution in Russia. As if the kind of abstraction practiced by members of the prerevolutionary Russian avant-garde inexorably ended up sublating the difference between art and politics.[3] That's rather naïve, although admittedly some artists at the time did see it that way. But this ended in 1921 at the latest, when many of them noted that abstract painting and revolutionary practice were drifting apart.

JAMES ELKINS: In the Seminars for volume 2 of this series, *What Is an Image?*, the art historian Jacqueline Lichtenstein more or less dismissed Rancière, saying just that he isn't interested in images.

JAY BERNSTEIN: I wouldn't disagree. He is a terrible critic. But he is a wonderful philosophic critic. I think his readings of Lyotard and Badiou are spot on.[4] And I think that *Disagreement* is a powerful book of political thought.[5] And there is a larger aesthetic context here.

2. Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 26; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

3. Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 32–33.

4. Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*.

5. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, translated by Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010).

Rancière says that representation has four constitutive conventions. Following the model in his book on literature, he says representation involves the imitation of action, a series of genres that refer to a hierarchy of character and subject matter, the appropriateness of actions that characters can commit, and the production of a world in which social standing and rhetorical ability are allied. Rancière's general way of expressing these four conditions is to say that art is composed of two features: a *mimesis*, which is a story, a legislation, a form of doing; and an *aisthesis*, a form of affection, of experience. What holds the form of action and the form of experience together is a picture of human nature. So the whole of premodern art is held together by an understanding of human nature as, say, damned and in need of redemption; but also as naturally stratified into classes: the noble and the base.

The aesthetic regime, for Rancière, is the loss or destruction of that hierarchy. You can no longer say which characters can speak, and which cannot (the fourth convention); which subject matters are acceptable; what forms of language are appropriate. All those traditional hierarchies disappear, and the question becomes, How are *aisthesis* and *poesis* (form and content) connected in the aesthetic regime? His answer is, Without a concept.

One way of thinking about this is to say that every modern work of art in its egalitarian assumption and democratic reach has about it an element of improvisation. It doesn't follow a set of rules or criteria, and thus each work has to engineer for itself, in its own terms, the relation of form and content. Modern art is therefore, in this sense, groundless.

Because art makes a claim on you, because it compels you, there must be a connection between form and content—and yet there is no concept, no way to name the connection. This is what Rancière means by saying art makes a promise: it promises there is a form of life, another picture of human nature, in which that new relation can be conceptualized: perhaps not in the artwork, but in the world, in living practices.

JAMES ELKINS: I prefer this theme in Tim Clark's *Farewell to an Idea*, in the first chapter, where "contingency" names an analogous condition, but without "promise," without the lugubrious language of "living practices" and "groundlessness."

HAL FOSTER: I agree Rancière is not a very good critic, but he is still attractive to many artists, and one reason, put cynically, is that he sprinkles some of his texts with references to some of their work. The notion of "the redistribution of the sensible" strikes me as wish-fulfillment: would that artists were in a position to do as much! It sounds like a way to reconnect art to politics, but it's mostly a fantasy, a mirage.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Yes, it's very abstract—

HAL FOSTER: Artists make a far too quick, nonmediated closure. To me it's not redemptive. It's a promise that is a mirage.

BEÁTA HOCK: The dearth of any tangible social content in Rancière is also perplexing because his project echoes, at least in my ears, Nancy Fraser's essay "From Redistribution to Recognition."[6] Fraser notes a rueful shift in the grammar of political claims at a time of the exhaustion of leftist utopian energies. The shift is from claims for social equality and the goal of winning *redistribution*, to the desire to win *recognition* for culturally defined group differences. The result is a decoupling of cultural politics from social politics.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Of course, what Fraser means by redistribution is different; she really is thinking about the redistribution of money and wealth.

KATHERINE DESJARDINS: People also read Rancière in art academies as a way of flipping over hierarchies. In academies in Italy, Rancière was behind such movements, as a way of giving power to students.

HAL FOSTER: His work on pedagogy is extraordinary, and so is much of his work as an historian. I am less convinced by his cultural criticism.

JOAQUÍN BARRIENDOS: I pretty much agree that the way in which art practitioners, art critics, and curators have been using and capitalizing this sort of political "promise" inherent in Rancière's critique of the anti-aesthetics obscures a broader understanding of aesthetics as the distribution of the sensible. For Rancière, aesthetics is not a negative outcome derived from the distribution of the sensible, but the distribution as such.

JAMES ELKINS: It seems clear to me that Rancière is so attractive in the art world because he offers a way to claim that politics and aesthetics are no longer problematically different. But you have to be both desperate for a solution and unreflective about it to accept a theory whose vocabulary, whose conceptual structure, is so distant from the art world, so much a deus ex machina.

JOAQUÍN BARRIENDOS: That's right. But we can't refuse to acknowledge that Rancière rejects any kind of consensual identification between politics and aesthetics. This means that politics and aesthetics might be considered together as a conflict or as mutually constitutive, rather than solely interchangeable elements. If we overlook this point, then the ethical dimension of the political art arises as a new regime, as a new partition.

NADJA MILLNER-LARSEN: Rancière is one of the few philosophers out there who insists on operating from the point of view of "emancipation" rather than social cohesion.[7] I think this is something practitioners are starved for, whether or not the popular adherence to the "distribution of the sensible" ultimately serves as a massive wish fulfillment (as Hal has suggested). The understanding of emancipation as the freedom to steal aesthetic pleasure from the holding cell of the bourgeoisie

6. Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist Age,'" in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 11–39.

7. As Hal pointed out, this is most apparent and most successfully theorized in Rancière's work on history and pedagogy. The two main texts I'm thinking of are *The Nights of Labor* and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

is perhaps too readily adaptable. This radical antifunctionalism is not necessarily problematic, but it seems to me that Rancière's schema lacks an account of how one actually moves *to break* with the distribution of the sensible—and this lack may be a place affect could be operative.

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: I must say that as an art historian I find Rancière's account of the aesthetic regime of arts rather captivating. At least in the sense that he forces us to reconsider the formalist bedrock of Modernism, as T. J. Clark's work also does. For instance, Rancière's claim that the leap outside of mimesis performed by Modernism was by no means a refusal of figurative representation allows us to discuss the Modernist ground of almost all the historical approaches to Modernism.[8]

JAMES ELKINS: You know, I wouldn't disagree with those sorts of assessments. But what, exactly, do they solve? I don't think it's possible to realign several centuries of art theory by proposing abstract redefinitions.

Anyway, I wanted to be sure to mention another potential theory source, which we have all been assigned to read: Deleuze, and specifically the book on Francis Bacon. Jay, I wonder if you could say something about how that book might work in our context.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon is an example of the subtending theory of affect.[9] He is interested in the fact that when we encounter a representation, of which we are aware, the condition of the possibility of that encounter is what he calls *sensation.* He claims a certain kind of Modernist painting is about this. Deleuze says "sensation is in the object," which means that a painter like Bacon is trying to get at a kind of imaging that passes through representation, or makes it oblique, and reveals the invisible structures of sensory affectation that are operating on the image, in order to make it possible that they can operate on us. For Deleuze, that sensory *stuff* is forces and energies. One of the ways Deleuze thinks about his own book is to urge that we read painting in terms of music. Just as rhythm bypasses our capacities for sensory control, and gets us moving—foot tapping, head bobbing—so the project of Modernist painting is to turn the object into rhythm. Matisse's great dance paintings do this idea to death. Pushing this idea is, for me, the fascination of the Bacon book. In order to do that, Deleuze says, a lot of violence is required: painting has to *release* our relationship to the sensory. (All of that, although I won't go into it now, is pure Kant; all that business of beauty being without a concept, and purposive wholes but without a worldly purpose.)

People are surprised when I say I take Deleuze to be a high Modernist. One way of getting at that is to see how he uses the abject. He uses it in a way that is not like the way in which the abject appears in anti-aesthetic literature. In the

8. Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*.

9. This was discussed at several points during the week. See, for example, Diarmuid Costello's remark at the end of Section 8 of the Seminars: "If, on the 'subtending' model, affect is presymbolic, and hence presubjective, it is not strictly speaking something that can be predicated of the subject at all: it predates the subject's emergence as such."

Deleuze book, he says, "with painting, hysteria becomes art. What the hysteric is incapable of doing (a little art) is accomplished in painting. It must also be said that the painter is not hysterical, in the sense of a negation in negative theology." And here's the giveaway sentence: "Abjection becomes splendor. The horror of life becomes a very pure, and very intense life. 'Life is frightening,' said Cézanne, but in this cry he had already given voice to all the joys of lines and color. Painting transmutes this cerebral pessimism into nervous optimism."[10] This seems to me very classically aesthetic, and it is one of the ways affect comes to be a replacement for pleasure or the aesthetic. But I would also argue that Deleuze gives us very few tools to think about the anti-aesthetic: it's actually a classic exposition of the aesthetic.

HAL FOSTER: That's very helpful. May I ask just one question? Does it matter if you think (as I do) that Bacon is a secondary painter—that, more, his work is manipulative, a manipulation of the affective?

JAY BERNSTEIN: My intuitions are the same as yours vis-à-vis Bacon. There are moments in Bacon that I like, but they're when he is imitating Degas's pastels.

So I note that Deleuze cannot make the separation he wants to make. Deleuze says again and again there is a difference between the violence of painting and the violence and horror of the represented—and yet he chooses an artist who meretriciously uses the most violent imagery, in order, I think, to be manipulative. Hence I choose Matisse, because he is an opposite.

I am sure the Bacon book wanted to be about Cézanne: it's a book whose deepest interest, philosophically, is in Merleau-Ponty. Deleuze is trying to out-Merleau-Ponty Merleau-Ponty about what lies underneath representation. It's only because Merleau-Ponty had taken over Cézanne that he chose the worst possible artist to make his case.

MARTIN SUNDBERG: Jay, I don't understand why you chose Matisse as opposed to Bacon, since Matisse is obviously also about struggle. Why not something completely different, such as Morandi? What would happen to the concept of violence there, in your opinion?

JAY BERNSTEIN: Huh. Well, while one aspect of Morandi is about contemplation and an eerie quiet, don't you think there is also something intense, disquieting, claustrophobic about a lot of those pictures? That in them mood overwhelms object? So even their quiet becomes pure feeling? That would be my opening gambit in what would need to be a longer conversation.

SVEN SPIEKER: In his *Analysis of Sensations*, published in 1897, Ernst Mach claimed that there are no objects, only sensations. The book can be read as a treatise on some of the foundational arguments Modernism makes about the autonomous nature

10. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), translated by Daniel Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 52.

of seeing (or sensing, in Mach's broader terms), especially its opposition to narrative. I am not sure that Deleuze has Mach in mind here, but he does make some strikingly similar claims about sensation as an antidote to storytelling.

JAY BERNSTEIN: In my understanding of Deleuze, it's about levels, strata, of experience. He doesn't want to deny the existence of narrative or representational structures; he just thinks they are reifications of more vital things. The entire "body without organs" idea is a way of getting away from the thought that our fundamental relation to ourselves is as a mind controlling a body. Hence he often says he wants to get rid of the notion of *organism.* That sounds like he wants to get rid of life, but what he really wants to avoid is the idea of organizations, functions organized for purposes. It is a *stratum theory* rather than an ontology.

JAMES ELKINS: A third principal source for conceptualizing contemporary art outside the anti-aesthetic is relational aesthetics. We've avoided this all week, and none of us assigned readings in relational aesthetics. Yet if we were to take a survey of art schools and young artists, I think we'd find enormous interest in the subject. I wonder if we might spend a few minutes situating that disparity.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: The misunderstanding in regard to relational aesthetics seems to be that it is trying to make a revolution, and that what it is actually doing is giving up on the Modernist revolution. It is a theorized aesthetic practice, one that steps outside of the ambition to change the world, which ran the twentieth century into the ground. In relational aesthetics people try to make small changes, which can be important changes; they are interested in opening spaces in a fairly rigid social system that is late Modernism, or late capitalism or what have you; they are interested in shifting the terms of the debate.[11]

JAY BERNSTEIN: Is it a consequence of that position that you have to accept that you are moving away from the aesthetic tradition, that you're giving up or repudiating the Modernist tradition?

GRETCHEN BAKKE: There was aesthetics before Modernism, so no. It's giving up on Modernism, but not on aesthetics.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Here are two unrelated reasons why people around the table here may worry about relational aesthetics. One has to do with whom its spokespeople happen to have been to date. Bourriaud doesn't strike me, at least, as an especially compelling thinker; his work tends to play fast and loose with its sources, which it uses opportunistically, and is peppered with contentious assertions and sweeping claims where one might hope for arguments instead.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: But Owens was also less than compelling as a philosopher; that doesn't lessen the impact of the work.[12]

11. See especially Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002).

12. See the discussion of Owens's essay in *The Anti-Aesthetic* in Section 2 of the Seminars.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Okay, here's the second reason: people aren't persuaded by the practice because they think it is essentially affirmative. To transform the relation between the gallery and the world through having the gallery exhibit a mock-up of Rirkrit Tiravanija's apartment, in which visitors can then have self-conscious conversations in his kitchen, seems to some like the most pointless dilettantism.[13]

GRETCHEN BAKKE: I have to say that's also my own criticism of relational aesthetics. It changes relationality, but it's not clear for whom. But I also come from the ex-Communist world, where having conversations in apartments was extremely important. So within capitalism, it's difficult to say it's meaningful to have soup in a gallery. Most people know one another anyway; the people having the soup all know what they're doing—but that doesn't mean the work doesn't have an impact. It simply doesn't take the standard—and I would add *modern*—form of resistance, revolution, or revolt. But just because it doesn't look like the kind of politics art ought to have, according to one set of estimations, doesn't mean that it ought to be written off wholesale. After all this is the sort of art a *lot* of people are doing.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: So do you think there's a better defense of relational aesthetics available than the one Bourriaud has given? Because I think quite a few people aren't persuaded by that.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: But who are "people"? I think artists are persuaded. In Slovenia, people love Bourriaud's theories because they allowed them to drink wine in galleries. But seriously, there is a link to de Certeau, to inhabiting a world that is normally occupied and built by other people without pretense of revolution. That sticks to people of my generation, and people younger than me, because these days a hundred thousand people can go out on the streets in Montreal and it's not covered by the newspaper.

JUSTIN B. WILLIAMS: To me, relational aesthetics signifies an impoverishment of our social reality. Why do we need the spectacle of the gallery to have soup and talk? Why is it so popular?

LAUREN ROSS: I think relational aesthetics, DIY culture, and the slow food movement are all contemporary reactions to feeling alienated. Relational aesthetics is a critical response to this disconnectedness: it asks the viewer to take part and to reexamine. It is also a way that artists can create outside of the system. It doesn't need galleries and it isn't collectible. I think it is a rebellion against the exclusiveness of the art world and an attempt to reclaim the importance of real life.

JAMES ELKINS: In my experience, de Certeau, concepts of the "everyday," Marc Augé and notions of "non-place," theories of site, and practices ostensibly based on Bourriaud have a strong and wide appeal for young artists here and in western

13. See also Tiravanija's 1997's *Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)*, in which he recreated his New York apartment at the Cologne Kunstverein. [—J.E.]

Europe. Elsewhere, and in universities, their effect is minimal. So what we need to consider is how to think about the disparity between serious critical thought on these subjects and everyday implementation.

Diarmuid, you coedited a book with Dominic Willsdon, who I've heard making passionate defenses of small, natural, everyday, ephemeral, non-gallery-based aesthetic gestures.[14] I wonder if you have any thoughts on the distance between academic critiques of relational aesthetics, like the one in *October*, and the many practices Dominic has wanted to defend?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I think you'll find my response disappointing. I can't speak for Dominic, or what he may or may not want to defend, but I think something analogous may hold here to Hal's view of artists' investment in Rancière's idea of a "distribution of the sensible" as a kind of wish-fulfillment. Artists, perhaps especially young artists, have a highly motivated interest in a theory that proposes the creation of "microtopias"—models of social relations enacted or precipitated by works or art, often in convivial art-world settings, as the closest we can hope to come to transformed social relations in an age of postutopian thought.

But I say this with one important caveat: even if there is some justice in this charge, it is nonetheless important that artists believe this. What else would get you out of bed in the morning to do something so stupid—at least from an instrumental point of view of getting on in the world—as making art? Artists have to believe in the social effectivity of art! Even if it's an illusion, it is perhaps a necessary illusion. In that sense relational aesthetics might be thought to fall within a well-established aesthetic tradition of conceiving art as placeholder for what does not obtain here and now. Also, on the positive side: as a curator, Bourriaud is much closer to artists and contemporary practice than many of those unpersuaded by his rhetoric. So it's hardly surprising that he would appeal to young artists.

JOAQUÍN BARRIENDOS: One other thing about relational aesthetics: in my view, the fact that Bourriaud came to prominence as "global" curator hand in hand with a certain idea of what relational aesthetics and criticality could mean in the postcolonial age obscures other perspectives of relationality in aesthetic, artistic, and political practices nowadays. Some of them contradict Bourriaud's claims even when he comes to elaborate on the idea of altermodernity as a critique of the postmodern condition. As an example of those alternative artistic relationalities, I would like to mention Lygia Clark's projects in the 1970s, which were described at the time by the own artist as *Objetos Relacionais* (*Relational Objects*).[15]

MICHAEL KELLY: The notion of moral, social, political critique underlies many of our discussions, but I am not sure we're clear, or agree, about what it means when it takes forms different from what it has meant in the aesthetic or anti-aesthetic

14. *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics*, edited by Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

15. On this topic see Suely Rolnik, "The Body's Contagious Memory: Lygia Clark's Return to the Museum," Transversal: Extradisciplinaire, EIPCP, January 2007, eipcp.net/transversal/0507/rolnik/en (accessed August 27, 2010); and Suely Rolnik, *¿El arte cura?* (Barcelona: MACBA, 2006).

traditions. Many people engaged in artistic practices tied to relational aesthetics are critical in some way(s), at least of the anti-aesthetic, even if (or because) their focus is on different kinds of experience. Commitment to critique means being open to these practices.

HAL FOSTER: I'm not sure criticality is the criterion anymore. That's what I meant to imply with my little genealogy of recent values in art.[16] For a long time, criticality was the default value; but the critical is often just the reactive or the resentful. Its opposite is not always the affirmative. Some artists that interest me today want a different relationship to those terms; they see criticality as an old fetish.

BEÁTA HOCK: An exhibition I curated last year might offer *agency* as a potential next element in Hal's genealogy.[17] The show highlighted instances when artists do not merely criticize or point to disturbing issues, but act, mobilizing their agency. The concept of agency has purchase both in postsocialist societies and other political contexts with a longer history of liberal democracy.

MICHAEL KELLY: Part of what I am suggesting is that criticality is up for grabs. I don't mean there needs to be a new concept reappropriated from the past. Its marker of failure might no longer be affirmation.

BRANDON EVANS: I know many people here whose work is not concerned with criticality in any way. A friend of mine, for example, is concerned only about his ability to draw a scary monster. Scary monsters make him happy.

MICHAEL KELLY: Fine, but critique here means, among other things (besides criticality), self-understanding, so your friend's self-understanding, on your account, is that he's concerned about only what makes him happy. In short, critique keeps emerging in our discussion, above and below, not just because philosophers bring it up, but because artists do too.

JAMES ELKINS: As I said when the genealogy first came up, I don't hear the word "criticality" in the studio at all; I hear it only in contexts like this one.[18]

DAKOTA BROWN: Assuming artists are after some kind of satisfaction intrinsic to the work, what sort of responsibility for "criticality" falls on interpretation? Is the point of theory and criticism simply to describe what makes people happy, whatever that might be?

AARON RICHMOND: For me, the concept of *relation* falls flat, or is vague, or seems easily adaptable. That is why I felt a great deal of sympathy for Eve Meltzer's project in relation to *Post-Partum Document* and her emphasis on the term "transaction," which has a concreteness lacking in the concept of relation. Just this morning, at Starbuck's, I witnessed numerous transactions, which had a reality and boundaries that were very different from the relations of relational aesthetics.

16. This is discussed at the end of Section 1 of the Seminars.

17. *Agents and Provocateurs*, cocurated with Franciska Zólyom, 2009–10; agentsandprovocateurs.net (accessed August 22, 2010).

18. See the end of Section 1 of the Seminars.

HAL FOSTER: The strongest critique of relational aesthetics that its understanding of relation is innocent of antagonism or even difficulty. The automatism of the transactions in your anecdote, for example—that's dropped out.

KAREN BUSK-JEPSEN: I think that critique hits the mark with regard to some of Bourriaud's examples, but there are others that have a critical edge. When Jens Haaning plays tapes with Turkish jokes in Copenhagen, it is about making people happy, but at another level it also about the problem of relating to each other.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: Again, Hal, I have to disagree. Bourriaud's second English publication, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay*, is about exactly the ways in which transactions and scripts can be tweaked or reworked both to change them *in vivo* but also to call the sort of attention to their ubiquity that should make people uncomfortable. And he doesn't limit himself to the "do you want fries with that?" sort of transaction, but refers to a not insubstantial number of what he calls "scenarios."[19]

JOANA CUNHA LEAL: Questions of relation remind me of Hal's preface to *The Anti-Aesthetic*, and the founding distinction between the postmodernism of reaction and resistance. I think this word, "resistance," is very important, but we have no idea how to define it today; clearly it also contains something of relations or transactions.

JAY BERNSTEIN: In my reading of the history of art, artists have only occasionally been concerned with criticality. They have been mostly concerned with making terrific art. Part of the reason for the disconnect we're noting is that, for a long stretch of about a hundred years, the entire business of making art turned out to entail a certain type of resistance. If the New, or making artworks unlike commodities or unlike photographs or in touch with the unconscious or modern and progressive, are the slogans orienting art making, then art in being its best self as art will also be critical and a form of resistance. Postmodernism was the death knell of that tradition, although the waning of that tradition preceded postmodernism. I take it that all serious artists interrogate their practice. Some of them will have political ideas, and some won't. It is, however, a complicated matter of history to figure out how those reflections relate to the surrounding social world. It is not obvious that what allowed artistic achievement and criticality to come together in the era of high Modernism is replicable. Indeed, the assumption that it is not is what lies behind Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.

HARPER MONTGOMERY: What's interesting to me about relational aesthetics is that works like Félix González-Torres's reclaim aesthetic experience. He made relational aesthetics possible, and yet the criticality of his works almost always hinges on an aesthetic experience. This is how politics inhabits a work like *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*.[20]

19. "The division of labor is the dominant employment scenario; the heterosexual married couple, the dominant sexual scenario; television and tourism, the favored leisure scenario." Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 39.

20. This work, dated 1991, was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago during the Seminars in an installation of the Donna and Howard Stone Collection.

LAUREN ROSS: What's interesting to me about relational aesthetics is that works like González-Torres's reclaim aesthetic experience for the viewer. When you take a piece of wrapped candy from the pile, you are implicated in the work, and the work is changed. For me, it is the dialogic relationship between the viewer and the artwork that makes relational aesthetics so compelling.

JAMES ELKINS: For me, those are incremental distances from the everyday, in which minimal disturbance in the ordinary forms of life count as maximally effective aesthetic statements. They aren't uncanny except in a homeopathic sense, but they are at the affective limits of the "relations" posited in relational aesthetics.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: I was thinking about Brandon's friend who draws the scary monsters. A few days ago Jay invoked zombies. I was struck by the fact that scary monsters make Brandon's friend happy. There is a recurrence of the living deadness that art supposedly dispels, and so in a way I feel zombies make Jay happy. How is the object regarding us, changing us, structuring our entire lives? And how do we move beyond those ideas?

JAMES ELKINS: For those of you who weren't there, Jay mentioned zombie movies early on, in the context of a description of how artworks have the power to make us feel alive, to bring us to life. In that context, zombies were reminders of what we don't want ourselves to be. Later, in a taxi, I tried to persuade him that zombies are not things to be avoided: we all love zombies, and in fact we want to be zombies, and that's why there are so many zombie movies! I was adducing *Day of the Dead*, where zombies remember they want to shop, and *Shaun of the Dead*, where the entire middle class is basically unaware of their colorful lives as zombies.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: Add to that the fact that zombies are interesting because they are the only New World monster.[21]

JAMES ELKINS: Interesting. And wouldn't life be simple if all you had to do was eat people? So I think you're right, it isn't chance that monsters and zombies have been parts of our conversation, not because we want art to help us avoid them, but because art gets in the way of our becoming them.

JAY BERNSTEIN: You can't stop there. Now you have to say what is meant by saying zombies are objects of desire.

JAMES ELKINS: This would be a clear sign that a large number of people don't want art to be critical, to wake them up.

HAL FOSTER: Art is there to enliven us: who wants to disagree (even though it seems, once again, too redemptive to me)? I side with Brecht against Benjamin when

21. Lots of stuff is being written on zombies these days, in serious ways. See Lars Bang Larsen, "Zombies of Immaterial Labor: The Modern Monster and the Death of Death," *e-flux journal* 15 (April 2010), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/131; and my own "Dead White Men: An Essay on the Changing Dynamics of Race in US Action Cinema," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2010): 400–428.

he called aura "creepy mysticism"; I'm still enough of an Enlightenment person to believe that we shouldn't confuse subjects and objects, that we shouldn't give over human agency to inanimate things. The critique of fetishism, which is crucial to the Enlightenment project from Kant through Marx to the Frankfurt School, lives on—at least in me. And that's why I feel alien to discourses in visual studies that treat images as people, as in *The Power of Images*, *What Do Pictures Want?*, and so on.[22] Here I want to hold on to criticality.

JAMES ELKINS: Three points to that. First, I am, I have been, guilty of a version of that in *The Object Stares Back*, but it was more in reference to experience than art.[23] Second, the conceit of loving zombies was meant as a way of doubting the redemptive moment in some of our conversation, and especially of suggesting that sometimes contemporary artists want art that doesn't enliven, that deadens. And third, regarding *What Do Pictures Want?*—my own difficulty with accounts like Tom Mitchell's is that they are part of a spectrum, all wavelengths of which have to be present simultaneously in critical discourse. The spectrum runs from the sense that artworks or images provoke thought, to the idea that they contain thought, to the notion that they have voice, to the notion that they have agency, to the conviction that they are alive. Each position, whether it is anthropological or is part of visual studies, needs to gesture to all the others in order for critical discourse to make sense.

HAL FOSTER: Maybe relational aesthetics wants to recover animation for people and not give it over to the artwork. I'd drink to that.

JAMES ELKINS: Does anyone mind if I point out that this conversation about zombies and fetishes is turning around and repeating the pairing of the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic? Anti-aesthetic as critical resistance to fetishism; aesthetic as unexpected expressive purpose of a desire for the dead. It's a supremely difficult dualism to escape from.

22. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

23. *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), paperback edition (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997).

7. THEORETICAL POSITIONS
AFFECT THEORY IN ART HISTORY

Theories of affect have emerged in several fields, and have been taken up by a wide range of practitioners. Here they are introduced first in relation to Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document *and works by Candice Breitz. The seminar was led by Eve Meltzer, and the participants had read, and heard, drafts of chapters of her book* Systems We Have Loved.[1] *This discussion also presupposes Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon.*[2] *The subject of affect, as a possible "beyond" of the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic, continues in the next seminar.*

EVE MELTZER: We have been focusing on Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document.* I suggested it as a starting point because there Kelly employs precisely the maneuver I think we need to make in order to better understand conceptual art: she recovers the discourse of antihumanism for our understanding of conceptualism and, for our purposes, the anti-aesthetic.

Regarding affect in general: to be perfectly honest, I came to affect theory as a way to shift my project away from the framework with which I began. That framework focused on the widespread appearance of language in art in the late 1960s and early '70s. As I am sure you all know, the "language and/in art" problematic has been mobilized by many and, to my mind, has become a rather tired. In addition to affect, antihumanism is important to my project because it was—as a set of discourses and as a term—used by a number of the artists I examine, and because it comes to stand in for another set of ideas that shaped both the academy and, as I argue, art practices of this period: structuralism.[3] In light of all the structuralist talk of the subject as a mere "effect" of this or that pre-existing system, "affect" emerged as a sort of counterpart or hinge to this notion of "effect," and so I have sought to plumb that pairing. So let's consider for a moment how this pairing works in *Post-Partum Document.* Mary Kelly knows that she is discursively produced as a mother, artist, activist, etc., she conveys a sense that her child, too, is in the process of being "thrown," as they say, into the symbolic order, and she reveals herself as having been "thrown"—these conditions go along with the condition of being an *effect.* Yet what is interesting and important about the *Document* is how it registers the ways in which that experience gets played out *affectively*.

1. Eve Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). The book was unpublished at the time of the Seminars.

2. The seminar had read chapters from Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), translated by Daniel Smith, afterword by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

3. Antihumanism marked, once and for all, the end of the humanist understanding of the subject as in command of himself, the humanist understanding of a consciousness fully transparent to itself, and the humanist understanding of the historical process.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Could you say what affect is for you, for this project?

EVE MELTZER: I should say that, although I have assigned their work, I don't directly use Brian Massumi or Rei Terada to theorize affect for this project.[4] Well, what I mean is I don't follow one or the other. I am certainly not with Deleuze in my thinking, and, more generally, I look to Massumi, Terada, Ngai, among others, to help me read the works of art under examination. I suppose if I have to align myself with a theory of affect, I would say I am most indebted to Freud, which would have to do with my intellectual formation as a student of Kaja Silverman's, who also has written about the significance of affect for the world, as it were.[5] As far as Freud goes: I am interested in affect as it appears, for example, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Freud's early work on hysteria. I am less concerned with following up on the distinctions that Massumi and Terada make, such as that between affect and emotion. But I think the ways in which they frame the question of affect are important and helpful.

That said, in my project my understanding or theorization of affect shifts from context to context—meaning it is the artwork in question that allows me to theorize affect and its significance at a particular historical moment in the history of art in the United States. Affect does not appear in the same way for Kelly as it does for Robert Morris, for example, whose neo-Dada work and drawing practices I also examine. In Morris's work of the early sixties—consider *Card File* or any of the self-portraits he did in the early sixties—affect works in the service of making visible the relationship between the antihumanist subject and the "system," the way in which he or she affectively manages the experience of alienation, belatedness, and so forth, specifically by positing a place beyond the "nightmare" of the system where more pleasurable affects can be made available. I say "pleasure," because if one looks across these early works, there is always a kind of sinister pleasure at work. Apropos of antihumanism, many years later, Morris wrote somewhere that "if there was a constant" in his art making, "the 'rotting sack of Humanism' . . . has always provided a target."[6] So it is the work of art, or works of art, that suggest how we understand the nature and function of affect.

GUSTAV FRANK: I don't understand yet. What is the "beyond"?

EVE MELTZER: This is what Massumi foregrounds so well. Affect doesn't appear within or on the grid, as it were; it doesn't show up, we might say, within the structural field (or poststructural one, for those of you for whom structuralism feels too remote an ism to grasp at this point). Systematically, affect has been relegated to, as Massumi says, "the gaps between positions on the grid." It has been relegated

4. The participants had been asked to read Massumi, introduction and chap. 1 of *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1–21 and 23–45; and Terada, "Introduction: Emotion After the 'Death of the Subject,'" in *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1–15.

5. Kaja Silverman, *World Spectator* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

6. Robert Morris, introduction to *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), ix.

to the spaces that our discourses don't attend to, "a theoretical no-body's land."[7] Affect appears, he says, "in the space of the crossing." In one sense, then, affect is "beyond" because it exceeds the discourses that we have grown so comfortable with—and by this I mean the discourses that both shaped and saturate the anti-aesthetic.

GUSTAV FRANK: So you want to say that this affect is a "beyond" in relation to the anti-aesthetic.

EVE MELTZER: No, I am saying that despite all claims to the contrary, despite the appearance of disaffection that so many artists took up, affect is there all along. It is only "beyond" with respect to our way of thinking and theorizing; it is beyond the limits of our current discourse, but it is very much a part of the anti-aesthetic.

GUSTAV FRANK: The anti-aesthetic itself comes in some years after the works you are studying, so I wonder if it is on the repressive side in relation to your themes. Or perhaps it opens and enlarges your themes? Criticism or theory taking the lead again?

EVE MELTZER: I'm not sure what you mean. Several of the texts in the volume are precisely about the 1970s—Krauss, Owens . . .

MARTIN SUNDBERG: Eve, I really would like you to be more specific when it comes to the site of the anti-aesthetic historically speaking. All your examples are located in the sixties and seventies—that is, before postmodernism. How would you describe the relationship between postmodernism and the anti-aesthetic?

EVE MELTZER: Do you have a date for the beginning of postmodernism? I'm not sure I do—again, another reason why I am not comfortable with the term. I tend to associate—as many if not all of the writers in Hal's volume do—the anti-aesthetic with poststructuralism and, well, really structuralism: Barthes, Lacan, Saussure, Althusser, Foucault, etc. If you look back to the Balibar essay I assigned, there he makes the case that poststructuralism is still really structuralism at work, that they have their distinctions, but it is structuralism that is the lasting movement of the twentieth century. So, in that view, if you consider the theoretical underpinnings for what we generally think the postmodern is, then postmodernism might be traced back to a much earlier date than you suggest. So as I see it, the sixties and seventies are completely within the relevant historical scope.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Eve, given that affect usually *exceeds* something, and given that affect is here imagined as exceeding certain theoretical diagrams, how would you relate it to the way Louise Bourgeois figures what is left out of the aesthetic? Or to put it differently: what is the role of affect in your understanding of the artwork?

Bois's terms, in regard to the *informe*, are very carefully posed so they change the way we view the work: the work would have to be reinscribed.[8] Does your use of affect have an analogous effect?

7. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 4.
8. See Section 3 of the Seminars.

EVE MELTZER: That's a big question, and again, we'd want to answer it case by case. For Kelly, her intervention into the discourses she mobilizes in the *Document*—and there are many there; after all, that is her point: to summon a vast archive of discourses, many of which are, as you say, diagrammatic, scientific, or at least *scientistic*—she shows us how intertwined our understanding of and affection for discursivity is with affect, even as the whole thing threatens to look so dry, calculating, informational. Indeed, my aim is to change our understanding of the artworks in question, and, more broadly, the aesthetic strategies associated with the period. But also, I think of my book as an effort to change how we understand our own indebtedness and embeddedness in structuralist discourse, which, along with conceptualism, was arguably one of the most transformative movements of the twentieth century.

JAMES ELKINS: Could you say a bit more about what you mean when you say you're not using Massumi and Terada directly? Because your critique would go in very different directions if you *used* Massumi, and yet he seems important to, or for, the work.

EVE MELTZER: Sure, but Massumi is only one amongst many. He is significant to me because he frames his intervention specifically in terms of the poststructuralist figure of the grid, which is also a central motif in conceptual art. And in the end I have aimed to write a history of the *figures* that comprise the discourse and aesthetic of conceptualism and structuralism, those that they shared, borrowed from one another, mutually inscribed. But I am also thinking with Freud, specifically his *Interpretation of Dreams*, where he is interested in what affect does in the unconscious, in the dreamwork, how it migrates, they way in which affectivity creates a unique and particular kind of signification, etc.

HAL FOSTER: But is "affect" an important Freudian term? What does he write in the original?

SVEN SPIEKER: The German is *Affekt*, but I don't recall it in the text.

EVE MELTZER: Of course Freud talks about affect! The thing is that he didn't publish, as far as I know, a definitive statement; his theory evolved piecemeal over time. But it is already there in the early works.

HAL FOSTER: He talks about energies.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I'd like to add some points of reference. First, about Freud: he talks a lot about affect in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, first when he mentions handing his daughter an apple; she doesn't want to eat it, and she makes a face as though she had bitten into it, and it was bitter.

JAMES ELKINS: I'm just thinking that the relation between any pre-existing theoretical discourse (Massumi, Terada, Ngai, Freud) and your material is something less than schematic: possibly it's emblematic. I'm interested in whether that relation between theories and art-historical practice is specific to the subject, affect.

EVE MELTZER: That's a really interesting idea. Could be. I haven't considered that.

SVEN SPIEKER: Affect always seemed to take me back to the eighteenth century and the sublime, and I didn't find it especially interesting. But when I read Deleuze on Bacon, I did begin to feel there was something there. But I am not sure that what Deleuze calls "sensation" and affect really can be conflated.[9]

Do you see any relation between Deleuze's understanding of sensation and the concept of affect, given that "sensation" is a nonexpressive, nonrepresentational way of inscribing (affective?) "intensities"?

JAY BERNSTEIN: They cannot be the same.

Eve, as I understand it, "affect" in your work names a way of registering something that is going on in the external world, but that remains especially unresolved. It's about an enjambment in the external world. Our affective response is the site of the irresolution that's out there. Morris's practice doesn't let that element in, but without it, his practice is unintelligible: that's how I understand your project.

I read your use of affect as a deconstructive term: it's like *différance*, the thing that's excluded but keeps coming up. (Although it's experiential rather than merely formal.)

OMAIR HUSSAIN: In the early moments of 1960s conceptualism, the critical force of the project was understood to be its negation of previous modes of art making. If, as Hal had mentioned, the visual and the aesthetic came to be understood as a place of reconciliation, the nonvisual, the dry, the indifferent, the systemized, was understood as a critical force of resistance. Reading conceptualism through the lens of affect challenges this understanding. I'm reminded of the book *Romantic Conceptualism*.[10] Projects like that, and the returns of emotion and beauty, appear as attempts to continue the project of conceptualism in the face of a real weariness toward the cold intellectualism of the sixties.

This space of affect, however, appears very similar to the kind of reconciliation the aesthetic was once accused of. If the negative moment in conceptualism is pushed away in favor of affect and the experiential, or the beautiful and the romantic, then what is the critical space of conceptualism now?

EVE MELTZER: I disagree. You presume that affectivity and criticality are at odds. And your rendering of conceptualism mirrors precisely the kind of misreading I am trying to remedy. "Affect" does not necessarily mean "beauty" or "the romantic." Part of what I am trying to point out is that affect is there even where we see the nonvisual, the dry, the indifferent, the systematized. Affect is completely of a piece with resistance, it is not contrary to it. I think part of the works' critical force *is* their affective force, and that has been overlooked in the scholarship.

9. For these terms see Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 31–38.

10. *Romantischer Konzeptualismus / Romantic Conceptualism*, edited by Jörg Heiser et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2007).

Remember affect is what enables ideological relations to be internalized and naturalized. It is affect that underwrites, as Lawrence Grossberg once wrote, "the power of the articulation which bonds particular representations and realities," without which no ideological system—including the interpretive—can hold.[11] So affect must be part of the project of resistance, not its antidote.

HAL FOSTER: There is a sense today in which affect is a primary tool of social control, and in a way that cuts across old social lines. There are videos by Candice Breitz, for example, in which people are asked to sing popular songs—Jamaicans sing Bob Marley, folks in Manchester sing "Working Class Hero" by John Lennon, and so on. The songs seem connected to these people, to these locales, but they're not, or not only. The affective identification with these songs, with their stories, is intense for us, too; we all feel it. Anne Wagner has talked about how this affect floats almost globally, interpellating people here, there, and everywhere. As Jay said, social integration isn't needed as long as there's system integration, and one of those systems is integration through affect. I, too, wept for Princess Di! Well, no, I didn't, but affect does make our *American Idol* world go around.

This may be too idiosyncratic, but for me the prestige of this category goes back to *Camera Lucida.* Affect discourse, trauma discourse: Barthes has a lot to answer for.

NADJA MILLNER-LARSEN: Affect might still help us locate the place where the *capacity* to reorient ourselves against complete and utter ideological cohesion could persist.

[*The seminar watched several videos by Candice Breitz.*]

JAY BERNSTEIN: To me the image of those isolated folk who are nonetheless simultaneously hooked onto the same popular song, captured in the same way by the music, is terrifying. It shows what fascism would look like if it happened now. If fascism ever returns, it won't look like it did in the 1930s. It will look like a catchy, irresistible Coca-Cola video with everybody singing and bouncing along.

EVE MELTZER: Jay, I can see that explanation; it works in an Althusserian sense. But there is some other possibility there. As Nadja says, it gives us the capacity for a kind of reorientation as much as anything else.

DAKOTA BROWN: Adorno characterized Hitler's self-presentation as "a composite of King Kong and the suburban barber"[12]—you go along with it, in part, because you actually feel a little superior to it. So fascism means something more, here, than crushing authoritarianism; it signifies a response to all sorts of affective needs in people, a recognition of them. It even offers a sort of empowerment.

HAL FOSTER: Part of the charge of the Breitz videos, it seems to me, is to ask us what other ways might affect be tapped or directed.

11. Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservativism and Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), 83.

12. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *The Culture Industry*, edited by Jay Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1991), 141. Adorno continues, "The people who obey the dictators also sense that the latter are superfluous. They reconcile this contradiction through the assumption that they are themselves the ruthless oppressor."

SUNIL MANGHANI: You *can* think about those things, but that's not in the work. The people in her videos are in grids, in a system: it doesn't leave much room to think outside the system.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I'm having trouble because when I look at that piece, I think of nostalgia, not fascism.

SUNIL MANGHANI: It strikes me "fascism" is far too loaded a term to use in this case, but do you see this as a critique, or as an entertainment?

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I don't feel uncomfortable about fascism. I'm interested in it, in what it does from a Brechtian perspective. But I'm not about to leave the room. There's something entertaining about Breitz's video, and I'd much rather watch it than leave the room.

SUNIL MANGHANI: But if it's entertainment, is it art? By which I mean whether we are critical or complicit. Or indeed both.[13]

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I don't know, but I'm not often worried about drawing a line between art and spectacle.

JAMES ELKINS: The large range of reactions to Breitz's videos is, I think, characteristic of a distance between the theorizations of affect and a more tidal, less conceptualized sense of affect that I have seen in young artists, including Breitz herself. I wonder if any other students might have thoughts along these lines.

MEREDITH KOOI: I wonder if we could look at the YouTube video "Double Rainbow," and the revisiting of that in the video of the Drive-Thru KFC/Taco Bell Doublicious Double Down Sandwich?

JAY BERNSTEIN: That was a whole bunch of cultural references that some of us have no idea what you're talking about!

JAMES ELKINS: Jay, you don't know KFC?

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Double Down?

[*The seminar watched the YouTube "Double Rainbow" video, in which a man gives a nearly hysterically ecstatic voiceover narration of a double rainbow, practically weeping and saying things like "What does it mean?" and "Oh my God, oh my God." Then they watched a video response, in which someone drives around the Drive-Thru of a KFC/Taco Bell, rehearsing the same ecstasies about the KFC/Taco Bell "Doublicious" Double Down Sandwich.*[14] *Then everyone went to lunch.*]

13. My phrasing echoes Hal Foster's formulation of the "old question" asked of pop: "critical or complicit?—the answer given by [Richard] Hamilton . . . is *both* and intensely so." Foster, "Citizen Hamilton," in *Richard Hamilton*, edited by Hal Foster and Alex Bacon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 145.

14. "Crazy Double Rainbow Guy—ORIGINAL" and "Double Rainbow Guy Gets Ecstatic over Double Down at KFC" can both be found on YouTube.

8. THEORETICAL POSITIONS
AFFECT THEORY AT LARGE

Later in the week, the seminar returned to affect theory, considering it from a more general standpoint. The participants considered a wide range of possible sources for theorizing affect in the arts, from general cultural theories to theories specific to the arts. A general model, in which affect is at once a product of systems and language, and also something that underlies them, is woven throughout the conversation.

JAMES ELKINS: Let me change direction a little, and introduce some thoughts that might be helpful in exploring affect theory. It seems to me affect has attracted widespread interest in the art world, and that it is the principal contender for a reconceptualization of the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic at a "deeper structural level." The difficulty is that it hasn't congealed into a coherent body of theories. Affect has been related to ongoing interests in multisensory artworks, immersive environments, the theorization of disabilities, the articulation of identity in queer theory, the adoption of notions of "animism," the pertinence for some practices of fetishism and totemism.

Let me propose three locations of affect theory, which I think can help triangulate it:

First, there are explicit theorizations of affect in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and other fields. I would list them this way: (a) a putatively Freudian form, perhaps best found in *The Interpretation of Dreams*; (b) an anticonceptual form, which we have emblematized in our seminars with the phrase "a-signifying nonsign"; (c) Brian Massumi's *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); (d) Rei Terada's *Feeling in Theory* (2001); and (e) the related exposition in Deleuze's book on Bacon, regarding "sensation." These five are theorizations we have discussed. In addition I know of at least two more sources for affect theory:

Second, there's affect in art history and criticism. This second location of affect theory is *in* and *for* art history, and specifically the art history of the late 1960s and 1970s. In this kind of work, which Eve has done in relation to Robert Morris's "withdrawal" from aesthetics, affect appears in scholarship as an enlargement or correction of previous interpretations: it acknowledges what was omitted and makes it continuous with meanings that were in place.

Third, there is affect in artworks. There are many possible examples. I think over the course of the week we've mentioned Candice Breitz, Olafur Eliasson, Bill Viola, and James Turrell, but the phenomenon is much wider than fine art. Meredith Kooi had us watching the "Double Rainbow" video and its video response, and just this morning, in the *New York Times*, there was an article

about kitten and puppy videos on the Internet. One of the most-watched videos of all time is a kitten being tickled, and there's a video response, in which someone tickles their dog and gets no response. They are fabulous videos, pure affect, distilled to a dangerous degree, all the content boiled away. This third location of affect is the one I've associated with our students, and with some young artists: I think it's significantly different from the first two, and quite possibly disjunct from our theme. The first and second locations of affect theory are definitely beholden to historical formulations of the anti-aesthetic, but the third is something different, and to the extent that it prevails, it sweeps everything before it.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: I think there are two ways of thinking about affect in play. One would see affect as the emergence of something that subtends symbolic regimes. There are numerous examples of this structural relation between affect and symbolic regime: the relation between primary and secondary process in Freud or semiotic and symbolic in Kristeva, between gesture and language in Merleau-Ponty or figure and discourse in Lyotard. There is the same broad structural relation between the two terms in each, something that can be traced all the way back to the relation between nature and taste (or culture) in Kant's theory of genius. All those metaphors have in common a sense of an eruption, into the symbolic, of what subtends symbolic orders. They refer to a break or hiatus in signifying practices.

The other concept of affect, which came out of Eve's papers, sees affect emerging not from below symbolic structures, but as a product of symbolic structures. The expression "a-signifying non-sign" only arises to describe affect as the product of the structure against which it is posed, and which is a condition of it showing up as such. Eve uses the expression to speak of the affect of representing administration; it allows her to demonstrate that works like Robert Morris's *Card File* do not need to be read solely as acts of administration without a surplus of pleasure. (Although "pleasure" might not be the right word. "Corrosive irony" might be better.)

EVE MELTZER: I think it is important to remember what Sianne Ngai says about affect with respect to the notion of the "a-signifying non-sign." She argues that affect "renders visible different registers of a problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) [and] conjoins these problems in a distinctive manner."[1] This is to say something about *how* it emerges, the fact that it is the conjoining of valences in a new way that is revelatory of something otherwise not registered.

JAMES ELKINS: Diarmuid, I would just say that as affect emerges as an *effect* of the clarity of representing systems, in works like Robert Morris's that have supposedly "withdrawn" from aesthetics, it is still necessary somehow to gesture toward the other, more disruptive sense of affect. I'm not sure why: I think it provides a promise of something deeper, "beneath" systems.

1. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.

HAL FOSTER: I think there is a third option, too, which is affect *as* administration. That's what I meant by affect as ideological state apparatus.[2]

EVE MELTZER: Yes—after all, if we think about that idea alongside or with Lacan, we are reminded that the imaginary is deeply affective, it functions as much by way of the visual and imagistic as it does by affect. Althusser's notion of the state apparatus is predicated on the imaginary.

JOAQUÍN BARRIENDOS: I think this third option is quite important. In more than one way this point has to be confronted with Boltansky and Chiapello's thesis on the decline of the artistic critique as it is presented in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.[3] In spite of their controversial argument, we have to acknowledge that affectivity is managed and perceived today as an asset in the corporate world; it's common corporate practice these days to encourage a creative mentality and to introduce the criticality of the so-called artistic spirit within the workplace. Be creative, with conviction and autonomy! seems to be the new capitalist imperative.

STÉPHANIE BENZAQUEN: Affect plays different roles in the reception of images of corpses and mass graves, which is my research interest. When you see such images day after day, there's a need to check to make sure you are still reacting to the image—if you still keep some balance between empathetic reception and the distance needed for its analysis.

JAMES ELKINS: I have also done research on strong images, especially on the Chinese photographs of the "death of a thousand cuts."[4] The French-Chinese research group that was doing this work needed to constrain affect very strongly in order to get on with their work. That became a problem, I think, when it limited the historical relevance of affective responses to the generation of Bataille: no one after him, explicitly including the researchers, needed to be interrogated for the possible effects of affect.

STÉPHANIE BENZAQUEN: Then there's the issue of the *mediation* of affect. When I react to an image, is it because I have been trained to react in that way? For me, this is an important question because it bears on the cultural context of our reactions.

Third, there is the image *as* affect. In that sense, images are more productive than representational. I think medieval notions such as *imago agens* are very useful in this regard.

JAMES ELKINS: The theme of images, or art, *as* affect, is one I would like to connect with the current art practices and popular culture images we've been considering; a link to medieval studies could be provided by Georges Didi-Huberman's work.

2. See, in this connection, Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004). [—J.E.]

3. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2007).

4. *Representations of Pain*, coedited with Maria Pia Di Bella (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011); "The Very Theory of Transgression: Bataille, *Lingchi*, and Surrealism," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 5, no. 2 (2004): 5–19; revised version, "The Most Intolerable Photographs Ever Taken," in *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Torture: Its Comparative History in China, Islam, and Europe*, edited by Timothy Brook and Jérôme Bourgon (London: Rowman and Littlefield, forthcoming).

STÉPHANIE BENZAQUEN: I wonder whether this "medieval turn," at least in discussions on images of atrocity, is a way to bypass the Enlightenment: it has problematic connections with violence done in the name of progress and civilization, and it hopes to restore some of the supposed innocence of the eye in pre-Enlightenment culture.

DAKOTA BROWN: An idea that seems to lurk in the background of conversations on affect—especially as it's picked up in art schools—is that one can sweep aside acculturation, administration, and commodification, and arrive at something more authentically human, more "natural." Jim, at one point you compared this sense of affect to Hurricane Katrina, and I think you're onto something. I think the apparent newness of affect can blur a continuity with Romantic ideas of a return to the state of nature. Jay, I wonder if you could respond to this—in part because the distinctions you've drawn between these ideas and your own position (aesthetics as the return of repressed nature) have sometimes been too subtle for me to understand.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I have some experience with affect in a clinical setting. Affect there is used to gain entry into someone's interior experience, so it's about display. For example, when I am working with patients, I am given a number of options to check off under the heading "affect," and some are descriptive, such as "Elated affect," "Depressive affect," "Anxious affect." But there are also options such as "Restricted affect" and "Blunted affect." That last one is especially important, because when someone has a blunted effect, it looks like the absence of affect, but it's still considered affect.

HAL FOSTER: Blasé means "blunted." Maybe there's an historical connection to old takes on the blasé subject of modernity, as understood by Simmel in "The Metropolis and Mental Life."

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Elise, what do you think that observation should *do* when we're talking about affect in art? On that taxonomy, it's a risk we'll always fail to perceive blunted affect. What should that do to our theorizing?

EVE MELTZER: Yes, it is a risk—a risk that was run and to which we fell prey with conceptual art in its earliest iteration. That was my point when we talked about "disaffection" in Mary Kelly. The failure to perceive is at the same time a suppression of "display," to use Elise's word—or, to think the matter in the terms that Charles Harrison once used in reference to conceptualism: "the suppression of the beholder."[5] The point was to resist the idea that art viewership relied on spectation and, by extension, to contest the conventional ideology of visibility by refusing its aspects: formalism, objecthood, the art market, and related notions of style, quality, permanence, and authorship. So I suppose for a theory of affect,

5. Charles Harrison, "Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder," in *Essays on Art and Language* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 45.

one could think about an ideology of visibility with respect to affectivity, beyond art and art history as much as within it.

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: I think the most interesting way to employ it is to think about its relation to theories of animism, which we were talking about in relation to W. J. T. Mitchell and others. There's a clinical relation between someone having an affect, and being affected, or having an affectation. The affect is talked about as a display without conscious recognition of the display, while affectation is a conscious choice to display something that may have no connection to the patient's inner state. A fixed affect is one that is nonresponsive and unchanging, and in that sense most art has a fixed affect, which makes it, in clinical terms, an affectation.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Even when blunted, right?

ELISE GOLDSTEIN: Yes.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Makes me think of Donald Judd.

JOAQUÍN BARRIENDOS: In my case this makes me think again of Lygia Clark. Her project *Structuring of the Self* has a lot to do with the clinical, political, and poetical dimension of producing an affect in someone else and of being affected by others by means of "relational objects." For her this kind of aesthetic experience entails a sort of political and therapeutic resistance. Thus the work has to do with perceiving affectivity as a relation or transaction between diverse resonant bodies (*corpos vibrátiles*).

MICHAEL KELLY: There are at least three more sources for understanding the rise and role of affect today. First, in art history, Jill Bennett's book *Empathic Vision* involves Deleuze's concept of sensation but moves away from Bacon and shifts instead to Doris Salcedo, William Kentridge, and several other artists dealing with what she calls "affective transaction."[6]

Second, in philosophy, Judith Butler introduces the concept of "apprehension" in *Frames of War*, in large part to capture the role of affect in connection with recognition. Many of her examples of apprehension come from art, or from the more general realm of representation (for instance nonartistic images), where she locates critique today.[7]

Third, in literary theory, Carrie Noland's *Agency and Embodiment* analyzes the notion of gesture to make sense of current discussions of embodiment (from Merleau-Ponty and others) in relation to the problem of agency, which is crucial because embodiment, like affect, is often thought to elide or undermine agency.[8]

JAY BERNSTEIN: Regarding Butler, it's important to think about why she does what she does and what she thinks the stakes are. The thought is that there are some

6. Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

7. Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

8. Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

psychological phenomena that are not merely descriptive, but that give structure to human life. Think of the way that Kierkegaard and Heidegger use *Angst*. In this sense, Butler wants to follow Freud and "depsychologize psychology": to take merely psychological terms and show they have structural force for our self-understanding. She also thinks language and discursivity come late, too late, in the sense that it is through our affective responses that we discover who we already are, what we are positioned to do and not do; in affect we discover our commitments and attachments. The ability to grieve is a central example: who we grieve is equivalent to whose life we think counts and matters, whose life if lost would tear me up. But to agree to this thought is equally to agree that we do not decide, as a matter of choice or reflection, which lives count and which do not. Rather, in finding myself grief-stricken over that death in a far-off land of someone who I did not know personally, I discover in ways I had been unaware of previously that that life matters utterly to me. So the idea of the aesthetic as what can make an end run around reflective thought and language, as what comes under the conceptual radar, beneath or beyond social practice, is the thought of what can put us in touch with attachments and fundamental commitments that we would, in a cool moment, deny existing. That is, I think, how Butler uses aesthetics and art examples in her writing: as things that reveal these pre-existing, stronger commitments and attachments.

MICHAEL KELLY: In her book *Frames of War*, the argument is that to recognize the prisoners in the photographs in Abu Ghraib as prisoners, we have to recognize them as grievable. But to do that, there is a sense in which we have to *apprehend* them as grievable, and it turns out the images we received from Abu Ghraib required apprehension, so images—not art—played a role.

JAMES ELKINS: This has been an interesting discussion in the last thirty minutes or so, because we have a dozen or more theories that might develop affect theory, both in art and in experience in general. Some accounts, such as Butler's and Deleuze's, have intermittent stakes in art, although they are more about experience. Others, like the clinical theories Elise described, seem ready to by applied to the arts. I have been wondering how they might be related, and it occurs to me that the theory that is the outlier here is not Butler's or Deleuze, but the idea Hal had of affect as administration. I say that because it seems that if the idea were to be developed, it might want to say something about all the other accounts.

HAL FOSTER: Affect might be a way to connect with what it is to be human, through our common state as sufferers. That way Butler's way becomes ethical and political very (too) quickly. But what does one do when you have Butler on one side, and Breitz on the other? As much as you might identify with the victims in Abu Ghraib, you identify immediately with Madonna in the moment of "Material

Girl" in the Breitz video. The Breitz video has that moment of "That's me!"—but of course it's not you. It's not authentic; you are interpellated.

DAKOTA BROWN: The Abu Ghraib identification is more authentic because it's more ethical?

HAL FOSTER: How did Eve put it—"affect" is an "a-signifying non-sign"? It seems to me weirdly a-subjectifying, too. I mean; you have the feeling, it seems like a subjective experience, but it is not necessarily a personal one. Our feelings for Bin Laden or Princess Di, Sarah Palin or Obama—they register deeply in us, sometimes crazily so, but are they "our" feelings? They are already felt for us somehow; we are already affected; and we share them with millions of others. It's as Althusser said about state apparatuses: affect could be both site and stake of contestation now, and maybe of creativity, too.

MICHAEL KELLY: That worry is very much part of the debate around Butler's work. It is a question about where the space of opposition or possibility of agency come in, which links Butler with Noland. Affects—or in her case, apprehension—alone do not automatically enable opposition or agency, but they are part of the picture. The appeal to apprehension as shared by all humans is a way of preventing theory from collapsing into the merely individual, subjective, or Neoromantic. But the "Doublicious" video is a different challenge.

HAL FOSTER: I took the "Doublicious" video seriously. For me it was a beautiful example of an interest of mine, the mimesis of the hardened.[9] It's not just a parody: it does everything we're asked to do in those commercials—to cathect wildly with this or that product—and flips it.

JAMES ELKINS: I wonder what desire those desubjectifying practices answer to. The video distributes subjectivity—

HAL FOSTER: Yes, it registers in the subject and elsewhere, in many other subjects, at the same time.

DAKOTA BROWN: There's a notion that there can be some sort of shared affect, or administered affect, but that we also want to get away from subjectless terms like "spectacle," which can seem like nothing more than conspiracy theories after a certain point.

I wonder if some form of return to the aesthetic, with the understanding that the aesthetic no longer solely resides in art, might be a way of getting at the explosion of fragments of aesthetic experience throughout advertising like KFC or Taco Bell. There is something in a shared, modern subjectivity, even in what we would like to consider absolutely administered and flat—

JAMES ELKINS: I don't quite get that yet. Why can't that be described without the concept of the aesthetic?

9. Foster, "Bathetic, Brutal, Banal: Strategies of Survival in 20th-Century Art" (manuscript in progress).

DAKOTA BROWN: Maybe we don't need the aesthetic. I'm just trying to get at something that might be in advertising and popular culture, without going back into culture theory.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Listening to the way our conversation has been going, I think it may help to mark some basic distinctions between affects, feelings, moods, and sentiments. It's common currency in recent philosophy that feelings and emotions have an intentional structure. Put simply, they take an object: you are angry *at* something or someone, afraid of something of someone, anxious about some possibility or other, that you feel cheated or misused is entirely understandable given the circumstances, and so on. If you were just plain angry or anxious or indignant as a matter of course, without some intentional object that would make your being so in some sense rationally explicable, that would be a mood rather than an emotion. Moods color everything in life; everything you experience is experienced through the optic of some always present mood, depression being perhaps the most obvious example. So it looks like feelings and emotions will be locatable in the individual, and rationally retrievable, while moods may characterize individuals, yet without being explicable in the same way. (It's not always clear why someone is depressed, though it pervades their experience of the world.)

But what about affects? It's not at all clear that affects can be explained along the same lines. If you take seriously the thought that affects are presymbolic, it follows that they *have to be* impersonal, because interpolation in the symbolic order is on such accounts typically a constitutive condition of the subject appearing as subject. This immediately distinguishes affects from emotions and feelings. If, on the "subtending" model, affect is presymbolic, and hence presubjective, it is not strictly speaking something that can be predicated of the subject at all: it predates the subject's emergence as such. (The fourth term, "sentiments," would on this taxonomy name a kind of debased or secondhand feeling. For this reason, Hal, the example of Lady Di that you gave doesn't register for me as affect, but as sentiment.)

NADJA MILLNER-LARSEN: The decoupling of emotion and affect is quite important to many theorists who want to resist the idea that feeling belongs to a subject. Teresa Brennan, for example, argues that the very idea of an emotionally contained subject is a surviving bastion of Eurocentricism.[10] Affect then can become a placeholder for that undertheorized space before subjectivization.

JAMES ELKINS: For me, this vacillation about the location of affect shows that we want it to have both the forms you gave it earlier—subtending and critical. It isn't a choice, it's a matter of not wanting to be clear about the immiscibility of the two forms we want.

HAL FOSTER: Diarmuid, where are the passions in that set of four terms? Thomas Hirschhorn takes the shrine as one of his formats; they are modeled on the

10. Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

shrines that appeared to commemorate Princess Di.[11] The works are about passion; instead of decrying spectacle and imagining you might be outside it, his move is to work within it, and use what binds us, which in this case is sentiment.

DIARMUID COSTELLO: Regarding the passions, Hal, I don't have clear intuitions about Thomas Hirschhorn, but I do about Bill Viola, another artist who takes the passions as his subject matter. Viola's work generally strikes me as incredibly manipulative of its viewer's feelings. The videos are a sentimental assault.

As to where the passions stand on this taxonomy, I don't have an immediate response. In one respect they seem akin to moods: a life can be consumed by a passion, as it can be pervaded by a mood. But in another respect they seem akin to emotions: one can be in the sway of an emotion just as one can be gripped by a passion. In terms of the taxonomy I offered I guess it would have to depend on whether passion is conceived as taking an object. But beyond that I don't feel qualified to pronounce.

HAL FOSTER: Hirschhorn wants to motivate his passion for different figures through vernacular forms such as shrines and monuments, but for people like Mondrian rather than Di. He suggests that, *pace* Rancière, we are not in an aesthetic regime but in an affective regime, this is our medium, and it's up to us to see what we can do with its energies. Viola, for me, is merely manipulative. He doesn't reflect on the medium, but uses old media to deliver the old investments.

OMAIR HUSSAIN: But to constantly attempt to "draw attention to our condition" seems like a concession to the present. It's feels like an admission of defeat, that our present condition is all we have, let's make the most of it. It reifies the present and evades the task of challenging it. I'm skeptical of the ways affect can be affirmative of the present. Affect exists within the ideological apparatus—what we were calling administrative affect—and when we see its use as a way of dissolving potential conflict, we recognize a conservative impulse, a way to liquidate political dissent. Yet it's celebrated in the contemporary art world, and functions similarly. Affect is a perfect platform for contemporary art to affirm plurality, eclecticism, and commonality, without working through potential conflicting positions and stances.

One of the difficulties I have with the idea of finding a "beyond" to the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic debate is that it be used to simply come to terms with what already exists. I think it would be a real loss to let an appeal to affect, passion, or emotion wash over real differences, real stakes, real positions. It seems typical of the contemporary to find ways of reconciling potential debates that could be productive. Anecdotally, in a class critique, it's really difficult to critique a work about pathos. If you're critical, you're pegged as the heartless asshole.

EVE MELTZER: Yes, but again, that is the misreading at work. Heartless equals blunted, after all. Also, you are misguided to think that affect is on the other side of all things "real."

11. See, for example, Benjamin Buchloh, interview with Thomas Hirschhorn, *October* 113 (Summer 2005): 77–100.

JAY BERNSTEIN: Right, Omair, that's the danger. Expressivity makes a kind of appeal, so that judgment seems like insult. If the only appeal is affect, it is the wrong sort of appeal.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: I think Hal has just said something sort of amazing, given the whole conversation we've been having this week. You said, We are not in an aesthetic regime, we are in an affective regime. That seems like it answers our question. I want to link it to Dakota's idea of fragmented aesthetic values scattered throughout experience. It makes sense that if we're in an affective regime, there are fragments of aesthetics suspended throughout the regime.

OMAIR HUSSAIN: What happened to our allergy to regimes? We say the Modernist regime is elitist, normative, and oppressive. We're against paradigms, unless they encompass everyone. That's much more conservative than arguing for particular paradigms, because it gives the false impression that we're all on the same page. When Jay makes emphatic, normative claims, we push back. But at least he is *honest* in stating what his normative claims are, and what he is against, what he's critical of.

Hal, I want to push you on this: you evade the question of critical judgments by insisting on your own impartiality to debates. That is its own normativity, its own paradigm. You have assumed a step away from the debates, saying you don't have opinions on normative claims, or that you won't make them, but that is a normative claim on your part. Mere description is normative. It is the norm that governs art criticism today. Contemporary art sees itself as existing outside of totalizing paradigms, yet its continual uncritical celebration of pluralism as an end in itself is its own totalizing paradigm. "Anything goes" is its mantra. "Mere description" is its normative practice. This regime of inclusion has actively worked to exclude one essential thing: self-criticism.

JAMES ELKINS: What would you do with the affect as administration model?

OMAIR HUSSAIN: I think it's a perfect parallel. The state uses affect as a way of appealing to a "collective humanity." Pathos is used to appeal to localized communities. Collective celebrations of "difference" only affirm an unflinching status quo. Rhetoric of "unity" and "inclusion" is used to maintain ideological consensus, to stifle criticism. The Obama administration is the application of affect at its most effective.

HAL FOSTER: I like your paranoia, dude! But I didn't hear Gretchen say that this affective regime subsumes all others; that's your projection. To say that there are shards of aesthetic experience in the affective regime isn't to subsume aesthetics. Maybe there is no one regime, but only a mix of residual and emergent ones.

OMAIR HUSSAIN: Maybe it's an exaggeration of projection, but the excitement for the compromise it presents is my platform of paranoia.

SVEN SPIEKER: Hal, I don't think that was a fair rejoinder to Omair's question. What I heard Omair say was that there was a hidden claim to normativity in your position, which has not made itself explicit but that nevertheless did make itself felt.

9. THINGS MISSING FROM THIS BOOK

Here the subject was all the things that had been excluded from the week's conversations, either by chance or because the Faculty or Fellows weren't interested. The idea of the seminar was to think about reasons why certain topics had been omitted, and to distinguish political and philosophic reasons from contingent ones.

JAMES ELKINS: I thought we should end with an open session, in the spirit of the entire event, on things we have omitted or underrepresented throughout the week.

It has been suggested to me that the optimal subject here is the linguistic, political, institutional, geographic conditions under which a conversation like ours can take place at all. I want to begin with that, but first I'll offer an abbreviated list of things we haven't discussed. I'll divide these provisionally into authors and subjects whose work is clearly continuous with our subject, but who were nevertheless omitted for one reason or another; and authors and subjects that might be discontinuous with our subject, where the reasons for omission might be easier to locate.

First there are omitted subjects that are continuous with our theme. There are individual authors, such as Alain Badiou and Jean-Marie Schaeffer, whom people might expect in this discussion.[1] Aside from that potentially endless list, there is the question of the revivals of beauty. When Diarmuid and I planned the week's seminars, the entire subject of the re-emergence of beauty, as in Dave Hickey, Peter Schjeldahl, Bill Beckley, and Elaine Scarry, and others associated with it, such as Wendy Steiner and Arthur Danto, gradually dropped out. The faculty just weren't interested in addressing them.

Then there are omitted subjects that might not be discontinuous with our subject. In my introductory lecture I mentioned Christian hermeneutics of beauty in relation to art such as Karl Barth and Jacques Maritain—an enormous tradition stretching back to the Church Fathers.[2] Closer at hand there is post-colonial studies, area studies, de-colonial studies, and other initiatives. Several of the Fellows, including Joaquín Barriendos, are deeply engaged with those subjects, but in that case it is not difficult to see the reasons their contributions

1. Schaeffer's argument is against the "speculative theory of art," which includes Modernism. Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, translated by Steven Rendall, introduction by Arthur Danto (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8. The content of the "speculative theory" is "philosophical," "the same as that of philosophy and religion" (13, 141). All share the Idea, and "the truth of Being" (141). What is needed, Schaeffer argues, is something outside of all that; Danto's introduction to the English edition notes that the argument might not be convincing, but the reasons for trying are apparent.

2. See the introduction.

seemed difficult to fit: there is a general lack of conceptualization of the relation between postcolonial studies and art history, which makes the bridge to Western aesthetics especially difficult to cross.[3]

BEÁTA HOCK: That may be true in well-circumscribed academic traditions. When it comes to other settings, there is much talk about parallel and multiple modernities as opposed to a singular modernity.[4] In peripherally Western regions like east-central Europe, the concept and practice of "self-colonization" is often discussed. The term was introduced by Alexander Kiossev to describe a kind of intellectual attitude that imports foreign values and models of civilization, and willingly contributes to the appropriation or colonization of its own authenticity through these imported models.[5] Self-colonization, according to Kiossev, is typically practiced in regions that are not sufficiently distant (and their cultures distinguishable) from the "great nations." In recent years, attempts have been made to formulate another paradigm by shifting the terms and adjusting the focus of art-historical inquiry. The point is to move away from persistently totalizing analytical frameworks and thus bring out the meanings of cultures located in various geographies. Piotr Piotrowski's texts form an important part of this work.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, those writers and many more are the principal subjects of the first book in this series, *Art and Globalization.* It's a larger subject: but my claim would be that even in those projects, there is a fundamental lack of discourse connecting art historical to other values. Piotrowski, for example, does work on these issues, but within an art-historical frame.

Another neighboring discipline we have not talked about is visual studies. There, an endemic presentism and an eccentric bibliography can slow an awareness of the pertinence of other discourses, especially older art history and theory, again making contributions to aesthetics very difficult.[6] And there's anthropology, an interest of several of our Fellows. It is a traditional "other" of art history and theory, ritually invoked as a source of parallel phenomena that do not need to be incorporated into whatever histories are at hand.

And finally, there are artistic practices, another traditional "other" of art history and theory. This is a longtime interest of mine, very hard to integrate into history and theory for a number of reasons.

3. This is developed in "Writing About Modernist Painting Outside Western Europe and North America," in *Compression vs. Expansion: Containing the World's Art*, edited by John Onians (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 188–214.

4. See the "Multiple Modernities" issue of *Daedalus*, 129, no. 1 (2000), or Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). For work more immediately invested in pluralising the tradition of writing art and cultural history, see Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), and Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the *Post-* in Postmodernism the *Post-* in Postcolonial?," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (1991): 336–57.

5. Alexander Kiossev, "Notes on Self-Colonising Cultures," in *After The Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, edited by Bojana Pejić and David Elliott (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), 114–18.

6. This is discussed in my *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

That's a provisional listing of absences, but let's begin with the political and institutional context of this event itself, and explore some of the conditions that have enabled a conversation like this one to take place at all.

STÉPHANIE BENZAQUEN: I have felt excluded throughout this week, on all the subjects we have discussed, because we have not touched on the social and economic conditions of theories of art. We have been living in the abstract. There is a precarious class of intellectual workers throughout the world: people who try to get jobs, find voices, continue to do what they want. And to do that, they have sometimes to censor themselves, to limit what they say, to choose topics that will be of current interest. That seems to me especially relevant in the academic world. I wonder what this precariousness has to do with the production of theory. I might be stretching it too far, but I had the feeling that Edward Said's text in *The Anti-Aesthetic* was, at least in part, about that: mechanisms of exclusion and preservation in knowledge production.

I also don't understand how we can talk about radical theory in the year 2010. I think it would be interesting to talk about aesthetics and anti-aesthetics from the point of view of compromise.

HAL FOSTER: It could be that those practices you may or may not want to call precarious, that want to map social and economic conditions, are both different but also complementary to relational aesthetics. The spectacle of soup in a gallery can seem like a gratuitous aesthetic gesture, but if you flip it, it can show how tenuous relationality is out there in the world. It is precisely not a critical gesture, but an aesthetic one, to make small, ephemeral communities. You don't really need relationality when relations are strong and robust elsewhere.

Does this help?

STÉPHANIE BENZAQUEN: Not really.

HAL FOSTER: I've failed again.

EVE MELTZER: Stéphanie, I think what Hal is intimating is that there is this sense "out there," so to speak, one that in fact goes back to the historical moment of the anti-aesthetic, that the political should be the irreducible ground of all things, or better put—*is* the irreducible ground. "Let's get back to *real* conditions," as you say. This is along the lines of something Omair said earlier this week; that affect is just exceed or distraction, what about "real" stakes. It is critical to realize that part of the intervention of practices like those associated with relational aesthetics is precisely to show that although the signifiers "social" and "political" often come to supplant or supersede, say, "the world," there is in fact more rudimentary terrain—of which things like relationality and affectivity form part.

BRANDON EVANS: Stéphanie, your concern relates to one of my hesitations from earlier in the week when I asked Jay about art as a delay of the promise of redemption. I think the sense of compromise you mention has more to do with assessing the

use value of so-called relational practices for social engagement, whether critical or uncritical—rather than limiting their use value only to the fields of philosophy and art criticism.

GRETCHEN BAKKE: Stéphanie, I have been thinking about the economics of presence: not just our presence here, but the presence of certain artworks in our conversation, of certain theorists in our minds. I'd like to pay some attention to the particularity of all that, in light of the precariousness of the current situation: not just the U.S. economy, or the academy, or art. Hal, regarding Hirschhorn, you said that it makes sense not to pretend to be outside spectacle, but to remain inside it, and work with what is given. That is a lot of what we've been doing here, and it would be good for the last hour of our week to be inside our spectacle, and think about how many of us are here precariously.

JAY BERNSTEIN: One reason why the anti-aesthetic may feel urgent at the moment is because the historical anti-aesthetic arose at a moment of cultural crisis. There was a sense that the high art of Modernism had lost its vigor, that it had lost its critical energies, that it was an outmoded vocabulary, that the language of the aesthetic no longer had power. I take it that crisis occurred on a number of fronts, but one could optimistically view it as internal to culture itself.

I think the anti-aesthetic is on the cards because there is a general crisis in the humanities. It is no longer clear that the economy wants culture, that it is an integral part of economic production. The comfortable relation between bourgeois society and its critics—how happy they once were to feed the mouth that bit them—is coming to an end. The question arises, therefore, for the humanities: what *is* our form of address? People who are interested in the anti-aesthetic might be concerned with its reproduction in art academies, as Jim has said. But I think there is a larger issue, and it's one of the reasons I agreed to come. I feel that the question of how any of this *can* matter, under these economic conditions, has become difficult.

That said, I don't know how to put together the internal conversation—the one we've been having—and my own sense, which I have in my own work, of the politics. For me they are both intimately connected and falling apart.

GUSTAV FRANK: Gretchen, I appreciate your intervention also as a matter of *method.* Jim, earlier you were very critical of Tom Mitchell's approach. But I think there is something methodologically interesting in that book. Without losing his appeal to sophisticated readers, he is attempting to find a more empathetic approach. He says, I don't want to step back and make theory from above. I think that approach corresponds very closely to what artists want us to know about current practices, and to theoretical approaches such as relational aesthetics.

From this perspective, Stéphanie and Gretchen are asking us to change our methodology, to something more empathetic. Empathy is probably theory's compromise to affect in and of the artwork.

BEÁTA HOCK: For me criticality, an earlier point of contention among us, is not so difficult to comprehend, and I locate it in methodology and epistemology. I'd like to offer interdisciplinarity as a key to criticality. Rather than relying on an arbitrary compartmentalization of knowledge and a strict separation between art and non-art, interdisciplinarity proposes to think through discourses produced in various areas of intellectual life. From this perspective, Said's writing is the most ambitiously postmodern in *The Anti-Aesthetic*.[7] He talks about the willingness of experts in the humanities to be left alone within the boundaries of their own immediate disciplines, and how they leave the administration of their lives to supposedly responsible decision makers.

JAMES ELKINS: This event, and the entire book series, is wholly funded by the Chicago collectors Howard and Donna Stone: that's the immediate institutional context. They are interested in having an annual series of international events, hosted at the School of the Art Institute, and a resulting book series. They have no interest in controlling the content. That freedom should be noted because it doesn't always, or often, happen with private patronage.

For me the challenge of the series is to address especially difficult ongoing problems in art by bringing together people who might not ordinarily talk. In this case, the theme might have called for a more focused group of people, perhaps all of them conversant with *October*, Zone Books, or related publications. Most of the people in such a gathering would be trained in the States or the U.K. But for this series, international participation is crucial, and in addition I thought it would be good to have people who have come upon this theme from the outside, belatedly, or through fields such as postcolonial studies. That made it difficult to choose the Fellows for this event, because awareness of the anti-aesthetic is not at all uniform around the world.[8] So the feelings of exclusion voiced by some Fellows at this event are especially telling.

MARTIN SUNDBERG: One explanation for our exclusions might be a lack of consensus regarding the basic terms we have been using. For me, it never really became clear how aesthetics and anti-aesthetics were linked to Modernism and postmodernism—and why we were afraid of using these terms in relation to each other. Also, as Joana and Joaquín have pointed out, the examples were taken from a very limited, normative range, always excluding that which didn't fit. This didn't exactly make the discussions relevant or constructive when regarded from another, non-American perspective.

7. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983),135–51.

8. The problem is not symmetric. In the first event in this series, *Art and Globalization*, Susan Buck-Morss, Fredric Jameson, and others had no great difficulty in returning *from* political and area studies *to* questions of the aesthetic, just because they appeared safely contained as economic and historical matters. *Art and Globalization*, edited by James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim, Stone Art Theory Institutes 1 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

STÉPHANIE BENZAQUEN: Isn't there a methodological issue here? If we address art history and postcoloniality, how do we make the canon interact with other ideas? I think about what Damisch says regarding the code that both regulates and deregulates the system.[9] Can we perhaps push the canon into a permanent crisis?

JOAQUÍN BARRIENDOS: Jim, as you mentioned, there are many connections between the aesthetic/anti-aesthetic question and the postcolonial/decolonial debate. I pretty much agree with your explanation of why all these issues have been omitted from our seminar. In my view, the beyond of the anti-aesthetic has to do with decolonizing diverse epistemic hierarchies that aesthetics itself helped and still helps to edify; that is why affect appears to be relevant. Since Kant, aesthetics and racism have developed a relation of mutual connivance. Therefore, we have to argue for a non-Eurocentric rehistorization of aesthetics. For me, that is the challenge that the postphilosophical reinvigoration of aesthetics faces today.

There are several writers who acknowledge the need of a more accurate understanding of what they call transcultural aesthetics (I am thinking of Marchiano and Milani), intercultural aesthetics (Van den Braembussche), or exotic aesthetics (David Carrier).[10] In very different ways, these authors recognize the "cultural turn" of current aesthetics; claim a different perspective on the interplay between art, autonomy and philosophy; and question the Eurocentric epistemic matrix and the universalistic aspirations associated with the discipline. However, in spite of these new approaches, it seems to me that the academic arena has a persistent lack of interest in aesthetic issues, which is directly connected to the dissemination of the three imperial disciplines: geography, anthropology, and art history. In my view, new cross-pollinations between current aesthetics and issues such as area studies, Western) progressive development, racialization, geopolitics, visual modernizing impetus, and world art history could be useful for promoting the decolonization of the Western aesthetic thinking.

HAL FOSTER: On the one hand, there is a crisis, as Jay describes, but on the other there is an enormous inflation of the cultural sphere. In the long run, and I am not sure how this plays into questions of aesthetics and anti-aesthetics, we might be in the last days of the culture wars, which have gone on for a few decades now. Thirty years ago, in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Said said that the task of humanities was to represent "humane marginality." Forget about the humane; maybe now it's simply human marginality.

9. Damisch, *Théorie du Nuage: Pour une Histoire de la Peinture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 178–87.

10. *Frontiers of Transculturality in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Grazia Marchiano and Raffaele Milani (Turin: Trauben, 2001); *Intercultural Aesthetics: A Worldview Perspective*, edited by Antoon van den Braembussche, Heinz Kimmerle, and Nicole Note (Amsterdam: Springer, 2009); David Carrier, *A World Art History and Its Objects* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

ASSESSMENTS