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The Outside In: Art and the "Non-Aesthetic"

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Abstract: This essay proposes a case for grasping "Marxist aesthetics" as a generalised philosophical approach to the study of art and experience that underscores the pertinence of the "external" logic of capital. Such a logic, as this essay will develop through an account of arguments developed by Theodor W. Adorno and Peter Gorsen, must be seen to apply to both the history of aesthetics as a subdiscipline and the objects that aesthetics purports to study. The first part of the essay reconstructs the double crisis of aesthetics and art as figured in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, focusing on how this was heightened in the post-war period through the increasing incursion of "non-art" and the "non-aesthetic" into the artwork. As Adorno therein argues, a dialectical philosophical aesthetics should negotiate this double crisis through the assessment of aesthetic categories in their decline. After demonstrating how this plays out in his theory of the double character of art, the essay then outlines Gorsen's notion of the de-aestheticisation of art, by which he seeks to analyse mid-century artistic practice as post-avant-garde. For Gorsen, de-aestheticised art rehearses the attempt by the historic avant-garde to abolish the distinction between art and life in the absence of widespread and organised revolutionary political movements. Tracing these arguments, the essay concludes with a brief case for fostering a "Marxist non-aesthetics," understood as the inscription of historical and social contradictions into aesthetics in order to remain with, rather than abandon, such contradictions.

Keywords: *Theodor W. Adorno; Peter Gorsen; Philosophical Aesthetics; Anti-Aesthetics; Avant-garde Art*

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> *Terminating the tradition of philosophical aesthetics must amount to giving it its due*.
>
> —Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

Insofar as it is conceivable, the theory of a "Marxist aesthetics" is best construed as a theory proposing the inadequacy of viewing aesthetics as an internally coherent, self-contained discourse. By seeking to demonstrate the importance of the history and logic of capital to aesthetic categories and experience, Marxist aesthetics aims to register how social contradictions perennially return in and punctuate aesthetics, whether conceived as a prefigured set of normative prescriptions, an account of quotidian or exceptional sensation, or a philosophical subdiscipline. Always requiring an analytical moment external to it, any image of aesthetics as properly self-sustaining is thus essentially undermined. For historians and theorists of art, this becomes a concern both insofar as formalist readings of art's autonomy have sought to equate modernism with a purist notion of its aesthetic character,[1] and insofar as aesthetics is judged inappropriate for the critical analysis of art, particularly post-conceptual art. This paper sets out an attempt to heighten the above tensions and to make a case for where they may aid the theory of art under the rubric of a "Marxist non-aesthetics," and does so in three parts.[2]

First, I propose a reading of the status accorded aesthetics in Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* as emphatically contradictory. In many regards, this contradiction provides one of the key theoretical frameworks through which the book should be read and against which it should be tested. To try to articulate this as directly as possible, the dilemma can be understood as a claim for the enduring necessity of philosophical aesthetics at a time in which it has fallen into historical obsolescence, a thinking of the redundancy of aesthetics at a moment in which history was beginning to demonstrate precisely how little it could be a sufficient discourse on art. As one of the key framing devices outlined in the draft introduction, Adorno figures this in his analysis of the

crisis of aesthetics. As I recount, Adorno views the protracted and deepening crisis of aesthetics not as something to be transformed into a rallying defence of it as a tradition—as we find, say, in contemporary conservative philosophical defences of beauty—but as an imperative to think this crisis as part of its structural constitution and to examine what might be philosophically generative of its contradictions.

Following this, I then demonstrate how this thinking of categories in decline returns in Adorno's theory of art's double character and through what he variously terms the extra-, pre-, sub-, and supra-aesthetic in the work of art, here broadly categorised as a work's "non-aesthetic" element. With such notions, which tend to be critically underappreciated in interpretations of *Aesthetic Theory*, my claim is that Adorno aims to account for the admixture of "artistic" and "non-artistic" materials and characteristics registered in an aesthetic encounter with a work of art. Taken together, these two sections jointly reaffirm an interpretation of Adorno that critically recovers and advances the Marxian content of his thought.

Whilst readers of this special issue may not need convincing that Adorno was a Marxist thinker, it bears briefly repeating that, accepting some notable exceptions, this dimension has generally been overlooked, downplayed, or denied in the academic reception of his work.[3] Against such a tendency and in neighbouring other recent interventions into, for instance, his critique of political economy,[4] the register I adopt here aims at a Marxist and dialectical reinterpretation of Adorno's philosophy that remains faithful to it by seeking to betray some of its key moments.[5] With respect to Adorno's philosophical aesthetics, such a reading would not only need to recognise and underscore that *Aesthetic Theory* was left incomplete and that we are necessarily driven, by the force of its own movement, to go beyond his extant philosophical account, it would also require thematising and theorising elements that Adorno may have found anathema. Such an interpretative framework, best termed "post-Adornian," equally forces us to view *Aesthetic Theory* as constitutively insufficient, reading with, against, and through it ideas that are extraneous to his work.

With eyes fixed elsewhere, therefore, the final section reviews other, more direct post-war attempts to variously historicise and theorise non-, anti-, and post-aesthetic elements and tendencies in art. A brief outline of some of these accounts serves both to indicate that we can retroactively recognise *Aesthetic Theory* as reflecting on these historical changes and to introduce the work of Peter Gorsen, who would expand and develop a post-Adornian theory of these changes through his notion of the de-aestheticisation of art. With this, Gorsen sought to develop a historical thesis regarding twentieth-century tendencies to abolish the difference between the bourgeois institution of art and the everyday,

so openly thematised by the historic avant-garde. Such histories of artistic practice, Gorsen suggests, de-aestheticise art not only in that they make a claim for the historically diminishing role that aesthetics plays for critical judgement, they also foreground art's supposed loss of autonomy and render programmatic art as non-aesthetic—which is, at the same time, an "aestheticisation of actuality."[6] Ultimately, though this tendency risks reproducing avant-gardist strategies without maintaining the broader revolutionary political project, Gorsen also takes it as dimly and perhaps invertedly preserving an aspiration towards such revolutionary societal transformation.

Reconstructing and developing Gorsen's arguments within the context of Adorno's, this paper ultimately aims to argue that the enduring case for a Marxist non-aesthetics within the theory of art arises from an internal recognition of the insufficiency of aesthetics by aesthetics. Which is to say, Marxist aesthetics proves critically and dialectically functional by underscoring that place where aesthetics breaks down, where it reaches its limit and recognises its own deficiencies in the perceptual identification of those "non-aesthetic," seemingly extraneous elements that pierce the work. Rather than abandoning aesthetics within an analysis of art, especially as part of the recognition of historic changes within the history of art, this paper claims that we need to instead recognise how it participates within a frame of heightened dialectical tensions. Or, as Paul Mattick Jr. writes: "The rise of artworld anti-aesthetics sets a valuable example for philosophers of art, suggesting the need for a critical engagement with the assumptions, and so with the history, of aesthetics itself."[7]

Aesthetics in Crisis

As Adorno claims in the draft introduction to *Aesthetic Theory*, philosophical aesthetics finds itself languishing at its current historical juncture, appearing as "antiquated" to artists, philosophers, and the general public alike.[8] In his reading, over the course of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, aesthetics suffered a protracted slide into relative redundancy, driven by developments in its historical unfolding and by its own structural imperatives. The philosophical position he most directly attributes to accelerating this waning is the "radical nominalism" of Benedetto Croce, the Italian neo-Idealist philosopher, whose work problematised the view of the discipline as the production of universal norms, standards, and concepts by insisting on the importance, radicalising a position already found in G.W.F. Hegel, of turning to the concrete, "on which each and every artwork, indeed any experience of beauty, is fixed," and the attendant prohibition of the necessity of philosophical distance, which specialised consensus had "falsely supposed possible in the spheres of the theory

of knowledge or ethics."[9] At the same time, as a philosophical discipline and in view of its theoretical aspirations, aesthetics appears unable to remain with such a position. Adorno writes:

> A general theory of the aesthetically concrete would necessarily let slip what interested it in the object in the first place. The reason for the obsolescence of aesthetics is that it scarcely ever confronted itself with its object. By its very form, aesthetics seems sworn to a universality that culminates in inadequacy to the artworks and, complementarily, in transitory eternal values. The academic mistrust of aesthetics is founded in the academicism immanent to it.[10]

Torn between its descent towards a nominalist treatment of the concrete and its ascent towards producing universalisable claims, the split of aesthetics arises not simply because of internal contradictions, as if their resolution could be overcome simply in theory, but also attends a split that is constitutive of its basic objects. Given that, for Adorno, one of these objects includes the history of art and given that developments within this history have led to the loss of art's self-evident right to exist, philosophical aesthetics experiences not only a crisis in its constitution, but also a crisis of applicability and relevance.[11]

Though he does not adequately thematise the issues involved in designating aesthetics the proper philosophical discourse of art—issues that arise insofar as aesthetics is both overly generic, in that the traditional Kantian notion covers a broader range of objects and can say little about the distinctive social-ontology of art, and excessively narrow, in that "it seals and legitimates the exclusion of art's other aspects from the philosophical concept of art, reducing it to a single plane of significance"[12]—we can and should read Adorno's resolute tendency to use the term "aesthetics" over "philosophy of art" as quietly stressing an antipathy, which he partly learned from Walter Benjamin, to the external application of philosophical concepts to artworks and the disjuncture between such philosophical concepts and an artwork's truth content. Or rather, it is the division of aesthetics in its base insistence on a version of nominalism and its broad aspirations to the theoretical, articulated at a moment when aesthetics appears to have been superseded, that provides the impetus to remain with it. If, then, Adorno seldomly claims his mature project to be a "philosophy of art," preferring to describe it as a "philosophical aesthetics," we should therefore interpret this as a dialectical commitment to aesthetics at a moment of its advanced dissolution. He writes:

> The dilemma of aesthetics appears immanently in the fact that it can be constituted neither from above nor from below, neither from concepts nor from aconceptual experience. The only possibility for aesthetics beyond this miserable alternative is the philosophical insight that fact and concept are not polar opposites but mediated reciprocally in one another. This must be appropriated

> by aesthetics, for art again stands in need of aesthetics now that criticism has shown itself to be so disoriented by false and arbitrary judgments that it fails vis-à-vis art. Yet if aesthetics is to amount neither to art-alien prescriptions nor to the inconsequential classification of what it happens upon, then it is only conceivable as dialectical aesthetics; dialectical method is not unsuitably defined as the refusal to rest content with the diremption of the deductive and inductive that dominates rigid, indurative thought, and this is expressly rejected by the earliest formulations of dialectics in German idealism, those of Fichte.[13]

Far from the straightforward adoption of aesthetics as a "traditional theory," as the maintenance of a philosophical trajectory that is unable to think the social content of its concepts, Adorno's notion of philosophical aesthetics thus attempts to name that remaining with the dilemma of dialectically approaching the truth content of an artwork as it is mediated in experience. Philosophical aesthetics thus becomes not a meditation on "pure feeling," as if any experience of "the aesthetic" were entirely unmediated, but the contradictory attempt to think "extra-aesthetic logic" from within an aesthetic encounter and to do so through a set of historically ailing concepts and categories.[14] Philosophical aesthetics proceeds not by convention, but "by determinate negation to think the categories that are in decline as categories of transition. The elucidated and concrete dissolution of conventional aesthetic categories is the only remaining form that aesthetics can take; it at the same time sets free the transformed truth of these categories."[15]

Adorno's claim here operates in two registers: as an analysis of philosophical aesthetics and as a methodological proposition. This is to say that this claim posits not only metaphilosophical judgement on how philosophical aesthetics should proceed, but also identifies one of the key interpretative strategies to be employed when reading *Aesthetic Theory* itself. Perhaps, had the book been finished before his death, and had the introduction been situated at the front of the printed edition rather than the back, we would have been spared some of the flat, tensionless secondary interpretations that have since come to dominate. Or to put more directly a point that bears repeating, *Aesthetic Theory* should not be read as a straightforward treatment and defence of high or late modernism which elevates a narrow set of its historically dominant traits into an inflexible ontology of art. Rather, as Peter Uwe Hohendahl has pointed out, the book aimed to question "the very possibility of philosophical aesthetics in the context of avant-garde art." It sought not to shore up a particular philosophical and artistic tradition, "not to develop a theory specifically for modern art," but instead "maintained that modern art challenged the very possibility of systematic aesthetics *tout court*."[16]

To think aesthetic categories in their decline, as testifying to moments of transition, is to try to think history as it shapes thought and experience. Following

this view, philosophical aesthetics has little to do with that doctrine of "norms and models that are meant to help people in a fixed, immutable way in the orientation of an intellectual or artistic production."[17] Whilst such a lamentation of stable aesthetic criteria—a position that tends to confuse "the so-called chaos of today" with the "chaos [that] has already become the law governing their own actions and imagination"—correctly recognises the historical character of aesthetics, it does so to bolster that conservative prescription to return to a prelapsarian image and social function of art.[18] Equally, however, Adorno stresses an antipathy to those cruder versions of theory that offer little more than an application of external categories.[19] Though aesthetics cannot do without a referent to "external" elements, elements that are constitutive of aesthetics and require it to constantly "overstep itself," we cannot simply apply critical social concepts to works of art without seeing how they are fundamentally tested and transformed. On this point, he is worth quoting at length:

> One is no more equal to a Beethoven symphony without comprehending its so-called purely musical course than if one is unable to perceive in it the echo of the French Revolution; how these two aspects are mediated in the phenomenon belongs to the obstinate and equally unavoidable themes of philosophical aesthetics. Not experience alone but only thought that is fully saturated with experience is equal to the phenomenon. It is not for aesthetics to adapt itself aconceptually to aesthetic phenomena. Consciousness of the antagonism between interior and exterior is requisite to the experience of art. The description of aesthetic experiences, theory and judgment, is insufficient. What is required is experience of works rather than thoughts simply applied to the matter, yet no artwork adequately presents itself as immediately given; none is to be understood strictly on its own terms. All works are formed in themselves according to their own logic and consistency as much as they are elements in the context of spirit and society. The two aspects are not to be neatly separated, as is the scientific habit. True consciousness of the external world participates in the work's immanent coherence; the spiritual and social standpoint of an artwork can only be discerned on the basis of its internal crystallization. There is nothing artistically true whose truth is not legitimated in an overarching context; and there is no artwork whose consciousness is true that does not prove itself in terms of aesthetic quality.[20]

Adorno's model of philosophical aesthetics is one that proposes to approach the truth content of an artwork by registering the historical redundancy of traditional aesthetic categories and criteria. Instead of buttressing a collapsing discipline, such a model names the privileging of experience within the critical comprehension of art via an internal reflection on the historical crisis of aesthetics for thinking its object. And whilst there are many approaches that equally prove, for one reason or another, fundamentally inadequate for thinking art, the claim here is that philosophical aesthetics uniquely foregrounds a contingency, a profound historicity, that registers shifts within the history of

art. Indeed, as the following sections will suggest, we might even venture that aesthetics most readily demonstrates its proximity to art only at that moment in which it is seen to be most distant. In Adorno's view, neither as a doctrine of values, a set of established norms, nor a belief in mere feeling, but only as a historically and socially conditioned, conceptually mediated experience of its own crisis does philosophical aesthetics name anything of theoretical worth. His unfinished book, *Aesthetic Theory*, aims at both the exposition and demonstration of this argument, both a case for what remains of philosophical aesthetics at a moment of its crisis and a testing of this crisis through the determinate negation of its categories.

Theorising the Non-Aesthetic

> *The artwork is not only aesthetic but sub- and supra-aesthetic; in that it originates in layers of the empirical, has a thing-like character, a* fait social*, and ultimately converges with the meta-aesthetic in the idea of truth, it implies a critique of any chemically pure attitude to art.*
>
> —Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (trans. amended)

Several aesthetic categories, ideas, and distinctions arise in and through Adorno's mature work, but few so distinctly turn on the limitations of an aesthetics in decline as does his theory of the double character of art, as autonomous and social fact. Bracketing from the present exposition a thoroughgoing account of its dynamic as an analytically separable latent contradiction,[21] I want to suggest that the double character of art foregrounds the above problematic of aesthetics in two basic ways.

First, there is the problem of the conflation of art's autonomy with the aesthetic. Though Adorno often falls short of a sufficient critique of this conflation, a shortcoming perhaps attributable to his "lingering aestheticism,"[22] it must be maintained that art's autonomy is a critical proposition about art within the historically particular social relations of capital. Such historical conditions and social relations constitutively structure art, historico-ontologically, and return as part of the formal character of and congealed institutional framework around a work.[23] In his theorisation of it, Adorno builds on a definitive post-German Idealist, more explicitly Romantic, philosophical legacy that characterises art as "a certain kind of production of meaning in the object, an autopoiesis, distinct from both *techné* and mimesis."[24] As Peter Osborne points out, art's autonomy should therefore not be made to bear either on the supposed autonomy of the aesthetic nor, too, on the supposed autonomy of the artist. Where the former incorrectly traces the origin of the theory of art's autonomy to Kant's *Critique*

of the Power of Judgement and locates it in a distinctive aesthetic experience, the latter tends to argue for either the artist's unique position within the social division of labour, their exceptionalism vis-à-vis the wage relation, or an overinvested notion of their unique "creativity."[25] Neither of these interpretations properly accords with the arguments offered by Adorno, downplaying autonomy's historical character and thereby diminishing its continuing function as a socio-critical category.

Second, and more important for my purposes, there is the formal registration of an artwork's "non-artistic" and "non-aesthetic" elements. Again, though the terminological conflation of the artistic and the aesthetic belies the substantial incongruity of these two concepts, and I take it to be a task left to a post-Adornian philosophy of art to both deepen and heighten this contradiction, the concern here is that of the incompleteness of the artwork's aesthetic mediation of the external world, of its self-posited dual incorporation of and distinction from what merely exists. In Adorno's view, this mediation should not be fundamentally characterised as representational, as the mimetic depiction of "real world subjects," no matter how clearly we might be able identify distinct buildings in a veduta or name historical individuals in a group portrait. Rather, it is the tautological process that describes the production of an artwork as the combined activity through which an artwork is produced, the self-positing of an artwork as a formal and objective mediation which ontologically distinguishes it from the merely existing. Or, to borrow one of his prized Schoenberg quips: "After all, I paint a picture, not a chair."[26] Such mediation is, however, never total or complete, but retains traces of its social origins. In this sense, artworks are the bearers of both aesthetic and non-aesthetic elements, both seemingly distanced from the "outside world" and offering interrupting glimpses of where the "outside" is let in. This basic interplay is imaged in what he terms a dual rejection and harbouring of the empirical and connotes an immanent condition of art, part of its "*ontological double-coding*," as Osborne writes.[27] The resulting dynamic tension between these movements then becomes a formal marker of art's autonomous and social character, where an artwork appears to have achieved its socially determined freedom from social determination. This, as he suggests in the following dense and far-reaching lines, thereby necessitates an internal and external apprehension of a work, a double observation:

> The double character of art—something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from social interdependency [*gesellschaftlichen Wirkungszusammenhang*] and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and social interdependency – is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic and *faits sociaux*. They require a double observation that is no more to be posited as an unalloyed whole than aesthetic autonomy and art can be conflated as something strictly social. This double character becomes physiognomically

> decipherable, whether intentionally so or not, when one views or listens to art from an external vantage point, and, certainly, art always stands in need of this external perspective for protection from the fetishisation of its autonomy.[28]

And again:

> To whoever remains strictly internal, art will not open its eyes, and whoever remains strictly external distorts artworks by a lack of affinity. Yet aesthetics becomes more than a rhapsodic back and forth between the two standpoints by developing their reciprocal mediation in the artwork itself.[29]

As I am reconstructing and reading it, this "double observation" is that model of philosophical aesthetics Adorno lays out in the draft introduction, from which the second quote is taken, naming that experiential recognition of the insufficiency of aesthetics for grasping the full formal complexity of a work. An "aesthetic" approach to an artwork will be fundamentally stumped by those elements that appear to be "extraneous," elements that deviate from what we might take to be artistic materials, that call into question traditional categories such as beauty, and that combine to produce the compulsion to think the importance of an extra-aesthetic logic to art. This vantage point will find itself confronted by those aspects that are most disharmonious, jarring, or non-belonging, find itself registering its own limits by observing momentary flashes of extraneous conditions to which art is subject.

Simultaneously, however, an "extra-aesthetic" or "pre-aesthetic" approach is both equally dubious and equally necessary. Dubious insofar as it cannot account for the artwork's particular formal mediation of reality, that it was produced as an *artwork*. Necessary insofar as it is the condition upon which an artwork becomes physiognomically decipherable as having separated itself as an artwork, that it was *produced* as an artwork.[30] The harsh and undifferentiating gaze that finds in a work nothing other than its external referent, so neatly encapsulated in that oft-cited retort "it is just a pile of bricks," fails correctly. At once, it is both "a barbaric residue or a danger of regressive consciousness" and yet is a proper response to changes in art history. "Something in art," Adorno writes, "calls for this response. Only when art's other is sensed as a primary layer in the experience of art does it become possible to sublimate this layer, to dissolve the thematic bonds, without the autonomy of the artwork becoming a matter of indifference. Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it."[31] In an Adornian register, art's critical claim to autonomy should thus be understood as contingent on the material recognition that it is internally limited, that it is socially situated and produced as part of the division of labour. In this, Adorno does not simply seek to advance the claim, which should now be a matter of mere interpretative convention, that art's autonomy is always relative, always socially conditioned,

but instead that the critical effectivity of the autonomy of art is constitutively contingent on those moments in which it breaks down. As he argues, what is included in a work as referents to the "empirical" are those historically received elements which materially constitute its "thing-like character" and are aesthetically legible as non-artistic—elements "directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic and *faits sociaux*."[32] Properly speaking, because the tense interplay between an artwork's "internal" and "external" elements is only rehearsed within the work, in an artwork's apparent rejection and separation from the merely existing, this dynamic plays out only at the level of art's autonomy. It is only at this level that a reduction of a work to its basic elements and processes risks destabilising the dynamic entirely. Though this is the case, it simultaneously cannot be recognised only internally to autonomy. The double observation of art is nothing more than the approach to art that maintains this tension simultaneously, that finds the double character within the work, and which Adorno names philosophical aesthetics.

The De-Aestheticisation of Art

> *Today, when one speaks of autonomy one does so only in the context of the* loss *of autonomy, a* crisis *of the means of visual expression, under the mark of the* de-aestheticisation *of art on the one hand and the* aestheticisation of actuality *on the other. And it is precisely here that we find the starting point for a redefinition of the relation of the ordinary and everyday* [Alltag und Alltäglichkeit] *to art and the aesthetics of art*.
>
> —Peter Gorsen, "Thesen zur künstlerischen Verarbeitung"

By the 1960s, that period in which Adorno was drafting and redrafting his unfinished magnum opus, it would not have taken a great deal of effort to discover, within the walls of a gallery, museum, or temporary exhibition space, not only a painting that represents an aesthetically mediated chair, but the formal incorporation of an ordinary chair itself. Though of course not entirely unique to the decade, the period saw a whole suite of seemingly "non-artistic" materials and references—from the industrial metals and forms employed by Charlotte Posenenske through to the language of commerce and mass media drawn on by Peter Roehr, to select two examples from Frankfurt—become increasingly constitutive of the basic grammar of artistic form. Such a tendency would engender, as Harold Rosenberg would describe, a "profound crisis" in art. It produced a state of generalised anxiety, a process in which "painting, sculpture, drama, music, have been undergoing a process of de-definition," and would ultimately crystalise in what Rosenberg termed the "anxious object," an artwork unsure of itself, not knowing "whether it is a masterpiece or junk."[33]

The artwork now profoundly unlike what it once was, the coming years and decades would broadly see artists, critics, and theorists debate the consequences of the post-war abandonment of several traditional claims of art and several aesthetic categories and values which subtend these claims, proceeding, hand-in-hand, with art's "movement toward de-aestheticisation"; something which, from the standpoint of the early 1970s, appeared to Rosenberg as "a reaction against and a continuation of the trend toward formalistic over-refinement in the art of the sixties, and particularly in the rhetoric that accompanied it."[34]

Increasingly, as the advent of conceptual art so concisely articulates, the latent antagonism and separation of art from the aesthetic came to be paradigmatic of the development and theorisation of contemporary art. This internal tension would return, in the debates of the 1980s and 1990s, as the "anti-aesthetic" character of "postmodern art."[35] Thus, in 1983, condensing and framing a series of interventions, many of which were made by his *October* colleagues, Hal Foster would describe the concept of the anti-aesthetic as rendering antiquated certain modernist notions of autonomy, as putting into question the notion and applicability of the aesthetic, and as challenging "the idea that aesthetic experience exists apart, without 'purpose,' all but beyond history, or that art can now effect a world at once (inter)subjective, concrete and universal—a symbolic totality. Like 'postmodernism,' then, 'anti-aesthetic' marks a cultural position on the present: are categories afforded by the aesthetic still valid?"[36] Though polemical, undeveloped, and not entirely systematic, as he would later admit,[37] Foster's anti-aesthetic sought to identify not only a prior and existing tendency in art history but was also extrapolated to encompass a set of occupied positions that stressed an antipathy to the reconciliatory aspects of aesthetic experience.[38]

Such claims would provoke the ire of figures such as Donald Kuspit, once a student of Adorno, in his theorising of "post-aesthetic art." The role of aesthetics in art—by which Kuspit means art's pretensions to elevate itself above the ordinary, to express and mediate an experience that transcends reality, to occasion a claim to formal and moral value, and to creatively wield beauty as the "ultimate protest against ugliness"—has been thoroughly "maligned," evidence for which he finds in the writing and work of Marcel Duchamp and Barnett Newman.[39] For Kuspit, who attempts in *The End of Art* a psychoanalytic, philosophical, and humanist defence for the normative rehabilitation of beauty and aesthetic experience, the post-aesthetic artist's abandonment of a creative approach to formal concerns is an unacknowledged contribution to the barbarism of the world. Such an artist forgoes the "aesthetic autonomy" of art which is, for Kuspit, something of "a prelude to personal autonomy, even a basic part of it."[40]

In sketching this paradigm of art history and theory, I want to reinforce that Adorno's own abstracted set of arguments about the crisis of aesthetics and the dynamic interplay of the aesthetic and non-aesthetic are more than philosophical conundrums and conjectures, suggesting instead that they are best interpreted as an early attempt to reflect on these historical changes in art in the post-war period, particularly on questions of the social character of form. That is, at a moment in which distributed artistic practices had animated the "dialectic of the boundary,"[41] as Peter Bürger once phrased it, between art and non-art, Adorno figures such changes through an argument about dialectical interplay between the historical crisis of aesthetic experience and the historical crisis of artistic form. Though my claim here is one that pertains predominantly to an interpretation of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, the extended critical theoretical work on these historical tendencies would only first be directly taken up by Peter Gorsen, a philosopher and theorist whose work is poorly known outside of the German-speaking world.[42]

Gorsen's contribution to my concerns are most densely compressed into his thesis on art's *Entästhetisierung* (de-aestheticisation), a term he adopted not from Rosenberg but from an earlier essay and comments by Odo Marquard.[43] For Marquard and others in the circle around the hermeneuticians, literary critics, and reception theorists that Hans Robert Jauss had assembled in 1966, a parallel set of concerns had been framed primarily as a question of a reinterpretation of art and literary history, of reinterpreting, in different ways, through different disciplines, and with different conclusions, "two epochal cesuras": the first of which arose with "the anti-aesthetic pretensions of Christian art," pretensions that were buried during the Middle Ages before being rediscovered again in the move to the Romantic period; while the second arose with the emergence of the "no-longer-beautiful arts" and had ushered in modernity. As Jauss suggests, art and literature in the post-war period had rendered the "aesthetic" itself a marginal phenomenon (*Grenzphänomen*), had maligned beauty as the definitive criterion for their assessment, and had forced a reappraisal of a series of minor categories such as the ugly, the macabre, the disgusting, the obscene, the hideous, and the heinous.[44] How, Marquard wondered as he began to reflect on some of the contributions to Jauss's volume, could art and its theory have arrived at a situation in which there was both "licence and the compulsion to de-aestheticise the aesthetic?"[45] In probing at this question, Gorsen viewed it less as a concern with the centuries-long history of literature and philosophical aesthetics than with the more recent histories of artistic experiment and Marxist theories of capitalist modernity. Gorsen's theory of the de-aestheticisation of art thus emerges as partly a theoretical reformulation and extension of Adorno's notion of *Entkunstung*, de-artification,[46] partly an encounter with post-Adornian critical theoretical reflection on art in the work of Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, partly a reckoning

with Henri Lefebvre's theory of the capitalist organisation of the everyday, and partly, but most importantly, an interpretation of the history of art, particularly with respect to the reverberations of countercultural movements and artistic experiments of the 1960s. For this latter, Gorsen departs from his problem by producing a "sexual aesthetics," turning to the history of the relation between art and the erotic, the pornographic, the moral, the obscene, the psychiatric, and the unwell to outline a theory that, as Kerstin Stakemeier argues, could be characterised "an immoral and, in view of the contemporary, ultimately antisocial art of the modern genders and their sex beyond their social second nature [*gesellschaftlichen Zweitnatürlichkeit*]."[47]

Though bound up in these histories, the problem of de-aestheticisation posed itself to Gorsen as essentially one of assessing the place of the aesthetic in the wake of the historic avant-garde.[48] How, in other words, does art persist after avant-gardist attempts to abolish it? How are we to understand post-war art as responding to a dilemma prefigured by the avant-garde? What irrevocable ruptures in aesthetics had the historic avant-garde caused? And what consequences are there to assessing recent artistic practice, as well as the theory and criticism that reflects on it, against this background? As he writes in the introduction to *Transformierte Alltäglichkeit oder Transzendenz der Kunst* (The transformed everyday or transcendence of art):

> We know that the attempt to reconnect art to life praxis has consistently failed (most recently in the sixties) and we observe that this failure is implicated in modern art history, causing a chain of *de-aestheticisations*, of boundary transgressions of traditional aesthetics, conceptually registered as "anti-art", "art of artlessness [*Kunstlösigkeit*]", "destruction in art", etc. Since the turn of the century, they manifest themselves in the tendency to dissolve the aesthetic work and semblance character into a life context that encompasses art and actuality.[49]

Whilst unsuccessful in its attempt at the complete and absolute dissolution of art, in the complete and absolute melding of art and life, the advanced ambitions of the avant-garde resulted in art's fundamental transformation, preserved by the figure of art's de-aestheticisation. In Gorsen's view, following his reading of Adorno, this is simultaneously a permanent loss of art's traditional transcendental function and a gain in its embrace of avant-garde art-abolitionist tendencies.[50] Which is to say that the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s saw artists variously rehabilitate and redeploy certain tactics that confront the bourgeois institution of art—tactics that lean on attempts at the radical dissolution of art into life—in full view of their historic unfulfillment.

Extrapolating from Gorsen, we can see this overarching tendency as having an essentially twofold function. On the one hand, it participates in the retroactive recoding of the historic avant-garde as a mere moment *internal* to the

bourgeois history of art, rather than an experimental effort, at times revolutionary, towards its undoing. Such artistic practices thereby belatedly redouble on those largely successful pre-war efforts to institutionally appropriate the historic avant-garde as part of its standard canon.[51] And consequentially, on the other hand, the transgressive character of avant-gardism has been reduced to a set of available artistic ideas, impulses, and techniques, reduced to a purportedly "progressive" insistence by artists, critics, and theoreticians on an overly simplistic social refunctionalisation and actualisation of art. Such an insistence reframes and risks appearing to resolve, through a "false de-differentiation of art and life,"[52] what Gorsen took to be the dominant post-war dichotomy posed to art: whether to transform or transcend the everyday. But why is this necessarily false? As a philosophically trained reader of the critical and heterodox Marxist tradition, Gorsen maintained that the ambition to dissolve art into life could not be properly achieved on the basis of an overstated overcoming of the distinction, but only through political and social revolution. Life, that is, is not some idyllic state that art merely emerges from and to which it should return, but the domain through which capital reproduces itself and alienates us. It, too, needs to be overcome. As Marcuse argued on this point:

> Art cannot become reality, cannot realise itself without cancelling itself as Art in *all* its forms, even in its most destructive, most minimal, most "living" forms. The gap which separates Art from reality, the essential otherness of Art, its "illusory" character can be reduced only to the degree to which *reality itself* tends towards Art as reality's own Form, that is to say, in the course of a revolution, with the emergence of a free society.[53]

In the attempted self-dissolution of art into life, Gorsen takes the historic avant-garde as having aimed not at a prefigurative image of emancipation, but at the radical transformation of the conditions of alienation, of capital's structural determination of everyday life. In the absence of a widespread proletarian movement which poses a substantial threat to capital and in the absence of an avant-gardism which would link itself to such a movement, the "progressive" attempt to de-differentiate art and life by bridging the two, misrecognises what was constitutive of the historic avant-garde as well as the conditions in which life subsists. Gorsen writes:

> One is not "modern" or "avant-garde" by proclamation. Whoever considers the development of art in the twentieth century against the background of failed political and social revolution will observe that this failure took shape in the aesthetic transgression of limits of the avant-garde, its so-called "expanded concept of art," and, having reached an extremity in the self-dissolution of art, continues through to the present under the headings of the happening, actionism, live performance, body art, and conceptual art as well as pop art, environmental, optical, minimal, and kinetic art, and so on. Such transgressions

> of limits, while maintaining a fragmentary distance from reality, have been variously debated under the banner of the "aestheticisation of the *inaesthetic* (ugly), *de-aestheticisation* of the aesthetic (beautiful)" and in the relation of art and illness, art and pornography, aesthetics and sexuality.[54]

Where the fate of early twentieth-century European avant-gardes had been bound to the fate of historic emancipatory movements, to the fate of the revolutionary working class, the defeat of those movements remains preserved in artistic form. Which is to suggest that post-war body art, conceptual art, environmental art, and the other examples listed above variously rehearse the failures of the historic avant-garde through the transgression of artistic limits, doing so as a way of revising, not abolishing, the bourgeois institution of art. Transgression of the traditional aesthetic criteria and purposes of art thereby comes to signify something internal to art, the means by which it is "expanded," not that which moves beyond it. What Gorsen thus intends to describe as the "chain of de-aestheticisations" is the dialectical tension that arises in art seeking to incorporate and foreground non-art elements without seeking to properly, by which is also meant socially and politically, overcome the socio-ontological distinction that separates art from non-art. In view of then-recent debates on *Waren-* and *Alltagsästhetik*, commodity and everyday aesthetics, Gorsen takes this dialectic as not only coming to increasingly define the dominant grammar through which art is produced and through which art's autonomy is purportedly jeopardised, but also and inversely, as the rendering "aesthetic" of ordinary life:[55]

> The relation of art to actuality, as the "supplier of its material", has decisively changed. We can establish the current loss of autonomy in two regards: first, art increasingly approximates the aesthetics of the everyday, ultimately dissolving itself in it; second, the ordinary and the everyday [*Alltag und Alltäglichkeit*] are increasingly subjected to an aestheticisation process.[56]

That the mundane now appears in bright colours and clean lines or that now "everyone is an artist," to parrot Gorsen parroting Joseph Beuys, is no cause for celebration. Here Gorsen is critical of what he calls the "political catchword" of everyday aesthetics, dismissing those that do not adequately see how everyday life plays its role in perpetuating alienation and domination, finding little that could be recuperated of the role that aesthetics, aesthetic principles, and aesthetic categories now play in accelerating capital's subsumption of social relations.[57] This dynamic runs alongside the de-aestheticisation of art in the convergence of art and life as a convergence of art and the commodity form—an aestheticisation "of commodities, advertising, public relations, and design, which draw on the most technologically advanced media such as photography, film, and television"[58]—producing a competing "autonomous" sphere.

Though Gorsen is too absolute in his account of art's "loss of autonomy," or better, too hasty to claim that the de-aestheticised conditions of art have forgone autonomy rather than heightening the dynamic tension of art's double character, he is correct to assert that the historical division of art and the aesthetic, that that questionable thing known as "the aesthetic" is increasingly shown to be inadequate to the production, reception, and theorisation of art, remains bound to *both* the history of art and the history of capital. Or rather, that aesthetics is the improper discourse with which to think art, that it cannot account for the complexity of avant-gardist and post-avant-gardist art, that its categories misattribute an elevated experience of artistic form as the criteria against which it should be judged, and so on, is made increasingly clear by capital's employment of its categories and norms.[59]

To try to reformulate Gorsen's answer to Marquard's question then, the licence and compulsion to de-aestheticise names the post-avant-gardist condition of late modern, or better pre-contemporary, art through which the chasm between art and aesthetics was both widening and collapsing. Such a condition preserves, in a contorted form, the avant-gardist revolutionary belief that capital, and with it art, could be abolished. In our intermediary condition, marked by capital's transformation of social relations as the transformation of its modes of exploitation and domination, this belief is negatively rendered in post-avant-gardist art, in experiments in de-aestheticisation:

> The unmistakable process of the de-aestheticisation of art comes to a standstill in the structures of alienation of the actuality of life. That which we observe as *de-aestheticisation* and as *subjectless art* in the history of the twentieth century and which we can continue to describe as aesthetically immanent expresses, under conditions of a commodity-producing society, the *inevitably failing* and simultaneously *aestheticised hope* that the qualitative difference between art and life can be abolished, the aesthetic semblance character of the artwork dismantled, and the promise of happiness practically honoured.[60]

Toward a Theory of "Marxist Non-Aesthetics"

Without a sufficient grasp of its intrinsic and extrinsic contradictions, aesthetics cannot comprehend art in any sufficient way. The sometimes gradual, sometimes abrupt history of the discipline is the history of coming to terms with these contradictions, figured as its growing sense of obsolescence. In the mid-twentieth century, in particular, this issue was forced by the tendency of post-avant-gardist art to break all allegiance to those categories with which aesthetics believed it grasped and evaluated its object. So often experienced as a permanent loss—of its "centre," of its autonomy, of its transcendent function,

and so on—this is properly thought as the historical foregrounding of the socio-ontological dialectic of art and non-art figured as a crisis of art's secure relation to itself, art's *Entkunstung*, and aesthetics' intimate relation to art, art's *Entästhetisierung*. This double crisis, the point from which *Aesthetic Theory* properly departs, thematises this through the encroachment of non-artistic materials into the work and the concordant demise of traditional philosophical categories. The critical theoretical claim on this tendency is not one that lurches towards a conservative lament or a "progressive" postmodern abandonment, but one that negatively assesses such discrepancies as the social and historical content of ailing aesthetic categories. Here constructed through a rereading of Adorno and Gorsen, I take Marxism to be well disposed to think the integrally "non-aesthetic"—well disposed, that is, to advance an understanding of the insufficiency of aesthetic apprehension to grasp the form and content of a work, to delineate the historically unstable boundary between art and non-art as a socially determined dialectic, and to recognise in the appearance of historical crises a permeation by the "external" logic of capital. If history has demonstrated that aesthetics is insufficient to art, a Marxist non-aesthetics proposes a case for remaining within the troubled discipline of philosophical aesthetics precisely because of its deficiencies and complications. Though the move to a philosophy of art might theoretically overcome these limitations, turning instead to a lineage that does not falsely equivocate by inadvertently elevating one element above others, it also does not remain with them. Equally, however, a Marxist non-aesthetics would have to the discipline—which a survey of present interventions may take to be a neutral and uncomplicated endeavour—with its constitutive contradictions, for if the cause to stay with philosophical aesthetics arises out of its heightened insufficiency, it is also to not occlude that this insufficiency is constitutive.

NOTES

1 For a critique of "the formalist trap" in the theory of art's autonomy, see Kim West, *The Autonomy of Art Is Ordinary: Notes in Defense of an Idea of Emancipation* (Sternberg Press, 2024), 22–35.

2 I would particularly like to thank Tobias Dias for his insightful comments on the draft version of this article.

3 See Dirk Braunstein, *Adorno's Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Adam Baltner (Brill, 2023), 350–53.

4 In addition to Braunstein, *Adorno's Critique*, a non-exhaustive list would have to include the following: Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld, and Chris O'Kane, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, 3 vols. (SAGE, 2018); Charles A. Prusik, *Adorno and Neoliberalism: The Critique of Exchange Society* (Bloomsbury, 2020); Peter Osborne, "Adorno and Marx," in *A Companion to Adorno*, ed. Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Max Penske (Wiley Blackwell, 2020); Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane, eds., *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy* (Bloomsbury, 2022).

5 A case is made (in my view convincingly) for the necessity of adopting a post-Adornian position in John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (Verso, 2015).

6 Peter Gorsen, "Thesen zur künstlerischen Verarbeitung alltagsästhetischer Äußerungen," in *Transformierte Altäglichkeit oder Transzendenz der Kunst: Reflexionen zur Entästhetisierung* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1981), 272. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German are my own.

7 Paul Mattick Jr., "Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics in the Visual Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 258.

8 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Athlone Press, 1997), 332.

9 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 333.

10 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 333.

11 On the parallelism between the crises in art and in aesthetics, see Alexander García Düttmann, "De-Arting," in *From an Aesthetic Point of View: Philosophy, Art and the Senses*, ed. Peter Osborne (Serpent's Tail, 2000), 71–87.

12 Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (Verso, 2013), 43.

13 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 334.

14 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 336.

15 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 341.

16 Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory" Revisited* (Cornell University Press, 2013), 6–7.

17 Theodor W. Adorno, "Without Model: In Place of a Preface," in *Without Model: Parva Aesthetica*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Seagull Books, 2023), 7.

18 Adorno, "Without Model," 7–8.

19 "Social concepts should not be applied to the works from without but rather drawn from an exacting examination of works themselves." Theodor W. Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Columbia University Press, 1991), 39. In his reading of Louis Althusser, Fredric Jameson offers an interesting addendum to this line of thought when he writes: "the category of mechanical effectivity retains a purely local validity in cultural analysis where it can be shown that billiard-ball causality remains one of the (nonsynchronous) laws of our particular fallen social reality. It does little good, in other words, to banish 'extrinsic' categories from our thinking, when the latter continue to have a hold on the objective realities about which we plan to think. There seems, for instance, to have been an unquestionable causal relationship between the admittedly extrinsic fact of the crisis in late nineteenth-century publishing, during which the dominant three-decker lending library novel was replaced by a cheaper one-volume format, and the modification of the 'inner form' of the novel itself." Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Routledge, 1989), 25.

20 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 349.

21 As I have argued elsewhere, the double character of art is not to be read straightforwardly as a dialectic—an interpretation common in the secondary that then tends to see in it an interplay between autonomy and heteronomy, thereby overlooking the (anti-)sociological content of Adorno's claim, reproducing a sociological naïveté that Adorno elsewhere criticised, and betraying the properly Marxian reference and legacy that it contains—but instead understood as a pre-dialecticised unity. See Louis Hartnoll, *Manifest Contradiction: Adorno, Sociology, and the Double Character of Art* (Ph.D. diss., Centre for Research in Modern Europen Philosophy, Kingston University London) 2023.

22 Peter Osborne, "Crisis as Form," in *Crisis as Form* (Verso, 2022), 32.

23 Osborne, *Anywhere*, 38–46.

24 Osborne, *Anywhere*, 44.

25 Adorno's theory of the artist is instead better construed as a theory of their peculiar *unfreedom*, an unfreedom bestowed by their given task as "executor" and as "the extension of a tool, a tool for the transition from potentiality to actuality." Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 166.

26 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 323.

27 Osborne, "Crisis as Form," 38, emphasis in the original.

28 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 252–53, with minor amendments. In a certain sense, these remarks are consistent with Adorno's earlier theorisation of the sociology of music's "dual relation to its object: an internal and external dimension," its being both consistent with and resistant to the social conditions it finds itself in and social functions that are attributed to it. Theodor W. Adorno, "Some Ideas on the Sociology of Music," *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford University Press, 1999), 2.

29 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 350.

30 On the legacy of physiognomy in critical theory, see Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Yale University Press, 2005), 137–242.

31 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 6.

32 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 252.

33 Harold Rosenberg, "On the De-definition of Art," in *The De-Definition of Art* (Secker and Warburg, 1972), 12. Cf. Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Audience* (Horizon Press, 1964).

34 Rosenberg, "De-aestheticization," in *De-Definition of Art*, 29. Or, as Paul Mattick Jr. insists: "Once any object chosen by an artist can be art, art is no longer aesthetic—that is, effective through its perceptual properties—in nature. Accordingly, 'taste' in the traditional sense loses its role to the newly invented art theory, which is increasingly thought of as constitutive of art itself. Mattick Jr., "Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics," 254.

35 For a short overview of this and other terms, see James Elkins, "Introduction," in *Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. James Elkins and Harper Montgomery (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 1–16.

36 Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Bay Press, 1983), xv.

37 Hal Foster in James Elkins et al., "Introductory Seminar," in Elkins and Montgomery, *Beyond the Aesthetic*, 31–33.

38 In the opening roundtable, Diarmuid Costello indicates something of this ambiguity when he asks: "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?" Diarmuid Costello in Elkins et al., "Introductory Seminar," 31.

39 Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 31.

40 Kuspit, *End of Art*, 38.

41 Peter Bürger, "Aporias of Modern Aesthetics," trans. Ben Morgan, in *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1991), 5.

42 A student of Adorno and Habermas, Gorsen would write shortly after the posthumous publication of *Aesthetic Theory* that the book "is not philosophy applied to art, but the philosophical in itself; not a theory of the aesthetic, but the self-unfolding truth of the aesthetic." Though early translations of *Das Prinzip Obszön* (The principle of obscenity) exist in both Spanish and Italian, to my knowledge there has yet to be any systematic translation of his most important essays and interventions into either English or any other language—though work by Kerstin Stakemeier will soon begin to ameliorate this. For an overview of his published work, see Martin Zeiller, ed., *Peter Gorsen: Bausteine zu einer Bibliografie, 1962–2018* (Universität für angewandte Kunst, 2018). For a translation of one of his early essays, see Peter Gorsen, "Prolegomena to a Hedonistic Enlightenment," in *Why Art Criticism? A Reader*, ed. Beate Söntgen and Julia Voss (Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2022), 167–75.

43 See Odo Marquard, "Zur Bedeutung der Theorie des Unbewussten für eine Theorie der nicht mehr schönen Kunst," in *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste: Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen*, ed. Hans Robert Jauss (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968), 375–92, as well as his comments to the discussions. An English translation of Marquard's essay, alongside some select pieces from the original *Poetik und Hermeneutik* anthologies, can be found in Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, eds., *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism* (Princeton University Press, 1979).

44 Hans Robert Jauss, "Vorwort," in Jauss, *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste*, 11.

45 Odo Marquard in "Siebte Diskussion: Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen in der fortgeschrittenen Neuzeit," in Jauss, *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste*, 629.

46 See, for instance, the comparisons and links made in Peter Gorsen, "Wider die Sozialpartner der Barbarie: Theodor W. Adornos *Ästhetische Theorie*," in *Transformierte Alltäglichkeit*, 75–81. To date, the most significant historical analysis and development of Adorno's concept of "de-artification" remains Kerstin Stakemeier, *Entkunstung: Artistic Models for the End of Art* (Ph.D. diss, University College London, 2010). See also, Kerstin Stakemeier, "Deartification: This Side of Art; Ideology Critique, Autonomy and Reproduction," in Warren Carter, Barnaby Haran, and Frederic J. Schwartz, eds., *Re/New Marxist Art History* (Art Books, 2013), 494–504. Though I would contest other aspects of his interpretation, Richard Wolin is somewhat correct to link this to Benjamin's reflections of the 1930s when he writes: "In *Aesthetische Theorie* Benjamin's notion of the de-auraticization of art becomes the concept of *de-aestheticization* [*Entkunstung*], which signifies a final dissolution of the essential aesthetic qualities which have up until this century been inseparable from the concept of art itself." Richard Wolin, "The De-aestheticization of Art: On Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie*," *Telos* 41 (1979): 111. The same link is also posited in Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (University of California Press, 1982), 155.

47 Kerstin Stakemeier, *Entgrenzter Formalismus: Verfahren einer antimodernen Ästhetik* (b_books, 2017), 168. For an English-language contribution to the critical reception of Gorsen and his work on sexuality, see Kerstin Stakemeier, "(Dis)Alienating. Implicating. Aesthetics in Love," in this special issue.

48 Drawing on Rosenberg, Mattick Jr. makes a similar claim in arguing: "To a great extent, it is worth noting, the art celebrated under the rubric of the anti-aesthetic shares formal features with art of the earlier avant-garde, in particular with dada and surrealism in its use of text, photography,

and stylishly ordered juxtapositions of images and objects." Mattick Jr., "Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics," 256. For a critical assessment of Gorsen's theory of the avant-garde, see Tobias Dias, "The Aporia of Praxis: Materialist Aesthetics, the Avant-Garde, and Socially Engaged Art," in this special issue.

49 Gorsen, "Einleitung," 8.

50 "It was Adorno who first philosophically reflected on the loss of transcendence in new art (just as Horkheimer had with religion, Gehlen with morality): he perceived it to be a new quality of art which had assimilated its de-astheticisation." Gorsen, "Einleitung," 10.

51 Efforts that would subsequently result in positing US abstract expressionism as the heir to European avant-gardism. Osborne, *Anywhere*, 18–22.

52 Gorsen, "Einleitung," 11.

53 Herbert Marcuse, "Art as Form of Reality," *New Left Review* 74 (1972): 56, emphasis in the original.

54 Gorsen, "Einleitung," 17, emphasis in the original. I have here translated the phrase "Life performance" as "live performance" in the assumption that this is a typo in Gorsen's English.

55 Though this is left as only indicative, in his account of post-war artistic practice, Rosenberg links the prehistory of the aestheticisation of the everyday to the Fascist aestheticisation of politics. He writes: "In the distant background of art *povera* [sic.] is the 'real' art of Marinetti's bursting shrapnel of the First World War visualised as a stupendous earthwork, and the patterns and rhythms of the Nuremberg rallies seen as communicative systems." Rosenberg, "De-aestheticization," 37. With Eunsong Kim, we could equally understand the "aestheticisation" of the everyday as part of a history of racialised property relations, of the rendering of those property relations as aesthetic categories and value judgements. See, in particular, chapters three and six of Eunsong Kim, *The Politics of Collecting: Race and the Aestheticization of Property* (Duke University Press, 2024).

56 Gorsen, "Thesen zur künstlerischen Verarbeitung," 272–73.

57 Citing Burger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Gorsen writes that "the actuality [*Aktualität*] of everyday aesthetics is much more a symptom and first result of the general demolition of art and its historical consciousness by capitalism itself." Gorsen, "Thesen zur künstlerischen Verarbeitung," 271.

58 Gorsen, "Thesen zur künstlerischen Verarbeitung," 274.

59 For one argument that regards the discipline of aesthetics as coeval with the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere, changes in patronage and statecraft, etc., see Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

60 Gorsen, "Einleitung," 17–18, emphasis in the original. Cf. Peter Gorsen, "Subjektlose Kunst," in *Transformierte Alltäglichkeit*, 57–73.23 Osborne, *Anywhere*, 38–46.