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Art Criticism: A 'Poetic' Conversation

By

Joseph Kassman-Tod

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Abstract

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Berkeley

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One of the more striking claims in the history of aesthetics is Theodore Adorno's claim in his *Aesthetic Theory* that, "The task of aesthetics is not to comprehend artworks as hermeneutical objects; in the contemporary situation, it is their incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended" (2015, p.118). In a few words, this sentence addresses the question that motivates this dissertation. Artworks resist understanding. Adorno sees this as a problem for aesthetics. In this dissertation I reflect on the problem Adorno's claim illuminates for art criticism. If art criticism is an inquiry of understanding, and works of art resist comprehension, then what is it for art criticism to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art? I contend that a discourse adequate to the challenge of art criticism needs to be 'poetic'. Not in the sense of a literary genre, but rather in the Platonic sense of poiesis as the 'bringing-forth' of new forms of thought. Art criticism is not principally about describing or evaluating. Instead we should see that art criticism is primarily about opening a conversation that responds to an artwork. The result of my inquiry is a radically different picture of art criticism to that offered by prevailing discourses in philosophical aesthetics.

My goal in this dissertation is twofold. My first aim is to offer a novel analysis of art criticism. I consider the structure of thought involved in criticism, the form of interpretation proper to criticism, the language of criticism, and the kinds of sociality that are thereby emergent. My second aim is to bring German Classicism and Idealism, the work of Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Hölderlin in particular, into contact with contemporary philosophical thought.

Art Criticism: A 'Poetic' Conversation

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Introduction

What is ‘Fine Art’? What is ‘Criticism’?

One of the more striking claims in the history of aesthetics is Theodore Adorno’s claim in his *Aesthetic Theory* that, “The task of aesthetics is not to comprehend artworks as hermeneutical objects; in the contemporary situation, it is their incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended” (2015, p.118). In a few words, this sentence addresses the question that motivates this dissertation. Artworks resist understanding. Accordingly, they cannot be straightforwardly interpreted as ‘hermeneutical objects’. Adorno sees this as a problem for aesthetics. In this dissertation I reflect on the problem artworks pose to art criticism, and that “it is their incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended.” I want to show that the very wording of this claim captures the dynamics of a problem that motivates my inquiry: if art criticism is an inquiry of understanding, and works of fine art resist comprehension, then what is it for art criticism to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?

Contemporary philosophical reflection on art criticism tends to prioritize either the evaluative, judgmental, or descriptive work of criticism.¹ According to these kinds of views, criticism evaluates or describes that which is the source of the artwork’s value. For the Aesthetics Hedonist, what makes an aesthetic value a genuine form of value, is the constitutive relation it bears to pleasure; for the Aesthetic Formalist, what makes aesthetic value genuinely aesthetic, is the way it supervenes on formal properties. A routine thought in the theory of aesthetic value combines these theses: aesthetic value is the capacity of formal properties to cause pleasure. This combination of formalism and hedonism has been labeled “the default theory of aesthetic value”; it is the dominant theory of aesthetic value in post-war Anglophonic aesthetics. For proponents of the ‘default’ theory, the critic’s challenge is thus to evaluate or describe the formal properties that cause pleasure in the appreciator.^{2 3} However, if aesthetic value is a matter of the formal properties that cause pleasure in appropriately situated appreciators, then criticism is just a matter of describing or evaluating those properties. But this leaves utterly obscure what Adorno could be talking about.

In what follows I offer a retrieval of Adorno’s concerns by locating them as emergent from a modern understanding of ‘fine art’. I want to show that Adorno points us in a highly productive direction, but that our understanding of art criticism can be deepened if we look to the thoughts of Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Hölderlin, in particular.

My goal in this dissertation is twofold. My first aim is to offer a novel analysis of art criticism. I consider the structure of thought involved in criticism, the form of interpretation proper to criticism, the language of criticism, and the kinds of sociality that are thereby emergent. My second aim is to

¹ An evaluative approach is argued for by Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), a unified descriptive-evaluative model is argued for by Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), for a descriptive-judgmental view see James Grant, *The Critical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² For recent formulations and criticisms of the ‘default’ theory, see James Shelley, ‘The Default Theory of Aesthetic Value’ (2019), and Dominic McIver Lopes, *Being for Beauty*, (2018), Chapters 1-4. For recent proponents of the default theory or a close descendant, see Malcolm Budd, *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry, and Music* (1995); Mohan Matthen, ‘The Pleasure of Art’ (2007); Robert Stecker, ‘Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Value’ (2007); Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (1983).

³ Critics of hedonism often want to retain a connection to positive affect or ‘pleasure’ but seek to expand the relevant positive attitude to one of enjoyment (Malcolm Budd, *Aesthetic Essays*, 2008) admiration (Kendall Walton, ‘How Marvelous! Toward a Theory of Aesthetic Value’, 1993), or appreciation of some sort. Other criticisms of hedonism target the associated idea that aesthetic pleasure is ‘disinterested’ in the hopes establishing a more personal, passionate, or love-like theory of aesthetic affect (Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art*, 2007).

bring Schillerian and Hölderlinian aesthetic theory into contact with contemporary philosophical thought. These two poet/ philosophers thought deeply about Kantian aesthetics. It is from out of an interest in Kant's Third Critique, an interest shared by many in contemporary aesthetics, that a Schillerian and Hölderlinian intervention in contemporary thought can be productively developed. By bringing these two relatively marginalized thinkers into contact with contemporary aesthetics I offer new perspectives on existing questions, and illuminate questions that existing positions conceal.

The philosophical problem at issue can be summarized in the following terms: to feel the inadequacy of one's understanding with respect to an artwork is an opportunity; it is an opportunity to break from normalized patterns of thought and talk. My proposal is that the capacity to take up this opportunity is the capacity for art criticism. Art criticism is not merely the work of the professionally recognized and institutionally accredited 'art critic'. It is a capacity within each of us. My guiding question is what it is for art criticism to be done well? That is: *What is it for art criticism to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of art?*

My answer is framed by the thought that fine art blurs the boundaries between what is representable and unrepresentable, intelligible and unintelligible, imaginable and unimaginable. I argue that criticism is a discursive effort to embrace, intensify, and publicize the effects of this irresolution. More specifically, I contend that a discourse adequate to this task needs to be 'poetic'. Not in the sense of a literary genre, but rather in Friedrich Hölderlin's sense of poiesis as the 'bringing-forth' of new forms of thought. Art criticism is not principally about describing or evaluating. Instead we should see that art criticism is primarily about opening a conversation that responds to an artwork, so that we, in our discourse, can allow for new possibilities of sense-making to emerge. The result of my inquiry is a radically different picture of art criticism to that offered by prevailing discourses in philosophical aesthetics. It requires a new way of thinking about both art appreciation and art criticism.

In what follows of this introduction I will present the frames in terms of which the issues to be addressed by this dissertation can be understood. These frames will be categorized under two headings: What is fine art? What is criticism? In approaching these questions, I will elaborate the specific character of a critical response to works of fine art, provide justification for my framing of the topic, outline my approach, and provide an overview of the further course of the argument.

What it means to criticize works of fine art can be summarized as follows: criticism of fine art deals not only with the 'meaning', 'value', or 'content' of the artwork, but also with the ways in which artworks allow us to think and feel, where these 'ways' deviate from normalized patterns of thought and talk. Criticizing fine art as fine art is therefore in large part a matter of thematizing the meanings and concepts that the artwork problematizes. Works of fine art provoke a debate on the possibility of perceiving, feeling, and thinking about the world differently.

Addressing the problem and even the possibility of art criticism requires us to acknowledge certain forms of thought and talk that deviate from those most commonly recognized in contemporary aesthetics. My proposal is not oriented towards the irrational, but rather towards an expanded form of rationality, beyond the possibilities of rational thought and talk ordinarily reflected upon. I want to show that the possibilities and challenges involved in the criticism of fine art cannot be reduced to the challenges of evaluation or description.⁴ The kind of criticism I endeavor to illuminate here in this

⁴ In his own doctoral dissertation, Walter Benjamin argued that a revival of criticism would be possible through a reevaluation of the Romantics. Art criticism, in Benjamin's reading of the Romantics, is not so much a matter of judgment,

dissertation rests instead on a reappraisal of our understanding of fine art, and on the productive potentialities of our critical engagement with it.

What is ‘Fine Art’ (*schöne Kunst*)?

What is a work of ‘fine art’? Neither the everyday meaning nor the philosophical use of the concept is clear or consistent. The analysis I offer will be a conceptual proposal for how to understand ‘fine art’. The following qualities serve as my criteria for what counts as a work of fine art: fine art resists understanding, and yet our experience of fine art is productive for enriched sensory experience, enhanced understanding, and for strengthening the social ties between us.

Early reflections on ‘fine art’ contain certain elements that have been forgotten, neglected, or too quickly dismissed in contemporary aesthetics. These early efforts emphasize the utopian, emancipatory, and critical potential of art—that is, the ability of the work of art to break through, at least momentarily, the prevailing narratives that regulate a community’s thought and talk. The work of art, they argue, allows us to view history and society in a different light. This light, however, is only available through appropriate forms of appreciation and criticism. These ideas are not the kinds of ideas that are particularly in vogue today. I deem them crucial, however, to the belief that works of art have an important place in social life.

Aesthetics as a philosophical discipline did not receive its name until 1735, when Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduced it in his master’s thesis to mean *epistémê aisthetikê*, namely, the science of what is sensed:^{5 6}

The Greek philosophers and the Church fathers have always carefully distinguished between the aistheta and the noeta, that is, between objects of sense and objects of thought. The aistheta are the subject of the episteme aisthetike or AESTHETICS [the science of perception]
(*Meditationes on Poetry*, §CXVI, p. 86).

It is in the ‘Prolegomena’ to his *Aesthetica* that we find Baumgarten’s definition of aesthetics:

Aesthetics (the theory of the liberal arts, the logic of the lower capacities of cognition [*gnoseologia inferior*], the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the *analogon rationis*) is the science of sensible cognition. (*Aesthetica*, §1)

but aims, rather, at the ‘completion’ of a work of art through its reception: “Criticism is far less the judgment of the work than its consummation,” (2004, p.153). Benjamin contrasts ‘romantic’ with ‘enlightenment’ models of criticism: “the complete positivity of criticism, in which the romantic concept of criticism is radically distinguished from the modern concept, which sees criticism as a court of judgment.” For the Romantic, aesthetics is not merely as a matter of pleasure or the refinement of one’s taste, but serves to educate and develop subjectivity.

⁵ Aesthetics, without its name, has been present to philosophy since antiquity, most clearly when Plato challenged the educational tendencies of poetry in the *Republic*, and when Aristotle defended them in his *Poetics*. Aristotle defends poetry from Plato’s argument that poetry turns us away from truth by presenting images of particulars rather than universal truths. Aristotle argues that poetry addresses universal truths, unlike history, which addresses particular facts (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451a37–1451b10). Moreover, by allowing for the *catharsis* of our emotions, and by revealing moral truths, poetry can also contribute to the development of ethical excellence, the other aspect of Plato’s criticism.

⁶ For an extended treatment of eighteenth-century aesthetics see Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics, Volume 1* (2014).

Baumgarten claims that beauty consists in the perfection of “sensible cognition.” This tells us that beauty obtains in the realization of the potentialities proper to sensible experience, independently of any further purpose sensation might have:

The aim of aesthetics is the perfection of sensible cognition as such, that is, beauty, while its imperfection as such, that is, ugliness, is to be avoided. (*Aesthetica*, §14)

Fifty years prior to Baumgarten’s thesis, Leibniz illustrated his view that sensory perception is a clear but indistinct or confused form of knowledge with a reference to judgments about paintings: “Likewise we sometimes see painters and other artists correctly judge what has been done well or badly; yet they are often unable to give a reason for their judgment but tell the inquirer that the work which displeases them lacks ‘something, I know not what’” (Leibniz, *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas* (1684), p. 291). The breakdown in reason-giving and justification indicates that from the earliest moments of modern thought about artworks, what comes to be recognized as ‘fine art’ resists evaluation grounded in reasons.

Winckelmann’s essay ‘On the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks’ (1755) opens with the claim that “There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequaled; I mean, by imitating the ancients” (2001, p. 2). The greatness of Greek art, according to Winckelmann, is obtained because it represents the bodily beauty of the ancient Greeks, and their bodily beauty was a manifestation of the ancient Greek beautiful soul.⁷ Winckelmann’s argument is that the freedom of the beautiful soul is favorable for the development of art: “Art claims liberty: in vain would nature produce her noblest off-springs, in a country where rigid laws would choke her progressive growth.” So we find in Winckelmann’s work the idea that artworks exceed the domain of law-bound nature, and thereby sensuously present the possibility of human freedom.

In his *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing also characterized ‘art’ as conducive for and an expression of freedom. For Lessing, the emphasis is on freedom from religious orders:⁸

I should like the name of ‘works of art’ to be reserved for those alone in which the artist could show himself actually as artist, in which beauty has been his first and last object. All the rest, in which too evident traces of religious ritual appear, are unworthy of the name, because Art here has not wrought on her own account, but has been an auxiliary of religion, looking in the material representations which she made of it more to the significant than to the beautiful;
(2003, pp.64-65)

⁷ Winckelmann illustrates this claim with reference to the statue of Trojan priest, Laocoön. The statue depicts Laocoön being strangled by serpents sent by Neptune to stop him, Laocoön, from arguing against accepting the Trojan horse into the city. Winckelmann writes: “The Expression of so great a soul is beyond the force of mere nature. It was in his own mind the artist was to search for the strength of spirit with which he marked his marble.” (2001, p. 30).

⁸ The main text of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* opens with the following thought: “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist” (2015, p1). Adorno is addressing a perceived crisis in the relation between art and society. Ever since art was liberated from church and state, it has appeared as a purposeless social phenomenon.

Karl Philipp Moritz, in his essay *On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful* (1788), claims that the perfection of the beautiful object consists in the “great interconnection of things... the true whole” (2003, p.139) insofar as we perceive “the true whole” by means of the senses and imagination. Moritz writes that “Each beautiful whole coming from the hand of the artist is thus an impression in miniature of the highest beauty of the whole of nature;” (2003, p.139). Beautiful art intimates the unity of nature. Artworks thereby make this unity sensually available to us in a way that ordinary forms of thought and sensory experience of objects cannot do. Only in the experience of the beautiful can we achieve a sensitivity to the order and unity of nature. For Moritz, artworks thereby sensorially present that which is excessive to the understanding. Moritz claims that “The nature of the beautiful consists precisely in the fact that its inner nature exists outside of the boundaries of the power of thought, in its generation, in its becoming” (2003, p.143), and then concludes, “The beautiful is beautiful precisely because the power of thought can no longer ask why it is beautiful” (2003, p.143). Beauty thus resists understanding. With these claims, Moritz bears at least a superficial similarity to Kant. However, while Kant provides his analysis of aesthetic judgment in terms of the transcendental structures of subjectivity, Moritz draws his conclusions from the proposal that beautiful art intimates the unity of nature, and it is this unity that exceeds the limits of the understanding.

In the *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, KU), Kant begins his analysis of pure aesthetic judgments of beauty from the premise that our pleasure in the object of our judgment obtains independently of any interest in the existence of the object (§3, pp.44-48). That is, we do not take pleasure in the object as agreeable to us, or as good for some practical purpose (§4, pp.48-51). Equally, a judgment of taste does not express a simple association of pleasure with the object. To judge that an object is beautiful involves speaking with a ‘universal voice’. The judgment consists in an assertion that the pleasure one takes in the object ought to be felt by any appropriately situated judging subject, even though “there can be no rule by which someone could be compelled to acknowledge that something is beautiful” (§8, p.59). Kant’s claim that a judgment of beauty is not conceptually determined means that the judgment cannot be justified by the object falling or failing to fall under a cognitive or moral concept. The fact that a property capable of conceptual discrimination is true of an object, cannot justify the judgment that the object is beautiful.

Kant argues that the ‘universal voice’ in which judgments of the beautiful are issued is founded not on a rule, i.e. a concept, rather, it is founded on free play of the cognitive faculties. The object’s arousal of a free play between the imagination and the understanding is manifest to consciousness as a disinterested form of pleasure. The feeling of disinterested pleasure justifies the universal claim in judgments of the beautiful because the imagination and the understanding must work the same way in everyone: “[there is] a basis that determines the feeling of pleasure a priori and validly for everyone. And the feeling of pleasure is determined a priori and validly for everyone merely because we refer the object to the cognitive power;” (KU, ‘Introduction’, p.27).⁹

⁹ Judgments of beauty need a deduction because they claim universal validity. As Kant notes, “it is not the pleasure, but *the universal validity of this pleasure*, perceived as connected in the mind with our mere judging of an object, that we present a priori as [a] universal rule for the power of judgment, valid for everyone” (§37, p.154). The deduction of judgments of taste is to provide a ground for the universal validity of these kinds of judgments. The deduction claims that the harmony between imagination and understanding, which is the source of the pleasure founding judgments of the beautiful, is the relation between the imagination and the understanding that is necessary for cognitive judgments in general. Accordingly, the harmony of the imagination and understanding that obtains in judgments of taste may be presupposed as valid for all appropriately situated subjects. Kant’s argument in §38, the ‘Deduction of Judgments of Taste’, focuses on this point. Judgments of taste meet the necessary subjective conditions for cognitive judgements, and are thus universally valid.

Kant's analysis of aesthetic response to works of fine art, is a development on his analysis of pure aesthetic judgment. According to Kant, all art is intentional human production. 'Fine art' is distinguished by being produced with the intention of arousing the cognitive faculties into a condition of free play. Moreover, a work of 'fine art' must express an 'aesthetic idea' that is purposive for the presentation of a rational idea, an empirical concept, or an emotion. Kant says that an 'aesthetic idea' is a representation of the imagination that "[strives] toward something that lies beyond the bounds of experience, and hence [tries] to approach an exhibition of rational concepts (intellectual ideas)" (§49, p.182). A work of fine art stimulates such a diversity of sensory images and associations, that it cannot be conceptually determined. Judgments of fine art thus consist in the free play of the imagination, understanding, and reason. According to Kant, this free play is productive for enhanced sensory experience, expanded understanding, and for strengthening the social ties between us.¹⁰

Kant argues that aesthetic judgments of fine art serve cognition *indirectly* by 'expanding' our cognitive faculties (KU §49, p.185).¹¹ The understanding undergoes 'expansion' in the following respect. According to Kant, understanding stands in an oppositional relation with sensibility. While sensibility is oriented towards the particular (intuitions), understanding is oriented towards the universal (concepts). Accordingly, Kant suggests that sensibility and understanding "are indispensable to each other, still it is difficult to combine them without [using] constraint and without their impairing each other;" (§51, p.190). The impairment incurred in acts of cognition appears to be softened in aesthetic judgment: "their combination and harmony must appear unintentional and spontaneous if the art is to be fine art." In our response to works of fine art, the understanding is cultivated towards a heightened disposition for interplay with sensuality. In this way the understanding is 'expanded'. Our acts of cognition can be more subtle and nuanced.

Kant also claims that the aesthetic idea expressed by a work of fine art "aesthetically expands the concept itself in an unlimited way" (§49, p.183). For Kant, we can think of the content of an empirical concept as involving both 'logical' and 'aesthetic' content. A concept's 'logical content' grounds our theoretical cognition as that which is analytically true of the concept. A concept's 'aesthetic content' includes subjective associations and 'feels'. Works of fine art can contribute to this latter kind of content, hence Kant's claim that aesthetic ideas can supply "a wealth of undeveloped material" which had not been true of the concept (§49, p.185). Aesthetic attributes can expand a concept with subjective qualities, like memories and affective associations, while preserving the concept's logical content. Aesthetic judgments of fine art thereby indirectly allow for richer cognitive experience because the diversity of representations schematized by the imagination in acts of cognition will be expanded.

Regarding the sociality of aesthetic judgment, in §20 Kant claims that judgments of the beautiful depend on the 'presupposition' of a *sensus communis*; and in §21 he attempts to demonstrate that we

¹⁰ Though the moral benefits of aesthetic experience are among the most important for Kant, they are marginal to my own interest in his analysis of fine art. For instance, Kant holds that the 'aesthetic ideas' expressed by works of fine art present morally significant ideas. He also proposes that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good because there are important parallels between our experience of beauty and the possibility of acting in accordance with the demands of morality (§59, p.229). For these reasons, judgments of the beautiful have a role to play in moral education: "Taste enables us, as it were, to make the transition from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest without making too violent a leap;" (§59, p.230).

¹¹ Kant writes: "we assess the value of the fine arts by the culture [or cultivation] they provide for the mind, taking as our standard the **expansion of those powers that have to come together in the power of judgment in order for cognition to arise**," (§.53, p.199, bold emphasis added).

have good reason for this presupposing. Kant claims that if judgments of taste are universally valid—and thereby presuppose a *sensus communis*—then they must meet “the attunement [Stimmung] of the cognitive powers that is required for cognition in general,” (§21, p. 88) i.e. the subjective conditions for claims to knowledge. Since this attunement is realized by the free play of the imagination and the understanding, Kant can conclude that we are entitled to presuppose a *sensus communis*. *Sensus communis* is therefore both a ground and a goal of aesthetic judgment: the universal validity of such judgments presupposes a *sensus communis*, and the demand for others to share in the pleasure I take in the object is a call for a *sensus communis*. For Kant, commonality, communication, and sensibility are implicated in aesthetic judgment. The capacity for aesthetic judgment implies the capacity for aligning our own sensuality with others. Judgments of beauty are therefore conducive for non-coercive communal formation amongst sensuo-rational subjects.¹²

Schiller criticized and developed Kant’s views. In the *Kallias Letters*, written to his friend Gottfried Körner in January and February of 1793, Schiller argues that Kant’s “subjectivist” conception of free play in aesthetic judgment needs to be complemented with an “objectivist” conception of beauty as the appearance of freedom or self-determination in the *object*. For Schiller, a beautiful form is one that appears to us to be determined only by itself and not by any force external to it. Schiller writes, “A form is beautiful, one might say, if it *demands no explanation*, or if it *explains itself without a concept*” (2003, p. 155). The beautiful object appears to the appreciating subject as beautiful, independently of any pre-existing or prevailing norms of cognition.

Schiller’s *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* [*Ästhetische Briefe*] (1795), written to his patron, the Duke of Augustenburg, continue this theme. The first letter involves recognition of the challenge that aesthetics poses to rational thought: “the whole enchantment of beauty resides in its mystery.” (L.1, p.88). In the second letter Schiller claims that “it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom” and thus to the achievement of political justice (L2, p. 90).¹³ With this claim Schiller sharply diverges from Kant’s views on the relation between aesthetics and morality. For Schiller, the cultivation of taste through aesthetic education is both necessary and sufficient for achieving the ethical and political demands of morality, rather than, as Kant supposed, a mere preparation for moral development.

Schiller analyzes human beings as subject to two conflicting forces: the ‘sense drive’ and the ‘form drive’. In ancient Greece, Schiller argues, these were in harmony, but in modern society people’s individual development had become excessively one-sided and imbalanced. In his sixth letter he characterizes the fragmentation distinctive to modernity: “we see not merely individuals, but whole classes of people, developing but one part of their potentialities, while of the rest, as in stunted growths, only vestigial traces remain.” (L6, p.98). People turn into either savage animals or insensitive intellectuals. Without harmony between the two drives in our humanity, people have no individual freedom, and without individual freedom people are unable to realize political freedom. Schiller wants us to see that the reign of terror following the French Revolution was consequent to this incapacity.

¹² In the ‘Appendix, On the Methodology Concerning Taste’, Kant says that the cultivation of common standards of taste allows for “the art of the reciprocal communication of ideas” (§60, p.231), and that this art is needed to achieve “sociability *under laws*, through which a people becomes a lasting commonwealth” i.e. a stable political community founded on shared attunement rather than brute force.

¹³ Throughout this dissertation I refer to The German Library edition of Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in *Essays: Friedrich Schiller*. Citations of the translation follows a convention of referring to the relevant letter (e.g. L2 or L15) followed by the page number of the German Library edition.

Harmony between the two drives can be achieved, according to Schiller, only through their reciprocity, namely, a condition of play. Schiller writes: “For, to mince matters no longer, man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and *he is only fully a human being when he plays.*” (L.XV, p.131). The experience of beauty will induce reciprocity in us. Accordingly, humanity needs an aesthetic education.¹⁴ For Schiller, fine art can educate people by bringing their drives into a condition of reciprocity, thereby providing the conditions for people to establish forms of political community that realize the ideals of the French revolution.

Returning to the question that motivates this dissertation—*What is it for art criticism to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?*—we now have a sharper sense of the historical context that motivates this question. If artworks evade decisive understanding, then art criticism cannot say what the artwork means without lapsing into nonsense. On pain of insensitivity to the artwork, the critic ought not to externally impose their own interpretation onto the artwork; yet on pain of speaking nonsense, the critic ought not fully to relinquish recognized standards of meaning and understanding. Criticism must find a form of discourse that does not jettison the need for communicability, and yet it must do so in a way that is not insensitive to the artwork.

Works of fine art exceed our ability discursively to determine them; they appear as excessive with respect to prevailing and pre-existing norms of sense-making. One cannot think of the artwork in terms of communicable standards of meaning and understanding without recognizing what Schiller called the artwork’s ‘mystery’. Works of fine art appear as meaningful in ways that are not sanctioned by what has been recognized as meaningful. This aspect of an artwork’s appearance motivates critical reflection while remaining beyond discursive determination. So exactly what kind of criticism is called for?

What is Criticism?

In the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines what he means by a ‘critique of reason’:

[we demand] that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions, and this not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws; and this court is none other than the critique of pure reason itself. (Axi–xii)¹⁵

Self-knowledge is presented as the absence of “unjustified pretensions” regarding that which reason can claim to know. We achieve this absence by way of a trial in which reason is called to justify its claims. This would seem to be the method by which Kant is going to address what, in the ‘Introduction’, he calls the “real problem of pure reason,” (B19), i.e. the possibility of judgments that are universal, necessary, and yet expansive (i.e. synthetic a priori judgments). Kant goes on to offer a clarification of what he means by ‘critique’:

¹⁴ In practice, since individuals tend to be imbalanced in either the direction of ‘form’—driven by principles and numb to particulars—or in the direction of ‘sense’—to be absorbed in particulars and thus inadequately attentive to principles—there will be two types of beauty, “energizing” beauty and “relaxing” or “melting” beauty, which will either strengthen one’s attentiveness to principles, or relax the grip of principles, whichever is needed (L17).

¹⁵ This reference is to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Axi–xii. All references to Kant’s first Critique use the standard A/B pagination of the first (1781, A) and second (1787, B) editions.

Yet by this I do not understand a critique of books and systems, but a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles. (Axi).¹⁶

According to this clarification, ‘critique’ includes, yet exceeds, the “real problem of pure reason.” Critique will address the ‘real problem’ by determining the “sources” of reason’s a priori cognitions, but it will also determine the “boundaries” of these cognitions. As Kant says later in the text, “philosophy consists precisely in knowing its bounds,” (A727/B755). ‘Critique’ is a method for achieving a form of self-knowledge that consists in knowing the boundaries of one’s cognitive capacities. The model of criticism that I advance in this dissertation draws on this aspect of Kant’s approach. Criticism of fine art involves reflecting on the limits of our understanding. However, to criticize ‘fine art’ involves going beyond these limits, or as Kant might have said, it involves ‘expanding’ these limits. So I depart from Kant’s critical method by asking what it is to move productively beyond those limits, without merely speaking nonsense. Moreover, I propose that this is an aspect of critique that Schiller opened up for us.

Beauty, according to Schiller, cultivates a way of thinking that Schiller calls “aesthetic.” In his *Kallias Letters*, Schiller reflects on how this form of thought is made possible by Kant’s emphasis on beauty’s resistance to conceptual determination.¹⁷ This form of resistance discloses a kind of judgment that does not issue in determinate categorization.¹⁸ For Schiller, the conceptual resistance involved in aesthetic experience becomes the initiating gesture for a new kind of philosophical critique—one that Schiller conceives as a historical and political form of critique.

This theme is developed in his *Ästhetische Briefe*. Beauty not only resists conceptual determination; for Schiller, it also resists the violence involved in the modern emphasis on productivity. Aesthetic experience thereby affords a perspective from which to critique the social norms at work in the present, and allows us to think towards new historical possibilities. Schiller calls this productive aspect of aesthetic experience “real and active determinability” (L20, p.145). In aesthetic experience one is free to determine oneself—one’s thought, sensuality, actions, and discourse—in ways that break from pre-existing and prevailing social norms.

Schiller interprets Kant’s aesthetics as allowing for a critical standpoint on the present. In the experience of beauty, wherein “the whole enchantment of beauty resides in its mystery,” (L1. p.88),

¹⁶ In striking contrast to this line from Kant, Herder’s *A Metacritique of the Critique of Pure Reason* begins with the claim: “Critique of Pure Reason: the title is alienating. One does not criticize a natural human capacity; one rather investigates, determines, limits it, shows its use and misuse. One criticizes arts, sciences, considered as products of human beings.” Rachel Zuckert (2020, p.156) argues that Herderian critique is conversation about publicly accessible objects.

¹⁷ The interpretation of Schiller in this section leans heavily on work by María del Rosario Acosta López. See, for instance, ‘On an Aesthetic Dimension of Critique: The Time of the Beautiful in Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters*’, in *Critique in German Philosophy: From Kant to Critical Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), 89-110; and ‘The Violence of Reason: Schiller and Hegel on the French Revolution,’ in *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy*, ed. María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey Powell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 59–82.

¹⁸ Acosta López (2020, p.92) argues that the resistance of a beautiful object to conceptual determination also exhibits the violence involved in categorization.

Schiller finds a critical standpoint that allows for an interruption in our normalized ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and talking. It is from out of his appreciation of the critical potential of aesthetic experience that Schiller claims, “if we are ever to solve the problem of politics in practice we must take the path of aesthetics,” (L.2, p.90).

The appearance of beauty not only displays this possibility, but also serves as an invitation and an exhortation to actualize our freedom. Schiller writes in his *Kallias Letters* that “[beauty] calls to me: be free like me.” (2003, p.173). The experience of beauty is for Schiller not only, as for Kant, a suspension of our theoretical and practical ways of relating to objects and to nature. Aesthetic experience also consists in being displaced into a critical way of thinking and feeling. The standpoint opened up by beauty—a standpoint of critique—involves the suspension of normalized determinations of meaning and understanding. That is to say, in aesthetic experience one can think towards new possibilities of thought, talk, sensation, and action.

From Schiller, we learn that fine art’s resistance to conceptual determination opens up the possibility for a distinctively aesthetic form of critique. This is a form of critique that frees our thought and sensibility from pre-existing and prevailing norms of sense-making, and allows us to think towards new ways of making sense of ourselves and the world in which we live. It is this Kant-inspired, Schillerian form of critique that I present and develop in this dissertation.

Program

This dissertation takes the following as its guiding question: *What is it for art criticism to appropriately and productively respond to a work of fine art?* In responding to this question I will offer a narrative arc that moves from inquiry into the kind of thought proper to art criticism, to the language consequent to this thought, and finally to the form of sociality that is fashioned by this discourse.

Chapter one concerns the kind of thought proper to optimally productive forms of art criticism. The dissertation’s guiding question will be refined in the following way: *What is it for one’s thought to be appropriately and productively responsive to fine art?* Responses to this question face two opposing dangers: ‘aesthetic servility’ and ‘aesthetic hubris’. In this chapter I argue that aesthetic humility corrects for both of these alternatives. More specifically, I argue that Hölderlin provides a promising model of aesthetic humility. In developing this model I contend that the artwork-directed dimension of aesthetic humility takes the form of ‘remembrance’. My proposal is that ‘remembrance’ consists in thoughtful attentiveness to possibilities of sense-making that have been or are being marginalized. The retrospective aspect of ‘remembrance’ in turn opens our understanding to new possibilities for thought and sensual experience to come. From an analysis of Hölderlin’s mourning-play ‘The Death of Empedocles’ and his theoretical essay ‘The Declining Fatherland...’, I argue that the kind of thought in terms of which we appropriately and productively respond to fine art, is a form of ‘remembrance’.

Continuing my focus on thoughtful responses to works of fine art, chapter two contends that the kind of interpretation needed for art criticism is a form of play. More specifically, I propose that it is a form of play governed by what I call the ‘norm of critique’: a norm to question, and to keep questioning. To develop my presentation of the play needed for optimally productive forms of art criticism, I look to Schiller’s *Ästhetische Briefe*. Here, two points are emphasized: that Schiller analyzed play in terms of the operations of subjectivity; and that according to Schiller, the ‘laws of beauty’ regulate play and provide the conditions by which one is free from the demands of all pre-existing and prevailing laws.

Finally, I offer an interpretation of Schiller's analysis, according to which play-as-reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) is characteristic of the relation between sense and nonsense. On this basis I provide an analysis of the play proper to art criticism. I claim that participation in the 'playroom' between artwork and critic, requires that one's thought conforms with the norm of critique.

In chapter three I enter into reflection on the kind of language that is emergent from playful remembrance in aesthetic response. With this turn in our inquiry the guiding question becomes: *What would it be for the language of art criticism to be both appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?* In this chapter I highlight the need for a 'poetic' quality. I argue against both 'prosaic' views that take the project of art criticism to consist in determining the 'meaning', 'value', or 'content' of the artwork; and 'poetic' views that take art criticism, when done well, to consist in a literary response to the artwork, i.e. art criticism as poetry.¹⁹ My proposal takes its cue from Kant's claim that aesthetic judgments of fine art 'expand' both mind and concept (KU, §49), and offers an interpretation of this claim inspired by Hölderlin. I propose that the language of art criticism is 'expanded' by new possibilities of thought and talk to come, and that as such, the language counts as 'poetic'. Art criticism is bound by norms of communicability, but its discourse expands beyond those norms towards new possibilities of sense-making. I illuminate this form of discourse through an analysis of Hölderlin's 'poetic' translations of Sophocles, and contend that this kind of discourse is also proper to optimally productive forms of art criticism.

The dissertation is brought to its concluding movement by reflection on the sociality of art criticism. In this chapter the guiding question is: *What is it for art-critical communication to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?* Broadly, contemporary work on the nature and purpose of aesthetic discourse tends to prioritize one of two poles: the need for agreement in judgment and/ or sensibility, and the flourishing of individuality through aesthetic response. I propose that these alternatives each express the legacy of Kantian and Schillerian thought, respectively. I argue that a favorable approach is available if we look to Hölderlin's way of characterizing the kind of communication that can occur between friends. Drawing on Hölderlin's thought, I submit Diversity-in-Unity as a norm on art-critical conversation. This is a framework that binds together a plurality of perspectives and voices, with what it is for one's individuality to flourish in and through aesthetic response. In art criticism, individual perspectives need to be reciprocally shaped in new and surprising ways.

According to the view being offered, when done well, art criticism avoids a judgment of what counts as 'good' or 'bad'. Art criticism can only be called *critical* if it opens discourse to new possibilities of thought, talk, and sensuality. In our critical responses to fine art, one reflects on the way the artwork cultivates a sensitivity both to the contingency of meaning and to the norms that regulate public discourse. Art criticism involves bringing into public discourse new possibilities of sense-making. These are possibilities that emerge from thoughtful reflection on the artwork and its invitation to see the world differently. Alternatively stated, criticism consists in thinking and speaking about an artwork as presenting a determination that marginalizes and negates other possibilities of sense-making. In 'remembrance' we think of these excluded possibilities, and in 'poetic' discourse we bring these excluded possibilities into the public arena. Works of fine art exceed the scope of our understanding, and yet, as Adorno acutely summarized, "it is their incomprehensibility that needs to be

¹⁹ For instance, in his *Critical Fragments*, number 117, Friedrich Schlegel writes "Poetry can only be criticized by way of poetry." (2003, p.244).

comprehended.” This dissertation offers a way of productively acknowledging the problematic status of art criticism without simply dissolving the problem.²⁰

If we cannot directly determine the ‘meaning’, ‘content’ or ‘value’ of an artwork, then what does this imply about the social dimension of art criticism? My proposal is that when done well, art-critical communication takes the form of agonal conversation. That is, art-critical communication fosters dissensus between a plurality of interpretations articulated from individual and subjective points of view. Conversation, I propose, allows one to recognize another perspective, and thus potentially to correct one’s own prejudices by meeting with the tests and challenges of others’ views.²¹ The public arena, the context for and audience to which criticism is articulated, involves many other people within complex historical, experiential, linguistic contexts, who each—as limited, particular, finite beings—occupy different and distinct perspectives within that common context, with different senses of what is important. Critical friction among viewpoints can correct for prejudices and interpretive insensitivities.

Art criticism involves the public exchange of experiences. It makes aesthetic experience a matter of public concern. The practice assumes that each of us can wonder at, reflect on, and argue about art. In what follows I submit that, when done well, art criticism takes the form of a ‘poetic’ conversation.

²⁰ This construal of art criticism draws somewhat on Christoph Menke’s understanding of critical method. Menke (2020) argues that criticism takes that which counts as ‘actual’, not as fact or given, but as the presentation of a “hidden” content in a specific form (e.g. the presentation of social labor in the form of exchange value). For Menke, true criticism is not interested in what is concealed. To criticize does not mean to unearth some hidden content behind a given piece of social reality. Criticism only begins with the question of the form in which this content is presented by that moment of social reality, i.e., by reading reality as a presentation. The act of critique asks not for the hidden content but for why this content, e.g. social labor, presents itself in the form of value. This is how Menke defined non-dogmatic forms of critique: “critique means to dismantle the illusion of necessity and to reveal it as a mere possibility; it also could have taken on another shape” (2020, p.384).

²¹ In this respect there is an important contrast between the vision I offer, and Rachel Zuckert’s Herderian model of critique (2020), in that the latter appeals to common standards, to criteria shared between author and critic, and between critic and the wider public. For Zuckert (2020, p.166), critique as conversation can clarify what those rules (e.g., our criteria of rationality) are. She proposes that Herderian critics take themselves to judge and to accord with or to be subject to already-given criteria. However, they acknowledge that these criteria may need to be investigated and made more precise or more present to consciousness. I propose, to the contrary, that in art criticism it is exactly these pre-existing and prevailing norms that are called into question and rendered available for revision.

Chapter 1

Aesthetic Humility as ‘Remembrance’: A Critical Virtue

History... is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.
(James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 1990, p.34)

Only that is the most veritable truth [wahrste Wahrheit] wherein even error—
because it is posited in the whole of its system, in its time and space—becomes truth.
It [truth] is the light that illuminates itself and the night as well.
(Hölderlin, ‘Reflection’, 1988, p.46)

In this chapter I illuminate the need for humility in aesthetic response.²² I argue that Hölderlin’s poetic and prosaic reflections on the dangers of hubris provide a rich and promising model for aesthetic humility, in its artwork-directed aspect.

My arguments will be oriented and motivated by the following question: *What is it for one’s thought to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?* Responses to this question face two opposing dangers. On the one hand, responses risk aesthetic servility. This arises when aesthetic response tends towards excessive passivity, such that either a need for interpretation is relinquished and aesthetic response then consists only in a simple hedonic tone, or when criticism consists solely in a descriptive account of the artwork’s sensuous properties.²³ Excessive passivity tends towards what I am calling ‘aesthetic servility’ because it would place the appreciator in a servile relation to their receptive faculties. Aesthetic servility can be seen as a vice, because it would amount to a failure to satisfy the need for interpretation.²⁴

On the other hand, responses to this chapter’s leading question risk aesthetic hubris. Hubris arises when a critic presumes themselves to have determined the ‘meaning’, ‘content’, or ‘value’ of an artwork by applying rules, concepts, and/ or theories conceived independently of their encounter with the artwork. Such approaches to criticism tend towards an excessively active and domineering approach. My proposal is that aesthetic humility serves as a corrective to both aesthetic servility and aesthetic hubris.

In developing this Hölderlinian model of aesthetic humility I have two main goals. My first goal is to argue for the artwork-directed dimension of aesthetic humility. To properly respond to this chapter’s guiding question, we need to acknowledge the ways in which art interpretation and criticism can

²² In recent work, Samantha Matherne has argued that Kant’s aesthetics provides a model of aesthetic humility. She argues that this aesthetic virtue has certain self- and other-directed attitudes, and can serve as a corrective to what she calls “the vices of aesthetic arrogance and aesthetic servility” (2022, p.8). Matherne argues that contrary to appearances, Kant’s aesthetics is a promising resource for developing a model of aesthetic humility.

²³ I say ‘simple hedonic tone’ to indicate that Kant’s analysis does not risk aesthetic servility. Kant understood aesthetic response to be free, in the sense that the pleasure upon which aesthetic judgment is grounded is not a matter of simple receptivity.

²⁴ I run against the prevailing view on virtue aesthetics which has been thought of as breaking with questions about aesthetic experience and appreciation, in order to concentrate on character. Pouivet argues that virtue aesthetics is “a break with... the aesthetics inherited from Kant... [which] emphasize[s] the notion of experience” (2018, p.365). Goldie (2010, p.830) also distances virtue aesthetics from Kantian discourses about aesthetic appreciation, judgment, and pleasure.

manifest this virtue and the vices that might cut against it. Drawing on Hölderlin's poetic and theoretical thought, I hope to bring out the dangers inherent in aesthetic servility and aesthetic hubris, and how aesthetic humility can counteract these tendencies. My second goal is perhaps more controversial. I argue that the artwork-directed dimension of aesthetic humility takes the form of 'remembrance'. Through a reading of Hölderlin's mourning-play 'The Death of Empedocles' and the theoretical essay 'The Declining Fatherland...', I aim to show that the kind of thought with which we appropriately and productively engage with a work of fine art, is a form of 'remembrance'. More specifically, it is a form of 'remembrance' whereby we think towards possibilities of sense-making that have been or are being marginalized by prevailing norms of thought and talk.

I begin in Part I by focusing the discussion on two well-known accounts of art criticism, by Susan Sontag and Richard Wollheim, respectively. I show how both Sontag and Wollheim can be read as providing an answer to this chapter's guiding question: *What is it for one's thought to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?* I argue that while Sontag argues for a model of criticism that tends towards excessive passivity, Wollheim argues for a model that tends towards excessive activity.²⁵ In Part II I look to Hölderlin's critique of hubris as poetized in his mourning-play, 'Der Tod des Empedocles' [The Death of Empedocles], and reflected on in his theoretical essay, 'Das Untergehende Vaterland...' [The Declining Fatherland...]. My primary purpose here is to reveal a form of thought that he characterizes as 'remembrance' (Erinnerung). In Part III I argue that 'remembrance', in this Hölderlinian sense, realizes aesthetic humility and thereby provides a compelling answer to this chapter's leading question. In Part III §1 I argue that art appreciation involves a need for interpretation, and that 'remembrance' corrects for aesthetic servility by satisfying this need in an optimally appropriate and productive fashion. In Part III §2 I argue that a capacity for displacement is cultivated and exercised in remembrance, and that this corrects for aesthetic hubris. In the exercise of this capacity, one resists any urge to rush a judgment or impose an interpretation. Exercising a capacity for displacement allows us to acknowledge the interpretive need for moving beyond our prejudices and preconceived categories of meaning and understanding. We experience the artwork as motivating a displacement of our normalized perspectives.

I. Eros & Retrieval

In this section I offer a reading of Sontag's 'Against Interpretation' and Wollheim's 'Criticism as Retrieval' as responding to this chapter's guiding question. Two claims will be made. First, that Sontag's proposals for art criticism risk rendering the critic too passive, such that their response to works of art will tend towards aesthetic servility. Second, I argue that criticism which accords with Wollheim's account will tend to be excessively active, and thus disposes the critic's work towards aesthetic hubris.

In her famous polemic against what I am calling aesthetic hubris, Susan Sontag offers a critique of the very practice of interpreting artworks. For Sontag, 'interpretation' is understood as a conscious effort to discern the meaning of an artwork by way of "certain code", or by applying "certain 'rules' of interpretation", such that the interpreter will then say, "Look, don't you see that X is really— or, really

²⁵ I construe these models of art criticism as forms of response to this chapter's guiding question, because I consider critical thought to be a capacity borne by each of us. Art criticism, therefore, is not merely the work of the professionally recognized and institutionally accredited art critic. In my view, our thoughtful responses to a work of art, our efforts to interpret it, count as instances of art criticism. This view very much inspired by Hannah Arendt's reflections on 'thinking' in general: "Thinking ... is not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty of everybody; by the same token, inability to think is... the ever-present possibility for everybody" (2003, p.187).

means—A? That Y is really B? That Z is really C?” (Sontag 2001, p.5). The interpreter, for Sontag, claims to be making the artwork intelligible by disclosing its meaning; they claim to be discerning a sense that is already there in the artwork. But Sontag, to the contrary, argues that interpretation consists in the imposition of a meaning that is not responsive to the artwork itself.

Sontag is worried about what she calls a “contemporary zeal for the project of interpretation,” which is motivated by “an open aggressiveness, an overt contempt for appearances” (2001, p.6). This contemporary form of interpretation is destructive because it looks for a meaning that is ‘behind’ that which is most obviously apparent. Sontag identifies Marxist and Freudian approaches to art criticism as primary examples of “aggressive and impious theories of interpretation,” whereby that which is sensually apparent “must be probed and pushed aside to find the true meaning— the latent content beneath.”

Rather than allowing our sensual capacities to flourish in and through aesthetic experience, Sontag claims that “interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art” (2001, p.6). Her point is that interpretation impoverishes sensual stimulation and “set[s] up a shadow world of ‘meanings’.” Sontag characterizes interpretation as a “philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone” (2001, p.7). She urges us to see that artworks can make us feel nervous and that interpretation is a way of taming the artwork because it reduces the artwork to its meaning, “Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable” (2001, p.7). Sontag contends that what matters in an artwork is its “pure, untranslatable, sensuous immediacy” (2001, p.8).²⁶ In this respect, she claims that interpretation “violates art” (2001, p.8), because it subjects artworks to categories of understanding that were conceived independently of the interpreter’s experience with the artwork.

Sontag calls for a form of criticism that serves rather than undermines the artwork. Instead of striving to assimilate art into thought, the critic would provide an accurate description of the way the artwork sensually appears to the critic themselves.²⁷ This would be criticism which “reveal[s] the sensuous surface of art without mucking about in it” (2001, p.11), and would thereby help us to see, hear, and feel more. Sontag contends that interpretation looks for a meaning that might not even be true to the artwork, and worse still, obscures the sensory presence of the artwork. For Sontag, criticism should make the artwork more real to us, “The function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*” (2001, p.12). Accordingly, “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art” (2001, p.12).

For Sontag, our response to an artwork is *appropriate* when we relinquish the need for interpretation and remain in a felt sensuous intimacy with it. Our response is *productive*, when we give a descriptive account of the artwork’s sensuous properties. Sontag makes an important point with which I agree. Namely, that the application of theories, concepts, or rules conceived independently of one’s aesthetic response, obscures the artwork. This kind of interpretation runs the risk of fabricating a meaning that

²⁶ Sontag can very well be read as an aesthetic hedonist. Broadly, the aesthetic hedonist claims that what makes aesthetic value a value is the constitutive relation it bears to pleasure. For recent formulations and criticisms of the default theory, see James Shelley, ‘The Default Theory of Aesthetic Value’, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 59(1) (2019), 1-12 and Dominic McIver Lopes, *Being for Beauty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), Chapters 1-4.

²⁷ In what follows I want to show that here Sontag is setting up a false opposition between a sensitive description of the way an artwork appears to one, and a thoughtful interpretation of what is revealed by that sensuous presentation. Merleau-Ponty’s *Cézanne’s Doubt* (*The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 59-75), and Arthur Danto’s criticism of Joachim Wtewael’s *The Wedding of Pelus and Thetis* in his ‘Three Ways to Look at Art’, *The Abuse of Beauty* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 125-142), are examples of criticism that do both.

is insensitive to the artwork itself. However, by relinquishing the need for interpretation, I propose that Sontag's approach to criticism risks excessive passivity to the point of aesthetic servility.

To bring this theoretical discussion to life, let us consider Charles Baudelaire's essay, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (*Peintre de la Vie Moderne*). This essay criticizes a series of illustrations by Constantine Guys:



Constantine Guys, 'Dandies in the Park', wikiart.org

What then can this passion be, which has crystalized into a doctrine, and has formed a number of outstanding devotees, this unwritten code that has molded so proud a brotherhood? It is, above all, the burning desire to create a personal form of originality, within the external limits of social conventions. It is a kind of cult of the ego... A dandy may be blasé, he may even suffer pain, but in the latter case he will keep smiling, like the Spartan under the bite of the fox. Clearly, then, dandyism in certain respects comes close to spirituality and to stoicism... whichever label these men claim for themselves, one and all stem from the same origin, all share the same characteristic of opposition and revolt; all are representatives of what is best in human pride, of that need, which is too rare in the modern generation, to combat and destroy triviality. That is the source, in your dandy, of that haughty, patrician, attitude, aggressive even in its coldness. ... Dandyism is the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages; ... Here in France, dandies are becoming rarer and rarer, ... when M. G. commits one of his dandies to

paper, he always gives him his historical character, ... All that is expressed to perfection in these illustrations.
(1988, p.420)

Baudelaire's criticism of this illustration doesn't describe its sensuous properties. Baudelaire doesn't dwell in the "pure, untranslatable, sensuous immediacy" (2001, p.8) of the artwork. He offers an interpretation, but would it be right to say that he thereby makes the artwork manageable and comfortable? Would it be correct to say that his interpretation sets up a 'shadow meaning'? In what follows, by turning our attention to Hölderlin's notion of 'remembrance', I argue that we should answer these two questions in the negative.²⁸

At the very least Sontag highlights a risk latent in interpretation. This is a risk that I believe to be present in Richard Wollheim's Freudian model of 'criticism as retrieval'. I propose that, in certain respects, when acted upon, this kind of criticism would tend towards aesthetic hubris. Wollheim argues that art criticism consists in the reconstruction of the creative process that culminates in the artwork of interest: "The creative process reconstructed, or retrieval complete, the work is then open to understanding" (2015, p.124). For Wollheim the artwork can realize the creative process to a greater or lesser extent, and it is critically relevant to consider the extent to which the creative process is realized in the artwork. The critic will consider the extent to which the resultant artwork obtained through design, how much is consequent to changes in intention, and which intentions went into the art-making process but were not realized in the resultant work. Wollheim emphasizes that the focus of retrieval is the meaning of the artwork, and not the meaning of the artist. The distinction, according to Wollheim, is that the creative process is more expansive than the artist's intentions. This is largely because the creative process includes social conventions, norms of art creation, the condition of the artistic tradition in which the artist is working, and beliefs held by the artists that are not directly relevant to their art-making intentions. When retrieving the creative process, the critic can make claims that are contrary to the artist's intentions, not least because the critic can use both theory and hindsight that were unavailable to the artist. This is the case, because the critic aims to give a maximally explanatory account of what the artist was doing.²⁹

²⁸ From a Platonic perspective, Anthony Nehamas has responded to Sontag in defense of interpretation. He argues that the binary set up by Sontag between hermeneutics and erotics, is false. They do not exclude one another. Nehamas argues, correctly in my view, that interpretation is always incomplete because nothing is what it is independently of anything else: "no moment, no person, no thing has a meaning in and of itself" (2010, p.125), and that interpretation is called for as long as love and beauty obtain. Only under conditions of indifference does the need for interpretation cease. We have no choice but to interpret the objects we love, Nehamas claims. In loving an artwork there is a need to try to understand what makes it beautiful, what provokes our love: "That is the least beauty inspires and love requires" (2010, p.126). Our love of the beautiful calls us to interpret the beautiful; and the need for interpretation would not arise in the absence of such love. To find something beautiful is inseparable from the need to understand what makes it beautiful.

Nehamas offers a helpful intervention, but he doesn't reckon with Sontag's important critical point, i.e. that preconceived rules for interpretation obscure the artwork. Should a critic impose preconceived rules or theories, they would not be appropriately or productively responding to the artwork. To allow for sufficient weight to be placed on Sontag's insight, I move beyond Nehamas's response to Sontag by considering the kind of thought that Plato (in the *Phaedrus* at least) took to be distinctive of philosophy, namely, remembrance. I will show that Hölderlin construed Platonic remembrance as a form of thought that undermines the hubristic tendencies of modern subjective consciousness.

²⁹ The Freudian impetus to Wollheim's proposals is brought to the fore in publications subsequent to 'Criticism as Retrieval'. In his essay 'Freud and the Understanding of Art' Wollheim writes, "[Freud attempted] to interpret Leonardo's adult life in the light of certain childhood patterns" (1991, p.253) and that "[Freud] uses the evidence provided by the pictures to confirm the link he has postulated between this last phase of Leonardo's activity and a certain infantile "complex," (1991, p.254). Regarding Freud's interpretation of Michelangelo's *Moses*, Wollheim writes, "in this study Freud is to be seen, not simply as revealing to us the deepest mental layers of a particular representation, but as indicating how

I contend that Wollheim's 'criticism as retrieval' risks excessive activity to the point of hubris because the critic is to interpret the artwork—provide an explanation of the creative process that issued in the artwork—by applying theory and categories of understanding that were conceived independently of their encounter with the artwork. Wollheim argues that by these means the artwork is thus "open to understanding." To the contrary, I propose that Sontag was correct to say that this kind of interpretation, far from opening the artwork to understanding, in fact obscures the artwork from the appreciator since they hubristically suppose themselves to have established the meaning of the artwork. Fine art, which is my concern, challenges the boundaries between what is representable and unrepresentable, intelligible and unintelligible, imaginable and unimaginable. Accordingly, understanding is itself a problematic category in the face of the artwork's indeterminability. I argue that criticism is a discursive effort to embrace, intensify, and publicize the effects of this irresolution. In what follows, I contend that according to Wollheim's model, criticism would not require the cultivation and exercise of a capacity for displacement and so it could not count as being optimally responsible to the artwork. That is to say, 'criticism as retrieval' would not require the critic to acknowledge the need for moving beyond their prejudices and independently conceived categories of meaning and understanding. Accordingly, they would not experience the artwork as motivating a displacement of their normalized perspectives. Not only does Wollheim's model not account for the way that artworks can change and challenge the appreciating public, but more worryingly, the possibility for such change is excluded from the work of criticism.³⁰ Accordingly, Wollheim's model cannot count as being appropriately and productively responsive to the artwork.

Did Baudelaire reconstruct the creative process that issued in Guys's artwork? I do not believe so. To the contrary, Baudelaire's criticism avoids the dangers of hubris latent in Wollheim's account. For instance, Baudelaire writes that the dandy is "heroic" and lives according to the "cult of the ego." My proposal is that far from determining the 'meaning', 'value', or 'content' of the artwork, he gives expression to the way the artwork motivates a movement in the standards of meaning and understanding that regulate our thought. In the following sections I will argue that the kind of thought on display in Baudelaire's criticism is that of 'remembrance'. This is a form of thought that brings forth new possibilities of sense-making. When done well, art criticism moves towards that which is to be said in response to the artwork without fully being able to say it. This is both to take seriously the nature of the artwork's refusal to be determinately grasped, and to see the productive potential of critical engagement. I will argue that this form of thought realizes the virtue of aesthetic humility. Baudelaire, for instance, avoids the risk of aesthetic hubris because he does not interpret the artwork in terms of rules, concepts, or theories conceived independently of his experience of the artwork. Indeed, the primary point of his criticism is that Guys's illustrations bring certain concepts into

these layers, particularly the deepest of them, are revealed in the corresponding statue" (1991, p.259). With these quotes we see Wollheim identifying Freud's method of interpretation as a retrieval of the creative process that issued in the artworks of interest. Moreover, Wollheim makes clear that Freud goes beyond the artist's intentions, to deeper, less conscious, even unconscious psychological 'complexes' established in the artists' childhood. In his *Painting as an Art* (1987), Wollheim even argues for the "repsychologization" of pictorial meaning.

³⁰ The idea that art changes the appreciating public has been consistently argued for by Alva Noë throughout much of his work. For instance, his *Varieties of Presence* closes with a poem co-authored by himself and Nicole Peisl. Only one sentence in this poem occurs twice: "The general form of the work of art is: See me if you can!" (2012, pp.157-160). The implication is that you need to change yourself in order to see it. This thought is developed throughout his *Strange Tools*, "Art is in the business of affording us the opportunity for just this kind of transformation from not seeing to seeing" (2016, p.102), and elaborated further in his forthcoming *The Entanglement*, "This act of making manifest what was hidden—afforded by art, constitutive of aesthetic experience—is transformative."

question: under conditions of modernity, what is a ‘dandy’ or a ‘hero’? There’s no indication that Baudelaire was engaged in an exercise of retrieval, but he clearly was interested in the way the artwork problematizes and leads us to rethink certain features of modern society.

II. *Der Tod des Empedokles*

In this chapter, my primary claim is that ‘remembrance’ is an appropriate and optimally productive form of thoughtful response to an artwork. Moreover, I claim that it is a form of thought that realizes aesthetic humility by correcting for both aesthetic servility and aesthetic hubris. In this section I develop an understanding of ‘remembrance’ by turning to Hölderlin’s mourning-play ‘The Death of Empedocles’ and his theoretical text, ‘The Declining Fatherland...’. To set up the philosophical problem that motivated Hölderlin’s attempts to write a mourning-play for modernity, we will start with a brief consideration of Hölderlin’s early theoretical text, ‘Judgment and Being’.

In notes dated to 1795, posthumously published as ‘Judgment and Being’, Hölderlin postulated the possibility of an intellectual intuition of the absolute, i.e. of Being.³¹ Hölderlin argues that all acts of judgment (Urteil) enforce division on a prior unity, and that this prior unity is Being. Hölderlin’s text first reflects on the composition of ‘judgment’ (Urtheil) as the original (ur) division (theilung):

“judgment is the original division between subject and object”
“Being – expresses the connection between subject and object.”

Judgment constitutes the division, Being the unity, of subject and object. This analysis compels us to distinguish between the object of knowledge and what can be called ‘Being’. ‘Being’ precedes every relation of subject to object: Being is that which is divided in acts of cognition, and therefore cannot itself be an *object* of knowledge. The thrust of his reasoning is that subjective consciousness necessarily involves some distinction between subject and object, and so is incompatible with absolute subject–object unity. Being is inaccessible to consciousness in its judgmental compartments. It is only through “intellectual intuition” that Being can be known or experienced:

... judgment is the original division between subject and object, the two of which are most intimately [innigst] united in intellectual intuition [intellektualen Anschauung]... Where subject and object are absolutely, not merely partially unified, in such a way that no division could be presupposed without damaging [zu verletzten] the essence of that which is to be divided, there and in no other way can we speak of absolute Being, as is the case in intellectual intuition.

Being cannot be directly grasped or understood without the annihilation of the subject comprehending it. According to ‘Judgment and Being’, subjective consciousness is possible only through the original division of subject and object. However, this division is also responsible for separating the subject from Being. The only way the subject can claim to know Being is through undercutting its own status as a subject, that is, through self-annihilation. However, although we cannot know Being theoretically, we can approach it through intellectual intuition. In theoretical and poetic work subsequent to ‘Judgment and Being’, Hölderlin characterizes this approach as a form of ‘remembrance’. In what

³¹ ‘Judgment and Being’ (Urtheil und Seyn), a sheet of paper torn from a book, turned up in 1930, and was first published in 1961. Dieter Henrich (2008) proposes that the fragment dates from early 1795 when Hölderlin was in Jena with Fichte, thus after his time with Schelling and Hegel at Tübingen.

follows, I want to show that Hölderlin's mourning-play 'The Death of Empedocles' is a warning against the temptation of hubris for one who risks too great a proximity to Being. Two points will be highlighted in my reading of this play: (1) the dangers of hubris, (2) the place of 'remembrance' as an appropriate and productive relation to Being, achievable for the finite conscious subject.³² In Part §3 of this chapter I will argue that the formal structure of 'remembrance' constitutes an optimally productive form of thoughtful response to a work of fine art. Where Hölderlin conceives of 'remembrance' as the effort to think of Being, I retain the formal structure of 'remembrance' in an analysis of our thoughtful responses to works of fine art.

II §1 First Attempts at a Mourning-Play

Hölderlin's *Der Tod des Empedokles*, composed in three incomplete versions from 1798 to 1799, was never published during his lifetime. The play was an effort to write a tragedy on a Greek theme for modern concerns. Although Empedocles is a figure from antiquity, Hölderlin situates him in the midst of modernity. Hölderlin poetically portrays modern hubris in terms of Empedocles' claim to be a god who can instrumentalize nature for his own purposes.³³

In the first version of the play, Hölderlin does not treat Empedocles' fatal leap into Mount Aetna as just a simple suicide, but rather as a quest for a reunion with Being. The imperative to seek reunion with the unity of all that is, is consequent to Empedocles' personal disposition and his philosophical thought. In his plan for the first version, Hölderlin describes Empedocles as disdaining all "one-sided" interests and engagements, because they restrict his devotion to the unity of Being. Finite human relationships leave Empedocles dissatisfied and restless insofar as they are not experienced "in magnificent accord with all living things." (2008, p.29). Empedocles is portrayed by Hölderlin as frustrated by experiences that accord with time's "law of succession" and thereby preclude the possibility of experiencing the absolute unity of Being.³⁴

³² The question of hubris—that is, of Empedocles' having uttered what is unspeakable, literally the *ne-fas*—is one of the decisive questions raised by the mourning-play.

³³ Hölderlin would have read about Empedocles of Acragas (the modern southwestern coast of Sicily), who lived circa 495–435 B.C.E., in many different sources. For instance, Lucretius's *De rerum natura* emulates Empedocles and celebrates the Sicilian landscape that is dominated by Mount Etna. Lucretius writes that the landscape produces a son who seems more like a god than a mortal: "The poems that sprang from his divine breast declare and declaim his illustrious discoveries, such that he hardly seems to be of mortal lineage." (1992, Book I, ll. p.733)

The single most important source for Empedocles' life that was available to Hölderlin was Diogenes Laertius's *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*. Diogenes reports that Empedocles had committed a crime against the unity of life and the collective consciousness (2020, pp.303-310). Diogenes refers to Empedocles' hubristic pretensions, reporting that Empedocles said: "For you I am a deathless god, no longer mortal, I go among you honored by all, as is right" (2020, p.306). We find this hubristic sentiment expressed in Empedocles' poem 'On Nature', a poem addressed to his disciple Pausanias. In Fragment 111 of this poem, Pausanias is promised not only the ability to control the climate as well as knowledge of medicines to counteract illnesses and the ravages of old age, but even the ability to "bring back from Hades the strength of a dead man" (2010, p.234) Empedocles says that nothing, neither life nor death, is beyond the reach of the power he possesses. Empedocles can thus easily be seen to have crossed the boundaries of life and death, and men and gods.

In the plan for the first version of the play, Hölderlin notes those aspects of the ancient philosopher's character that fascinate him: Empedocles' desire for an intense rapport with nature, for union with the cosmos, and his contempt for all limited and one-sided human projects.

³⁴ An objection to time's "law of succession" is a way of articulating Hölderlin's own frustration with Kant's analysis of temporality. According to Hölderlin, Kant analysis of the temporality of empirical experience precludes the possibility of a reunion with nature and the divine. The relation of "succession" to "one-sidedness" is developed in a text Hölderlin wrote while planning the first version of his mourning-play, called 'Reflections' ('Aphorismen'). In the penultimate aphorism Hölderlin opposes intellectual grasping with love. Love is an intuition of the unity of empirical relations which

[It] contains all reality... hence, there is no object for this "I"... however, a consciousness without object cannot be thought... Therefore, within the absolute "I," no consciousness is conceivable; as absolute "I" I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing, hence is the absolute "I" (for me) nothing.
(1988: 125)

Empedocles can thus be read as appointing his own subjective consciousness as foundational to all that is. According to Hölderlin, this self-aggrandizing claim is not only hubristic, it is ultimately nihilistic.

II §2 Das untergehende Vaterland...

The difficulty that remains unsolved in both the first and second versions is that of showing why Empedocles' self-sacrifice is needed for the foundation of a new community. Faced with this theoretical problem, Hölderlin wrote an essay posthumously entitled 'Das untergehende Vaterland...' [The Declining Fatherland...] (also known as 'Das Werden im Vergehen' [Becoming in Dissolution]). The essay offers a dialectical analysis of a society in transition from one form to another. By 'fatherland' Hölderlin means a world-configuration that constitutes one's inherited and accepted framework of meaning. The perishing of a world involves the perishing of its standards of meaning and understanding. In the process of its dissolution, a world can no longer justify decisions and courses of action. Hölderlin's focus is on the emergence of new socio-political possibilities from out of the dissolution of pre-existing frameworks.

Hölderlin identifies the "moment" (*Augenblick*), as the temporal unity of dissolution and of becoming:

This decline or transition of the fatherland... is felt in the parts of the existing world so that at precisely that moment and to precisely that extent that existence dissolves [das Bestehende auflöst], the newly-entering [das Neueintretende], the youthful, the potential [Mögliche] is also felt.
(1988: 96; 2020: 33).

The perishing of what exists is at the same time a transition to the new. The new, in the moment of perishing, is not in the first instance actual. Rather, the new has the status of possibility. It is a possibility of future relations and connections, of a totality of actualities and necessities, and of the categorical determinations of a world that had not only been concealed, but restricted by the perishing world. Hölderlin thus conceives of the moment in which the "existing world" disappears as precisely the moment in which the possibility of a new world dawns.

Hölderlin speaks of a "(transcendental) creative act," which characterizes the "transition" from a seemingly "real nothing" into a new reality (1988, p.99). The transcendental structure of perishing allows it simultaneously to be an inception of a new world. Hölderlin writes: "the *possible* [das Mögliche], which enters into *reality* [Wirklichkeit] as that *reality itself dissolves*, is operative and effects the sense of dissolution as well as the remembrance [die Erinnerung] of that which has been dissolved" (1988, p.97, italics in original). For Hölderlin, "the possible," is the formation of new categories, concepts, and relations between concepts. It is the pre-categorical movement that counts as the coming into being of a language and a world. Hölderlin thus lays bare the structural limits of possible

experience and the transcendental structure by which new possibilities of worlds and languages emerge. Hölderlin writes both that the “creative act” must be the transition “between being and not-being” (1988, p.97), and that “from nothing there follows nothing;” (1988, p.96). The implication is that out of nothing comes nothing, but out of the approximation to nothing emerges possibility. The movement “between being and not-being;” is the movement between worlds and languages passing away, and worlds and languages to come.³⁸

We are told that “remembrance” is “the recollection of dissolution” (1988, p.97). It is thought which is directed at the difference between our own finitude and infinite Being, between the longing to experience unity with Being and the absence of such a possibility. In ‘remembrance’ we think towards that which allows no remembrance, i.e. that which is not available to consciousness. Hölderlin credits ‘remembrance’ with thinking of the “world of all worlds, the all in all which always *is*,” (1988: 96). In ‘remembrance’, thought strives to think the unthinkable, namely, Being.³⁹

‘Remembrance’, in this sense, liberates thought from the temporality of empirical experience, i.e. a temporality of mere succession. In a letter to his brother written while working on his mourning-play, Hölderlin wrote that Kant’s analysis of humanity cleaves “too one-sidedly to the great autonomy of human nature” (1988, p.137). For Kant time is the pure intuition of subjective sensibility, more specifically, it is the form of the subject’s own representations: “[time is] the mode in which the mind is affected through its own activity (namely, through this positing of its representation), and so is affected by itself” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B67-68). For Hölderlin, ‘remembrance’ allows that which was excluded from consciousness to appear. Kant excludes from temporality whatever transcends the scope of subjective mental representations. In ‘remembrance’ we think towards that which is beyond the scope of empirical experience, i.e. that which is unrememberable and unknowable. ‘Remembrance’ thereby transgresses the limits of what is cognizable. In ‘remembrance’ the subject’s experience is no longer determinately mediated by subjective conditions of representation. According to Hölderlin, ‘remembrance’ involves a *Lebensgefühl* (feeling of life), which is a theoretically inconceivable sensitivity to Being. He writes:

there emerges by way of recollection a complete sentiment of existence [Lebensgefühl: feeling of life], the initially dissolved; and after this recollection of the dissolved, individual matter has been united with the infinite sentiment of existence [Lebensgefühl] through the recollecting of the dissolution, and after the gap between

³⁸ Werner Hamacher (2020, p.126) argues that for Hölderlin language is original, i.e. poetic, when it is the mere possibility of language as such. Original language, the language of tragedy, is language “in the outermost limit of its mere possibilization.” Poetry articulates the new possibilities of sense-making. I develop this theme in chapter three, where I argue that the language of art criticism needs to be ‘poetic’.

³⁹ There is a Platonic animus to this point. Hölderlin’s ‘remembrance’ of Being is structurally analogous to the way that Platonic love remembers the “blessed vision” from which the human being has fallen. We know that Hölderlin admired Plato’s *Phaedrus*. In a letter to Neuffer in October 1794, Hölderlin discusses his intention to write an essay on aesthetic ideas, which was to begin with a commentary on a central passage of Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

In the famous ‘taking back’ myth of the *Phaedrus* (243e–257a), ‘love’ is characterized as a form of madness, but a madness that is divinely inspired, and from this come the greatest goods a mortal can have (244a). It turns out that the specific form which love’s madness takes is recollection. Recollection (249c) draws the embodied soul back towards the Forms that it had seen prior to its embodiment. Recollection is a madness, a state of enthusiasm, because it draws the soul from the concerns of the human condition towards presence with the divine. It is a movement of the human soul towards a condition of divinity (249c-d). Note the parallel with Hölderlin, for whom in remembrance we think towards that which is foundational for (and therefore in a sense ‘prior to’) subjective consciousness. But this foundation is also beyond the scope of subjective cognition.

the aforesaid has been closed, there emerges from this union and adequation of the particular of the past and the infinite of the present the actual new state, the next step that shall follow the past one.

(1988: 98)

Lebensgefühl is a sensitivity to Being, and the mourning of its loss to subjective consciousness.^{40 41} The feeling obtains only as ‘remembrance’ of Being, because it is transcendent to the scope of subjective experience. In the dissolution of consciousness, ‘remembrance’ (Erinnerung) integrates the perishing consciousness into “the infinite [*Lebensgefühl*],” and thereby opens unto novel possibilities of thought and sensibility. Dissolution thus becomes a creative rather than a destructive event. In ‘remembrance’ we think of that which has been lost to consciousness, of that which is not a possible experience for modern subjective consciousness. It involves thinking of that which is meaningless since Being eludes conceptual determination. However, for Hölderlin, in thinking of this unthinkable unity with Being, ‘remembrance’ opens the possibility for a revolution in modern consciousness.

II §3 An Unresolved Ending

My presentation of the third version will concentrate on the way that ‘remembrance’ is construed as involving a future-oriented dimension.⁴² To illuminate the nature of ‘remembrance’ the entire third version is filled with temporal reorientations. It opens with Empedocles on Mount Aetna, already committed to his own death. Empedocles exhorts Pausanias to overcome his love and attachment to himself, Empedocles. Pausanias is advised to go to Plato’s Athens where Empedocles says he himself has already been, but Plato’s school lies decades in the future since Plato was born around the time that Empedocles passed away. Pausanias is also instructed to travel to a Rome which lies either hundreds of years ago in the past (with Aeneas) or hundreds of years in the future (with Imperial

⁴⁰ *Lebensgefühl* is a form of intimacy (Innigkeit). Max Kommerell suggests an association between ‘innigkeit’ and ‘intellectual intuition’: “[Tragedy] contains an intellectual intuition, i.e., something that cannot be achieved by a concept, something that within poetic forms pertains to the mythic state of life—namely, the perception of the individual within the whole, as of the whole in the individual. Here we also have Hölderlin’s concept of Innigkeit.” (quoted by Krell 2008, p.226)

In ‘On Religion’ [Fragment philosophische Briefe], Hölderlin characterizes ‘recollection’ (Erinnerung) in contrast to empirical experience, as a way to think of our relation to the divine, i.e. to that which has been forgotten by modern consciousness. Erinnerung exceeds the thought of necessary and mechanical relations. Hölderlin uses the German term ‘Erinnerung’ to describe a mode of experience in which we do not explain the world in terms of causal relations (necessity) but rather in terms of a more basic relation in which we feel ourselves to be one (innig: intimate) with Being. Erinnerung is an experience that is only available insofar as we are “raised above necessity.”

⁴¹ In her *Hegel’s Concept of Life*, Karen Ng argues that for Hegel the ‘Idea of Life’ functions as the necessary condition and presupposition of cognition. In developing her argument, Ng draws out the points of similarity and contrast with Hölderlin. For Hegel, life as Idea is “original judgment.” She writes: “alongside Hölderlin’s understanding of judgment as grounded in ‘Being’, Hegel recasts the activity of judgment as grounded in what he calls “the original judgment of life [*das ursprüngliche Urteil des Lebens*],” suggesting that judgment’s powers are at once enabled and delimited according to the form of this activity,” (2020, p.166). Whereas for Hölderlin judgment is a subjective act that enforces division on a prior unity and irrevocably severs the subject from Being, for Hegel judgment is a structure and movement of Being itself. But for both, cognition is made possible by original judgment. The interpretation I offer here of Hölderlin’s reference to “*Lebensgefühl*” opens up further possibilities for exploring the similarities and differences between Hölderlin and Hegel along the lines that Ng presents. Hölderlin’s ‘feeling of life’ is a non-judgmental yet thoughtful experience of unity with Being, which therein involves both a difference and similarity with Hegel’s view in the *Logic*.

⁴² The third version is primarily concerned with the legitimacy of Empedocles’ standing as a messianic ‘chosen One’. In the final (completed) scene the Egyptian priest and seer Manes asks whether Empedocles is the messianic awaited one, rather than someone who is only pursuing a personal and misguided passion. In the ‘Sketch Towards the Continuation of the Third Version’, Hölderlin has Manes recognize that Empedocles’s self-sacrifice will inaugurate a renewed epoch.

Rome).⁴³ The third version ends with Pausanias being sent off to Egypt where he can undertake his educational journey:

And if the soul in you refuses rest, then go
Inquire of my brothers far away in Egypt
... you'll learn that mortals standing
Face to face are but images and signs
Yet this will not disturb you, my dear friend!
They'll open for you there the book of destiny.
Go! fear nothing! everything recurs. And what
Is yet to happen already is accomplished.
(2008, pp.181-182)⁴⁴

Empedocles suggests that through a hermeneutic relationship with the past—by reading “the book of destiny”—one is directed towards the future: “Everything recurs. And what / Is yet to happen already is accomplished.” Empedocles also says that “mortals standing / Face to face are but images and signs.” The word “sign” appears several times in “The Declining Fatherland...”. There we are told that only in passing away can an individual be the “sign” of a passing world and the promise of a new world to come. In another theoretical text also written between the second and third versions of the play, “The Significance of Tragedies” (Die Bedeutung der Tragodien), Hölderlin asserts that this sign must itself be nullified in order to direct us back toward its ground: “to the extent that the sign is posited as insignificant = 0, original matter, the hidden foundation of any nature, can also present itself” (1988, p.89). We know from “The Declining Fatherland...” that an individual’s self-sacrifice can count as the inauguration of a new form of consciousness, on the condition that it is founded on the transcendental structure of perishing and becoming. Now we can add that Empedocles’ self-sacrifice is a sign that equals zero. The act presents itself as the “moment” of perishing and becoming. The sign is meaningless both because pre-existing standards of meaning and understanding are in dissolution, and because the new possibilities now in the process of becoming are merely possibilities. Hence in the third version Empedocles says: “when human words no more / Were understood, nor human laws, that was when / The meaning of it all assailed me and I trembled: / It was my nation’s parting god!” (2008, p.185). When the nation’s god departs, all one can do is tremble, for this is not something that one can “grasp” conceptually, it is something that assails one. The individual that perishes is a sign that equals zero, because from the decline there is the becoming of new possibilities of world and language. But these are new *possibilities*, yet to be actualized.

Empedocles’ status as a sign that equals zero, implies a relinquishment of authority. Hölderlin sees that Empedocles’ self-sacrifice can in no way determine the future, he can only hope that his words and deeds will inaugurate new socio-political formations that will be favorable to human flourishing. Empedocles’ life and death can open up a new indeterminate future, but there is no guarantee of what shape this future will take. There is no new actuality established by Empedocles’ death, only new

⁴³ Here we can read Hölderlin as interested in establishing something like a community of thought. In a letter to Johann Gottfried Ebel (November 9, 1795), Hölderlin writes of this form of sociality in terms of the ‘communing of spirits’ and the ‘sharing of living breath’ (cf. Hamacher 2021).

⁴⁴ This speech by Empedocles ends with the Stoic theme of *palingenesis* (becoming again, rejuvenation). *Palingenesis* is related to the notion of *ἐκπύρωσις*, the consumption of the old world by fire. Out of the ashes of the old order, emerges the new, as detailed in “The Declining Fatherland...”. Hölderlin hopes for a revolution of *reason* through its rejuvenation by *nature* such that a political framework can emerge that realizes the ideals of the French revolution.

possibilities. These are possibilities to be worked out and interpreted in and through the reception of his death by the community of Acragas.

III. Remembrance in Art Criticism

In the previous section we saw that for Hölderlin ‘remembrance’ involves both a retrospective thought process, and a future-oriented thinking-toward new possibilities of meaning. For Hölderlin, the possibility of experiencing Being is lost to modern consciousness. In ‘remembrance’ we mourn the loss of this experience, namely, an experience with the unity of all that is, and we think towards such an experience as a possibility that transcends the scope of subjective cognition. In this section I argue that the formal structure of ‘remembrance’ characterizes an appropriate and optimally productive form of art interpretation. Where Hölderlin conceives of ‘remembrance’ as the effort to think of Being, I retain the formal structure of ‘remembrance’ in an analysis of our thoughtful responses to works of fine art. Moreover, I contend that ‘remembrance’ is a form of thought that in the context of art appreciation, realizes the virtue of aesthetic humility. As such, it serves as a corrective to both aesthetic hubris and aesthetic servility. My proposal is that an appropriate and optimally productive response to a work of fine art involves thinking of possibilities of sense-making that *have been or are being* marginalized by prevailing norms of discourse, and that this thereby opens up our thought to new possibilities of thought, talk, and sensuality.

III §1 Correcting for Aesthetic Servility

Recall Sontag’s claim that in an effort to render works of art “manageable,” and “conformable” (1964, p.5) the interpretation of artworks “pushes aside” the sensuous immediacy of the artwork in order to discern “the true meaning—the latent content beneath.” I argue to the contrary. Works of fine art resist our understanding by calling into question features of our lives. Fine art thereby provides the opportunity for us to understand ourselves and the world anew. Only under conditions of indifference does the need for interpretation wane. To the extent that we take interest in the artwork, to the extent that we are gripped by it, there is a need to try to understand what it shows us and why it provokes us. Sontag might call this love. Our love of an artwork, in this sense, involves a need to understand it. The need for interpretation would not arise in the absence of such love.⁴⁵ To be in the grip of an artwork is inseparable from the need to understand what makes it gripping.

Though Sontag has an important argument against the hubristic nature of certain kinds of criticism, many of her concerns would be alleviated by the model of interpretation highlighted in this chapter, namely, interpretation as ‘remembrance’. Far from making the artwork manageable and conformable, this form of interpretation embraces the difficulty of art. It embraces the problems that artworks pose to our understanding, but in a productive way. In ‘remembrance’, we allow our standards of meaning and understanding to be challenged by the artwork. The artwork calls into question certain aspects of our understanding. Baudelaire, for instance, interpreted Guys’s illustrations as raising a problem about modernity, such that we are motivated to question what counts as a ‘dandy’ and what is a ‘hero’ in present historical conditions. The critic, as exemplified by Baudelaire, opens themselves up to new possibilities of sense-making, and thus for making sense of themselves and the world in which they live anew. But, importantly, this thought process is left open. The meaning of the terms is not determined anew. Rather the norms that regulate meaning are exposed as contingent, and they are opened up for revision. We cannot not determine in advance of our interpretation what will be said

⁴⁵ This interdependence between love and interpretation is argued for by Nehamas (2010, p.126).

or what will be thought. Critical thought, as remembrance, allows for surprise. That is, we can be surprised by the artwork in the way that it motivates us to see things differently. ‘Remembrance’, as Hölderlin poetically illuminated in the final version of his mourning-play, has a futural dimension. It involves thinking towards new possibilities of sense-making.

My proposal both retains Sontag’s criticism of aesthetic hubris, namely, that we obscure the artwork when we interpret it according to preconceived standards of meaning and understanding, and avoids the risk of aesthetic servility present in Sontag’s call to excise interpretation from aesthetic response.

In art appreciation we encounter something we cannot conceptually determine. In a sense, artworks are untimely because they cannot be interpreted according to prevailing norms of communicability. Artworks bring our understanding into question, and this is a question which motivates a response. Art thereby compels the appreciator to undergo an experience of the finitude and contingency of their understanding. To undergo this experience requires humility. We are brought to confront a structural necessity of finite understanding, namely, that interpretation is perspectival. Any given perspective marginalizes and, in a sense, forgets others. Through this process, conscious or otherwise, we establish an orientation to our lives; we—in a socio-historical as well as personal sense—define for ourselves what counts as good and worthwhile, thereby giving meaning and direction to our lives. Without selective forgetting one’s life is without bearings.⁴⁶ Through history the meaning of our terms and the evaluative orientations we take are determined in certain ways rather than others. So there is an element of contingency in the meaning of our terms. What counts as ‘good’, ‘bad’, praise-worthy or blame-worthy, is to a significant extent determined by public recognition. Artworks motivate us to think of that which is negated by the way these norms are determined, i.e. to what cannot be said on pain of speaking nonsense or of speaking against public consensus. Accordingly, that which the artwork invites the critic to think toward will vary depending on the norms that structure the critic’s thought. Artworks stage the contingency of meaning, showing that the standards of meaning and understanding that regulate our lives are inherently questionable and ought to be questioned.

Remembrance implies that something has been forgotten. In its ordinary use, forgetting is thought of as an absence of a prior presence, e.g. I forgot that my friend went to the Biennale last year, I forgot the time of my appointment, I forgot whether it was forecast to rain today. ‘Remembrance’ in the sense at issue in this chapter does not make present again a past experience. ‘Remembrance’ is not the *recovering* of something lost (a prior presence).⁴⁷ Rather, ‘remembrance’ involves reckoning with the historical conditioning and perspectival nature of human understanding. It is a way of thinking of that which has been or is being marginalized, as a new possibility for making sense of ourselves and the world in which we live.

⁴⁶ Arendt argues that the polis is the space of collective memory; it is “a kind of organized remembrance” (2018, p.198) serving as witness and archive for the activities of the great. Aggregated choices determine what will count as valuable.

⁴⁷ Hölderlin’s poetic presentation and theoretical analysis of remembrance bears remarkable similarity to Freud’s analysis of trauma. For Freud, the event that leads to trauma is precisely that which is not consciously experienced. What occurs only comes to awareness at some later point in a deferred form, leaving the traumatizing event strictly inaccessible. In trauma there is no original experience that can be recalled, yet there is recurrence, a return of what was never present and never experienced. In this phantom encounter there is the incomprehensible feeling of having seen or known something before that cannot be verified or dispelled. An awareness that there is something that can never be brought to a decisive understanding. Trauma is suffered precisely because the original happening is *not* directly available to experience. It is this lack of direct experience that becomes the basis of the repetition of deferred exposure. See William S. Allen (2007, p.214) for comments on how Freud’s analysis of trauma can supplement an interpretation of Hölderlin’s poetic thought; see Cathy Caruth (2016) for a developed analysis of trauma; and see Maria del Rosario Acosta López (2021) for a discussion of the relation between trauma and the transgressive potential of aesthetic experience.

There is an important difference between incomprehensibility that offers the possibility of being comprehended at some point in the future, that is, grasped with a change in our norms of thought and knowledge; and incomprehensibility as the negative domain that exceeds the flexible limit of perspectival finite human understanding. The latter depends on the historicity of comprehension. In our experience of fine art, we are exposed to the historical limit of meaning, to that which language cannot quite register. This is the thought of ‘remembrance’. It involves a thoughtful attentiveness to the past. More specifically, to possibilities of meaning and understanding that *have been or are being* negated or marginalized by prevailing norms of discourse. Such thought endows experience with a sensitivity to its own historicity. ‘Remembrance’ accounts for the way the very structure of meaning conceals or effaces other possibilities of understanding. In this sense, artworks expose us to the perspectival nature of understanding, and we thereby experience *the possibility* of seeing the world in new ways.⁴⁸

By analyzing our thoughtful responses to fine art in terms of the formal structure of ‘remembrance’, I offer a response to this chapter’s guiding question which avoids excessive passivity and thus aesthetic servility. Equally, however, in ‘remembrance’ we do not hubristically suppose ourselves to finally and exhaustively grasp the artwork’s meaning.

III §2 Correcting for Aesthetic Hubris

Wollheim’s ‘Criticism as Retrieval’ also recognizes the importance of considering past reality. However, I contend that his model of art criticism risks excessive activity to the point of hubris. According to Wollheim, art criticism, when done well, involves an explanation of the creative process that issued in the artwork. Moreover, this can be achieved by applying theories and norms of understanding established independently of the critic’s experience of the artwork. Wollheim argues that by these means the artwork is thus “open to understanding” (2015, p.125). However, Sontag was correct to say that this kind of interpretation, far from opening the artwork to understanding, in fact obscures the artwork from the appreciator since they would hubristically suppose themselves to have established the meaning of the artwork. At least in the case of fine art, which is my concern, aesthetic experience resides on the boundaries between what is representable and unrepresentable, intelligible and unintelligible, imaginable and unimaginable. Accordingly, understanding is itself a problematic category in the face of the artwork’s indeterminable status. I argue that criticism, when done well, is a discursive effort to embrace, intensify, and publicize the effects of this indeterminability. This, in turn, requires cultivating a capacity for displacement. Namely, the capacity to put one’s prejudices—and thus oneself—into question, and to remain open to new possibilities of understanding oneself and the world. Wollheim does not recognize such a requirement, and so his analysis of art criticism cannot count as providing a model for optimally responsive interpretation.

⁴⁸ The experience of ‘remembrance’ is one of Benjamin’s most constant concerns. He critiques the concept of empirical experience emerging in the Enlightenment, of which Kant’s analysis is exemplary. The dominant philosophy in modernity, he argues, considers experience in mechanistic and mathematical terms, valuing it only insofar as it stands in the service of scientific knowledge. It thus systematically ignores the temporality of experience, reducing it “to a minimum of significance” (2004, p.101). This is a way of framing the distinction between *Erlebnis* as ‘lived’ or ‘immediate’ experience, or as ‘lived instant’; and *Erfahrung*. For Benjamin, in *Erfahrung* there is an alternative history opened up by a political intervention in the present: “the flash of awakened consciousness” (*Arcades Project*, pp.388-389). *Erfahrung* transpires as an interruption of our prevailing historical narratives. A compelling analysis of this kind of experience can be found in his text, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (1940). Here, remembrance [*Eingedenken*] open the present by unmasking history’s silenced injustices: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (2007, p.256).

We respond to artworks out of a need to understand and interpret. This need is consequent to the way the artwork resists our understanding. Fine art cannot be made sense of according to the norms of meaning and understanding that regulate our initial encounter with the artwork. Our need to understand and interpret is consequent to this predicament. The need to understand an artwork is not a need to achieve correct knowledge of it. Rather, it is a need that can be addressed only by the cultivation and the exercise of a capacity for displacement

Interpretation happens in *response* to an artwork. In ‘remembrance’, the critic undergoes an experience in *response* to the artwork.⁴⁹ Not only does Wollheim’s model not account for the way that artworks can change the appreciating public, but more worryingly, the possibility for such change is excluded from the work of criticism. Accordingly, Wollheim’s model cannot count as advancing an appropriate and productive response to fine art. He thus argues for a form of criticism that risks aesthetic hubris.

My proposal is that displacement is a distinctive dimension of aesthetic experience. We are confronted by something that compels us to revise our understanding, because prevailing possibilities for making sense of the world are incommensurate with that which we are experiencing. Prejudices that have been historically inherited, and that regulate the possibilities and limits of our understanding, are experienced as being inadequate to the artwork. Aesthetic experience involves an anxiety of disorientation because a critical response to an artwork involves letting go of our customary ways of making sense of the world. When done well, criticism involves accepting that the understanding to be achieved exceeds the possibilities of understanding that we initially bring to the encounter.

Recall that for Hölderlin, by ‘remembrance’ we are on the verge of thinking of Being, but we are never so much on the verge as to be at one with it: we do not occupy Being as a vantage point. We experience that which we are thinking of as a ceaseless withdrawal from consciousness. We ‘remember’ a possibility of experience lost to modern subjective consciousness. Drawing on the formal structure of this kind of thought, I have argued that ‘remembrance’ in art criticism does not involve retrieval of forgotten facts, or a simple repetition of past experiences. Rather, it involves thinking of marginalized or negated possibilities of sense-making. To be critical is to allow our current set of concerns to be challenged by a space of possibilities that have been marginalized or negated by prevailing norms of thought. The critic responds to the artwork by thinking of lost possibilities of meaning and understanding which in turn opens the possibility for experiencing the world in unforeseeable ways.

In Baudelaire’s criticism we can read the work of ‘remembrance’ in his proposal that Guys’s illustrations motivate us to rethink what counts as ‘a dandy’, as ‘heroic’, and as ‘spiritual’. The meaning of these terms is called into question by the artworks and this is brought into public discourse by Baudelaire’s criticism. Baudelaire’s writing invites us to suspend the customary meaning of what it is for someone to be ‘heroic’ and to be ‘spiritual’. This is a suspension that allows us to think in response to the artwork and towards a richer understanding of modernity. As Baudelaire writes, “[Guys] is looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call ‘modernity’” (1988, p.402). In response to Guys’s artworks, Baudelaire opens a conversation that brings certain concepts into movement, and opens us to new possibilities of sense-making. This does not mean that Baudelaire articulates new concepts, but his criticism allows for these concepts to be rethought in new and surprising ways. For instance, it is certainly surprising when Baudelaire writes, “Clearly, then, dandyism

⁴⁹ In his poem *Andenken*, Hölderlin writes: “But memory, / Is taken and given by the ocean, / And the eyes of love do not waver in their gaze, /” (1990, p.267). Remembrance is beyond conscious control; remembrance happens *to* us.

in certain respects comes close to spirituality and to stoicism...” For Baudelaire, this is a rethinking of what it is to be ‘a dandy’ that is made available by thinking of the marginalization of the dandy in mid-19th century France:

Dandyism is the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages; ... Here in France, dandies are becoming rarer and rarer, ... when M. G. commits one of his dandies to paper, he always gives him his historical character, ... All that is expressed to perfection in these illustrations.

Baudelaire’s criticism is responsive to the way that Guys’s illustrations question the present. The marginalization of the dandy allows Baudelaire to think anew what it is to be a dandy, or to be a hero, in modern industrialized society. This is why Baudelaire writes that Guys’s illustrations give the dandy his “historical character.” Baudelaire avoids aesthetic servility because he responds to the artwork with critical interpretation, and he avoids aesthetic hubris because his writing reflects the exercise of a capacity for displacement.

Aesthetic humility has an important role to play in art appreciation and criticism. Without aesthetic humility, we run the risk of failing to respond appropriately and productively to works of art. With aesthetic humility, we recognize the finite and perspectival character of our understanding. I have explored a Hölderlinian model of aesthetic humility as a virtue that can serve to correct for both the application of independently conceived ideas about an artwork, and for an unduly low regard for oneself as a thinker. For these reasons, I submit that a Hölderlinian model of aesthetic humility illuminates certain features of good aesthetic response. In particular, this model can help us to avoid both aesthetic hubris and aesthetic servility, so that we can become critics who proceed in a careful way, sensitive to the artworks we appreciate.

Chapter 2 Interpretation as Play

What is it for one's thought to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art? In the preceding chapter I argued that 'remembrance' provides a compelling answer to this question. The purpose of this chapter is to show that art criticism, when done well, involves a thoughtful form of play. More specifically, I propose that it is a form of play governed by what I call the 'norm of critique': a norm to question, and to keep questioning. The resultant picture will be that 'play' will need to be incorporated into our understanding of 'remembrance'. This chapter, however, will focus on specifying the kind of play proper to art-criticism.

'Play' is said in many ways. The play needed in art criticism lies between two further kinds of play: play that is rule-determined, and rule-less free play. We can discriminate art-critical play from the play of a game with determining rules. According to Piaget (1962, p.146), games with determining rules are the only ones to persist through adulthood. The rules are freely accepted but must be adhered to rigorously. If one breaks the rules, the playfulness of the game is ruined. Piaget contends that this is the play of the mature, socialized human. The rules are known and accepted, and the game that obtains is an unproblematic space of intelligibility: players know what counts as winning and losing.

Maria Lugones characterizes this kind of play—the play of games with determining rules—as essentially agonistic. She proposes that in this kind of play risk and uncertainty arise only with respect to whether one will win or lose; the players present a *self-importance* since their purpose is to win by their own aptitudes; and they cannot tolerate non-conformity to the rules of the game—one must conform on pain of exclusion. In contradistinction, Lugones draws our attention to “*a playful attitude [that] turns the activity into play*” (1987, p.16). She argues that there are forms of playful activity which do not presuppose rules to define what counts as play. The activity has no rules, or at least, no rule(s) could be adequate to understand the activity. The playfulness of the activity involves uncertainty and as such there is an “*openness to surprise*.” Those at play lack self-importance because they are not occupying a predetermined role, they are “*open to self-construction*,” and they are not constrained or defined by a normative framework. That is, there are no rules that determine what counts as 'necessary', 'appropriate', 'good', or 'erroneous'. Rather, the players “*are there creatively*” (1987, p.16).

The phenomenon that I have in mind lies somewhere between these two extremes. I propose that the play needed for art criticism is at once normatively structured, and a condition of freedom. When we encounter a work of art, we feel a need to understand the artwork. In art criticism, the critic thoughtfully responds to the artwork in a way that accords with what I call 'the logic of play'. I use the term 'logic' to indicate that the play of art criticism is a form of thought. We are drawn into interpretation by the sense that there is something to be understood, and are thereby brought into play with and by the artwork. In and through the play there is a movement beyond our normalized ways of understanding ourselves and the world in which we live. To illustrate this point let us consider Arthur Rimbaud's prosaic text 'Mystique', which is often read as a critical response to the central panel of *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, by Hubert and Jan van Eyck (completed 1432):



Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, central panel

On the slope of the bank, the angels turn their woolen dresses in the pastures of steel and of emerald.

Meadows of flames bound to the summit of the hillock. On the left, the compost of the ridge is trampled by all the homicides and all the battles, and all the disastrous sounds describe their curve. Behind the ridge on the right is the line of orients, of progress.

And while the band at the top of the picture is formed of the turning and bounding rumbling of the conches of the seas and of human nights,

The flowery sweetness of the stars and the sky and the rest descends opposite the bank, like a basket, - against our face, and makes the abyss fragrant and blue down there.

(‘Mystique’, *Rimbaud. Complete Works, Selected Letters, a Bilingual Edition*, 2005, p.334)

Does it matter that the angels surrounding the altar do not appear to be turning their dresses in the field as the angels are said to by Rimbaud? Is it true to the painting to say that the multitude of small white flowers qualifies as ‘steel’? Many elements of the poem such as the angels’ turning, the meadows of bounding flames, the “bounding rumbling of the conches of the seas and of human nights,” and the fragrant abyss, cannot be located in the painting, but this is not a deficiency. Rather, it is a clue to Rimbaud’s playful response to the artwork.

Rimbaud writes of the rich and varied sensual response he has to the artwork. He says that the “band” at the top of the painting is formed by the “bounding and rumbling of the conches,” that the curve on the left of the painting is described by the “disastrous sounds” of “homicides” and “battles,” that the “flowers and sweetness of the stars” descend on the opposite side, and that the abyss is “fragrant.” Moreover, in reflecting on the painting, Rimbaud’s thought is led to the ‘fragrant abyss’. We might say that his thought is enticed—by the ‘fragrance’—to that whereof one cannot speak—an ‘abyss’.

My proposal is that Rimbaud interprets the artwork according to what I call the *norm of critique*: a norm to question and to keep questioning. As he critiques the artwork, he uncovers new aspects of the artwork. No single interpretation can be given that exhausts the meaning of the artwork; rather, the artwork compels us to further consideration and interpretation. Rimbaud's criticism demonstrates that van Eyck's painting leads us beyond normalized ways of thinking. We are called into an illusory space where for Rimbaud, at least, there is a felt need to talk of features that are not literally there in the painting, and of the "fragrant abyss" to which the painting leads us. In his playful response to the artwork, novel possibilities for thought and sensation are present to Rimbaud. His understanding is set into motion and is ultimately brought to an "abyss," i.e. to a point of meaninglessness. That is, through this playful response, his thought is brought to a suspension of the norms that govern communicability.

Art-critical interpretation, when done well, involves a suspension in the norms that govern the meaning of our utterances. We can thereby come to understand ourselves, others, and the world in which we live, differently, according to different norms of meaning. Through art-critical interpretation, in the play between ourselves and the artwork, our understanding is playfully opened to new possibilities of sense-making.

This chapter will be composed of three parts. In Part 1, to develop my presentation of the kind of play at issue, I provide a reading of Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment as pertaining to works of fine art. Here, there are two points I intend to emphasize: (i) even though Kant's analysis is of the formal structure of aesthetic judgment, he describes the state of free play constitutive of aesthetic judgment in terms of movement; (ii) Kant's analysis of free play is given in terms of the operations of subjectivity. I propose that Kant helps us to understand the normative conditions distinctive of aesthetic response, but that his formal analysis can be deepened, and it is to Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* (*Ästhetische Briefe*) that I turn for precisely this development. In Part 2 my interpretation of Schiller's *Ästhetische Briefe* also foregrounds two points: that Schiller, like Kant, analyzed 'play' in terms of the operations of subjectivity; and that according to Schiller, the 'laws of beauty' regulate play and provide the conditions by which one is free from the demands of all prevailing and pre-existing laws. Part 3 steps beyond Schiller's reflections on play. I offer a reinterpretation of Schiller's analysis, according to which play-as-reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) is characteristic of the relation between sense and nonsense. On this basis I provide an analysis of art-critical play. I develop the themes presented in this introduction by working towards the claim that the play needed in art criticism is not a subjective condition of the critic. Rather, it is more appropriately construed as a playing-with relation between the artwork and critic. This is a dynamic relation that I call the 'playroom'. My proposal is that participation in the 'playroom' between artwork and critic, requires that one's thought conforms with the norm of critique.

Part 1. Kant on Fine Art: A Quickened Imagination

In the previous section, I proposed that the play proper to art criticism is neither determined by rules, nor a rule-less free play. To motivate a sense of what this kind of play involves, I referenced a short piece of art criticism and offered a brief analysis of this piece with a view to bringing the kind of interpretation needed in art criticism to the fore. To deepen our understanding of the normative status of the play proper to art criticism, I turn to Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment as pertaining to works of fine art. My purpose is to demonstrate two points. First, that Kant's formal analysis of free play often involved terms associated with movement, such as 'quicken', 'broadening', 'rapidity';

second, that free play in response to fine art is to be understood as constitutive of a *subject's* aesthetic response.

Kant's discussion of fine art (*schöne Kunst*) is primarily located in sections 43 to 54 of the *Critique of Judgment* (KU). Fine art, according to Kant, primarily makes the most important ideas of morality, which are otherwise rational abstractions, sensuously palpable to us through the free play of the imagination. By the time he arrives at the topic of fine art, Kant can take his analysis of 'pure' judgments of taste as having been understood by his reader, and so he writes in such a way that the former builds upon the framework of the latter. I offer the following as a brief gloss on pure judgments of taste. The mental state constitutive of this kind of judgment is a state of free play, alternatively described as a "harmony", "proportioned attunement", "quickenings" of the cognitive faculties (imagination and understanding) which meets the subjective condition for cognition (KU, §9, p.63; §13, p.69). This kind of judgment is indeterminate: it is not determined by any pure or empirical concept, or by the moral law. Pure aesthetic judgment does not yield any determinate knowledge about its object. It merely expresses the play of the cognitive faculties in the performance of reflective judgment.⁵⁰

The concept of 'fine art', is introduced by distinction. All 'free art' is made with the purpose of arousing pleasure in its respondent. This pleasure can be the sensuous manifestation of either representations that are "mere sensations", or representations that are "ways of cognizing" (KU, §44, p.172). That is, a work of 'free art', can be intended to arouse pleasure either by offering sensory stimulation, or else by provoking the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding into a condition of reflective judgment. In the former case, the free art is 'merely agreeable', in the latter case it qualifies as *fine art*. So an object counts as fine art on the condition that it is intentionally produced with the aim of arousing pleasure in its respondents by provoking their cognitive faculties into a condition of free play.

Kant (KU, §45) tells us that even though fine art is necessarily intentionally created, it must not seem intentional to its respondent. That is, a work of fine art must appear to the respondent as if it were a product of nature. Since nature presents itself as if it were speaking a language with a "higher meaning" (KU, §42, p.169), so too must a work of fine art. So in the case of our response to works of fine art, Kant seems to recognize something of an extra-subjective quality. This is brought to the fore in Kant's analysis of 'genius'. Kant tells us that 'genius' is "the innate mental predisposition *through which* nature gives the rule to art" (KU, §46, p.174). So there is some normative compulsion beyond the structures of subjectivity, which itself finds expression in a work of fine art. This is a compulsion for which no determinate rule can be given (KU, §46, p.175). Nature, as extra-subjective and non-objectified, is that from which the normative quality of fine art draws its expression. Genius gives something that exceeds the genius' own cognitive capacities, and which in turn provokes the artwork's respondent into a condition of free play. That which the artwork expresses can be traced to something extra-subjective, i.e. nature. And yet, Kant's analysis of free play is analyzed in terms of subjective structures. Kant ultimately draws his analysis back into the subject.

Kant asserts that works of fine art have 'spirit' (*Geist*), and that the 'spirit' of fine art is apt to provoke a free harmony of the respondent's cognitive faculties by the representation of 'aesthetic ideas':

[*Geist*: Spirit] in an aesthetic sense is the animating principle in the mind. But what this principle uses to **animate [or quicken]** the soul, the material it employs for this, is

⁵⁰ In reflective judgment, reason strives for a universal by which to categorize given particulars.

what imparts to the mental powers a **purposive momentum**, i.e., imparts to them a play which is such that it sustains itself on its own and even strengthens the powers for such play. ... this principle [*Geist*] is nothing but the ability to exhibit *aesthetic ideas*;

...
(KU, §49, pp.181-182, bold emphasis added)

Kant's presentation of 'spirit' is replete with movement terms. The 'spirit' of an artwork provokes the respondent's mind into a 'purposive momentum' or 'play', which cannot be determined by a concept. Spirit 'animates' and 'quickenes' the soul. Aesthetic ideas, expressed by works of fine art, bring the imagination and understanding into a "purposive momentum", which Kant elaborates as "[strengthening] the powers for such play" (KU, §49, p.182).

For Kant, an 'idea' is a representation of an object that it is not possible to cognize (KU, §49, p.182). Kant is thinking of cognition as requiring both a concept and an intuition, and an 'idea' is a representation of an object that outstrips one or other of these cognitive functions. An idea of reason is a representation that outstrips the intuitive capacity. They cannot be demonstrated in intuition. Conversely, aesthetic ideas outstrip cognition because they step beyond the bounds of our concepts: they involve an intuition that is so rich and complex that no concept or conceptual description could ever be found adequate to it.

An aesthetic idea is described as "the imagination's **rapidly passing** play" (§49, p.186, emphasis added) which resists conceptual determination, but which also 'presents' at least one concept. A work of fine art expresses an 'aesthetic idea', namely, a representation of the imagination that "strive[s] toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience" (§49, p.182). The aesthetic idea "stimulates so much thinking," because the understanding strives to subsume or determine this sensuous representation. So our response to fine art consists in the contentful free play of imagination, understanding, and reason (provided the concept presented by the aesthetic idea is an idea of reason). Kant offers the following example:

A poet ventures to give sensible expression to rational ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation, and so on. Or, again, he takes [things] that are exemplified in experience, such as death, envy, and all the other vices, as well as love, fame, and so on; but then, by means of an imagination that emulates the example of reason in reaching [for] a maximum, he ventures to give these sensible expression in a way that goes beyond the limits of experience, namely, with a completeness for which no example can be found in nature.
(KU, §49, p.183)

The concepts presented by an aesthetic idea are "aesthetically [expanded]... in an unlimited way," (§49, p.183). The imagination thereby "sets the power of intellectual ideas (i.e. reason) **in motion**" (§49, p.183, emphasis added). That is to say, the aesthetic idea provokes reason to more than can be grasped by reason's own capacity for representation. No description could possibly be adequate to the idea 'expressed' by a work of fine art. So in aesthetic judgments of fine art, we are caught in a normative demand for rational determination of an indeterminable sensory manifold. This is a condition of free play.

Recall the piece of criticism by Arthur Rimbaud quoted above. His criticism suggests that through reflection on various aesthetic attributes of the artwork—the colors, the angels and their dresses, the

emerald field, the steel flowers, the implied scents and sounds—our thought is oriented towards a conflagration that in turn leads to “progress”: “Meadows of flames bound to the summit of the hillock. ... Behind the ridge on the right is the line of orients, of progress.”⁵¹ Rimbaud is prompted by the artwork to rethink the relation between the concepts *spirituality* and *nature*. Rimbaud reflects on these concepts through an aesthetic idea abounding with sensory representations: visual, auditory, odorous. Moreover, although this aesthetic idea presents the concepts *spirituality* and *nature*, this by no means exhausts the meaning of Hubert and Jan van Eyck’s artwork. No single analysis of *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* can be given that exhausts its meaning. Indeed, the artwork’s resistance to interpretive determination prompts us to further consideration and interpretation.

For Kant, in response to works of fine art, the imagination, in its “momentum”, that is, in its movement of play, is in a condition of freedom. The artwork provokes the subject to think in an “undeveloped way,” that is, in a way that has not been brought into accord with any pre-existing or prevailing norms for cognition, and hence in a way that cannot be determined in any finite linguistic expression (§49, p.183).⁵² Aesthetic ideas therefore provoke the understanding into expanding its possibilities of cognition. Alternatively stated, in aesthetic response to fine art, there is a demand for norms of thought to take account of that which has been ineffable, unnameable, or irrelevant to cognition. This is a respect in which works of fine art provoke the “quickenings” of our cognitive powers and “connect language with spirit” (§49, p.185). Aesthetic ideas *per se*, hold open this condition of free play. Aesthetic ideas, in being unnameable, in refusing conceptual determination, infuse language with that which has been unsayable.^{53 54}

⁵¹ The painting could very well be interpreted in terms of the Stoic theme of *palingenesis* (becoming again, rejuvenation). *Palingenesis* is a Stoic thought related to the notion of ἐκπύρωσις, the consumption of the old world by fire.

⁵² When Kant says that aesthetic ideas can expand a concept by adding “a wealth of undeveloped material” (§49, p.185). His examples of “undeveloped material” include subjective associations and feelings and as such can be understood to include memories, recollections from childhood, and nostalgia. Accordingly, the representations appropriate to a concept are expanded with material that had not been relevant to my acts of cognition, i.e. had not featured in one’s cognitive life. For an extended treatment of this theme see Matherne (2013, p.28). I take it that this is the respect in which Kant claims the poet “provides nourishment to the understanding” and thereby “[gives] life to its concepts through the imagination” (§51, p.191). Consequent to aesthetic judgments of fine art one’s understanding is expanded as new possibilities for theoretical cognition are available to us.

⁵³ Henrich (1982, p.243) proposes that the task of any philosophical aesthetics is to comprehend the reason/ ground for the ineliminable riddle-character of artworks. We have seen that Kant offered an analysis of this in terms of the transcendental structures of subjectivity: the subjective faculties necessary for morality and cognition are brought into free play.

⁵⁴ There are other ways that concepts enter into our response to works of fine art, but since my focus is on Kant’s analysis of *free play* in response to works of fine art, I will set aside these elements of Kant’s aesthetics (cf. Guyer 1994, for a developed discussion on these points). For instance, Kant tells us that our response to beauty “must refer to some concept or other, for otherwise it could not possibly lay claim to necessary validity for everyone. And yet it must not be provable *from* a concept, because, while some concepts can be determined, others cannot, but are intrinsically both indeterminate and indeterminable. ... reason has a concept of the second kind: the transcendental concept of the supersensible underlying all that intuition,” (§57, p.212). On this view, as Guyer (1994, p.283) explains, the idea of the supersensible substratum of all possible experience counts as an aspect of our response to works of fine art without necessarily being an explicit theme of any particular work of art.

Another aspect would concern Kant’s claim that beauty is a symbol of the idea of the morally good. This idea could feature in our response to works of fine art, without being the concept towards which the aesthetic idea is directed. Kant’s claim is that a relation of symbolism obtains because there are important analogies between the experience of beauty and the nature of moral motivation and judgment. A further aspect is that the response to fine art in itself demonstrates that our will has the capacity to be *freely* determined by the moral law (§59).

There is an important question about what kinds of concepts aesthetic ideas can present, but this is at a tangent to my purpose in this chapter.⁵⁵ Suffice to say that Kant does place an emphasis on the importance of morally significant ideas. In §52 (p.195), Kant tells us that a work of fine art “attunes the spirit to ideas.” That is, through the free play of our response to works of fine art we cultivate a richer intuitive sensitivity to moral ideas, which are ideas that cannot be intuitively demonstrated. In §59 (p.230), Kant writes that judgments of taste enable us to “make the transition from sensible charm to habitual moral interest without making too violent a leap” and this is because the imagination, in its freedom, gathers representations that are purposive for the demonstration of moral ideas. Indeed, Kant warns that artworks that do not present a moral idea “[make] the spirit dull” (§52, p.196). Artworks, and the free play of the faculties that works of fine art arouse, habituate a moral interest: they cultivate our faculties for an ever richer sensitivity to the demands of morality.

For present purposes, I want to conclude this section with two points that are present in the above interpretation but require emphasis: (1) that the play constitutive of aesthetic response is a subjective condition which is not determined by rules; (2) that Kant’s formal analysis frequently defines and describes play in terms of movement. These two points are going to be relevant to our analysis of Schiller’s *Ästhetische Briefe*. Regarding (1), I show that Schiller offers an analysis of play which is neither determined by rules, nor rule-less, and so brings us into a space that I identify in the final section as the space of art criticism. Regarding (2), I elucidate the respect in which Schiller’s analysis of play focuses on the kind of movement essential to aesthetic response. For Schiller, this is a counter-movement or *reciprocity* (*Wechselwirkung*) between the two drives essential to our humanity. This sets up a move in the final section where I provide an analysis of the play proper to art criticism. I will propose that play-as-reciprocity characterizes the dynamic between critic and artwork.

Part 2. Schiller’s *Ästhetische Briefe*: The Laws of Beauty

To develop our understanding of the normative status of aesthetic response—as neither determined by rules, nor rule-less—I turn to Schiller’s *Ästhetische Briefe*. My focus will be on Schiller’s analysis of the ‘playdrive’ (*Spieltrieb*) and its ‘laws of beauty’. Two points will be emphasized: first, that the ‘playdrive’ is an essentially subject-centered condition; second, that the ‘laws of beauty’ provide the conditions by which one is free from the demands of all pre-existing and prevailing laws. These two points set the stage for the reinterpretation of Schiller’s play drive that I offer in this essay’s final section.

In the eleventh letter of his *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller offers an analysis of what he calls our “sensible-rational nature.” These two sides of our nature can cooperate or conflict, but it is characteristic of our humanity that we are both.⁵⁶ Schiller starts with a distinction between ‘person’ and ‘condition’. This is a polarity that covers and establishes the entire field of analysis. He regards this as synonymous with a distinction between the self and its properties/ determinations. The person is *formal*, something

⁵⁵ Must the presented concept be moral? moral or purely rational? or can it also be empirical? Guyer (1994, p.282) proposes that the concept need not be moral and that Kant’s only requirement is that the concept stands in some relation with practical reason. Matherne (2013) argues that aesthetic ideas can present both empirical concepts and affects, in addition to ideas of reason. Accordingly, artworks could present either, or both of moral, non-moral rational, and experience-oriented concepts.

⁵⁶ De Man (1996, p.136) characterized the oppositional structure we find throughout Schiller’s writings as a chiasmatic literary trope. There are a variety of sharply marked polarities, strictly opposed to each other, and with each polar opposition the entire field is covered and established. Understood in this way, these forms mark a symmetrical and reversible structure.

purely indeterminate, a mere potentiality for determination. Schiller says that to exist the person must be determinate, and that it is determined only through its *matter*. Schiller thereby insists on both the ineliminable distinction between form and matter, and their necessary dependence. The mutual dependence of matter and form imposes two basic demands on human nature. First, we should *materialize form*, i.e. we should determine form in something particular. Second, we should *formalize matter*, i.e. we should measure the particular relative to a universal.

In the twelfth letter, Schiller explains that there are two *drives* essential to our nature which correspond to each of these demands: the ‘form drive’, which aims to formalize matter; and the ‘sense drive’, which aims to materialize form.⁵⁷ The sense drive encompasses feelings, desires, and sensations; and the form drive involves both empirical concepts and moral principles. Schiller glosses the perfection of human nature as the ideal of “reciprocal action [*Wechselwirkung*] between the two drives” (L14, p.125). In a state of reciprocity, neither drive dominates or subordinates the other; rather they achieve a condition of proportionate harmony (L13, p.121). We must strive to achieve reciprocity, namely, the condition for the highest possible degree of variability and sensitivity in our sensuality, and the highest possible degree of autonomy in reason. For Schiller, then, the ideal of humanity is the idea of our drives in reciprocity.

Schiller’s analysis of the human as founded on two drives tells us that there is movement in the transcendental structures of humanity. That perfection of our humanity consists in the reciprocity of these contrary forces tells us that the ideal structure of humanity is a counter-movement. Reciprocity is the proportionate counter-movement between the two drives. In reciprocity the two sides are brought together, from out of isolation, to actualize this ideal counter-movement. By bringing these two forces together into a counter-movement we thereby achieve a condition of ‘play’, or what Schiller calls the ‘play drive’ [*Spieltrieb*].⁵⁸ Schiller is clear that the play drive is not a fundamental third drive, and that sense and form provide an exhaustive analysis of our humanity (L13, 121).⁵⁹ Play is the counter-movement that obtains when the sense and form drives actualize reciprocity. In play, both drives are present, both impulses are at play in their counter-movement.

De Man (1996, p.149) is right to claim that ‘reciprocity’ does not denote a dialectical structure: the play drive does not consist in double negation between the opposing drives of sense and form. According to de Man (1996, p.151), play in Schiller’s *Ästhetische Briefe* means *Spielraum*, the space that you need in order to prevent a dialectical encounter from taking place. You need play between sense and form to keep them from negating each other. De Man (1996, p.153) argues that there will be a

⁵⁷ Beiser (2005, p.139) argues that Schiller is indebted to K. L. Reinhold’s distinction between a *Trieb nach Form* and a *Trieb nach Stoff*.

⁵⁸ Beiser (2005, p.143) notes that Schiller extends Lessing’s and Kant’s concept of play, making it more ethical and anthropological. Beiser also contends that Friedrich Wilhelm von Ramdohr’s *Charis* was another important precedent. Ramdohr maintains that human beings are subject to two fundamentally different kinds of drives: the drive to satisfy our basic physical needs; and the drive toward freedom. What satisfies the first kind of drive we call good; and what satisfies the second we call beautiful. This second drive, Ramdohr explains, originates in a more primitive and fundamental need, one that can be observed in animals and children: the drive for play. Beiser notes that although Schiller disapproved of Ramdohr’s empirical aesthetics, there is a clear affinity in their concepts of play.

⁵⁹ Eva Schaper, claims that the play drive is the emergent from harmony between sense and form: “The play drive, then, is not a real, i.e., fundamental drive, but what emerges when neither the necessities of nature nor the ambitions of the intellect dominate,” (1985, p.164).

chiasmatic exchange of attributes between the sense and form drives, by means of play: form will acquire arbitrariness and particularity; and sense will acquire necessity, law, and systematicity.⁶⁰

On these interpretive points I agree, but de Man does not see that reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*), for Schiller, involves a meeting of the drives by mutual grounding and formation, and not merely of reversibility. Schiller says that play will “introduce form into matter and reality into form” (L14, p.127). Taken on their own, each drive imposes a constraint. The sense drive imposes the constraint of physical need; and the form drive imposes the demand that we act on moral principle. Under conditions of reciprocity however, sensibility ceases to constrain us relative to the demands of morality; and morality ceases to constrain a cultivated sensibility. Schiller claims the play drive will “set man free both physically and morally” (L14, p.127). The idea is that one will be free from the constraints of sensibility because one’s character will be educated and sufficiently developed to counter sensible urges; and one will be free from the moral constraints of reason because one will have internalized lawful moral demands. In their reciprocity, each drive limits and shapes the other, and thereby establishes the conditions under which the individual, *qua* ethical subject, can flourish.

Schiller argues that works of fine art cause an ‘aesthetic condition’. This is a condition of play between indeterminacy and determination. Schiller describes the aesthetic condition as one of *active determinability* (L20, p.145). ‘Active’ because the subject has the freedom to determine themselves in a way that is not demanded by any preexisting norm. In its play, the mind (*Gemüt*) is in a condition of reciprocity (counter-movement) between determination (sense) and pure indeterminacy (form).⁶¹ The conditions are therefore met for one to determine oneself in a way that is not responsible to any preexisting norm of determination: we can see, imagine, desire, feel, think, and act anew. The reciprocity of play releases us from the strictures of our normal conduct, and thereby allows us to be open to new self-determined and self-determining possibilities. Play is a condition of the individual in which the authority of existing rules is no longer binding.⁶² Rather than obliging us to take on any particular commitments, play is necessary for realizing our own subjective self-determining capacity.

For Schiller, the play drive is a counter-movement between sense and form that accords with what Schiller calls, “the laws of beauty” (L23, p.154). The laws of beauty govern the unity of the *Gemüt* through reciprocity of sense and form. These are the laws according to which we actualize our freedom. These laws govern the structure according to which determination and pure indeterminacy, contingency and necessity, particularity and universality, are set into play and thereby make available new ways of thinking, perceiving, talking, and feeling. The ‘laws of beauty’ allow us to determine ourselves “by means of freedom” (L27, p.176), because we do not feel ourselves to be compelled heteronomously. Instead, we freely determine ourselves from out of the counter-movement (play) between determination and pure indeterminacy. The laws of beauty do not directly demand action,

⁶⁰ De Man also argues that ‘humanity’ is treated by Schiller as a “closed concept”, and as unanalysable. This is to say that ‘humanity’ is treated as a psychological and therefore empirical term. Beiser (2005, p.45), offers good reasons to resist this view.

⁶¹ ‘*Gemüt*’ can be translated as ‘mind’, but this would be too narrow. We should understand the term as referencing all that composes the subject: mind, feeling, dispositions, and desires.

⁶² Matherne and Riggle (2020, pp.31-32) propose that for Schiller, aesthetic value in general should be conceived in terms of the power of certain objects and properties to cause us to be in a state of play, which is valuable because it is a condition of freedom. Matherne argues that this can be taken as an alternative to other models of aesthetic value and freedom. This chapter could be viewed as an account of art criticism that responds to this kind of aesthetic value.

they are norms that govern the structure of play, according to which we actualize our freedom. The laws of beauty establish that one is not bound by any pre-existing or prevailing laws.⁶³

Schiller says we “leap” into play (L27). This is a leap into consciousness that accords with the laws of beauty, it is a leap into the counter-movement between opposing drives. The leap “becomes a dance” (L27). New possibilities for thought, talk, and sensibility arise: “shapeless gestures [become] harmonious miming speech,” and “the confused noises of perception begin to obey a rhythm and weld themselves into song” (L27, p.175).

Schiller acknowledges the paradoxical appearance of these claims; indeed, the first letter involves recognition that the “magic [of beauty] resides in its mystery” (L1, p.88). There is an essential mystery in beauty because beauty causes a harmony between opposing drives, which is to say that beauty causes an apparently contradictory structure. Later, Schiller says that “nothing is more absurd and contradictory than such an idea” (L18, p.137). Reciprocity between sense and form is apparently inconceivable. And yet, this contradictory state is productive for the realization of our freedom. Indeed, Schiller sees that this is precisely the point to which the study of aesthetics leads. If we can understand a unity of opposites, we thereby find “the thread that will guide us through the whole labyrinth of aesthetics” (L18, p.137).

Dieter Henrich (1982, pp.238-9) advises us to read the *Ästhetische Briefe* as evidence of a movement of thought that points beyond the *de facto* presentation of Schiller’s aesthetic theory. Taking up this critical perspective, I propose that Schiller’s analysis of play, as reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) between contrary drives, shows the way forward. It opens the way for a richer comprehension of the way meaning figures, and is refigured, in art appreciation and criticism. I want to move beyond Schiller’s analysis in two ways: (1) by reinterpreting reciprocity in terms of the relation between sense and nonsense; (2) by reinterpreting the play drive (*Spieltrieb*) as a playroom (*Spielraum*). I propose that the play of art criticism is not as a condition of the subject, but a way of relating to an artwork: the play is not within oneself, it is between oneself and the artwork.

Part 3. Questioning in the Playroom

To recap, the primary claim of Part 1 was that the play needed for art criticism is neither an activity determined by rules which establish an unproblematic space of intelligibility; nor is it a rule-less free play. In Part 2 I sought to develop our understanding of the play distinctive to aesthetic response by looking at Kant’s analysis of aesthetic judgments pertaining to works of fine art. We saw that Kant analyzed aesthetic response as a subjective condition, that play is a formal condition frequently described in terms of movement, and that aesthetic judgment is a form of play that is not rule bound. To further our analysis of the movement distinctive of play in aesthetic response, we turned to Schiller’s *Ästhetische Briefe*. We saw that Schiller analyzed play in terms of the reciprocity

⁶³ Matherne and Riggle (2020, p.27) argue that though it may seem as if Schiller’s and Kant’s concepts of play are similar: they both involve the harmony between sensible and rational capacities, and they are both responsive to beauty; in fact Kant and Schiller have fundamentally different conceptions of play. Kant defines free play in specifically *cognitive* terms, as the harmony of “cognitive powers,” whereas Schiller defines play as a form of freedom. Matherne and Riggle (2020, p.29) propose that unlike on Kant’s view, freedom is not an indirect consequence that might come about if we engage in play; it is constitutive of play itself. I don’t completely agree that this is a point of difference. Even though free play in Kant functions to sharpen our sensitivity to the demands of the moral law, Kant emphasizes throughout the *Critique of Judgment* that aesthetic judgments are undetermined, they are reflective judgments, that is, judgments that are not determined by any rule for cognition or by the moral law. The disinterested feeling of pleasure is the feeling of one’s freedom.

(*Wechselwirkung*), or counter-movement, between the sense drive and the form drive. We noted that play-as-reciprocity is neither determined by any pre-existing norm of cognition, nor is it rule-less. To assist our understanding of this middle position, we reflected on Schiller's conception of the 'laws of beauty'. My interpretive proposal was that we can understand the counter-movement of reciprocity as governed by the 'laws of beauty'. In this final part, I want to reinterpret Schiller's analysis, to show that the kind of play proper to art criticism retains many of the features that Lugones identified with rule-less play (i.e. surprise and creativity), but that the thought involved in critical interpretation needs to conform to the norm of critique—to question and to keep questioning. We will also move the analysis of play beyond the subject and into the 'playroom'. That is to say, play will be analyzed in terms of the relation that obtains between critic and artwork.

The advantages of reinterpreting reciprocity in terms of the relation between sense and nonsense are consequent to reflection on what it is for something to be a work of fine art. When we encounter a work of fine art, we do not encounter mere nonsense but rather a need to think of possibilities of sense-making that have been and are being marginalized by prevailing norms of thought and talk. The artwork thereby provokes us into understanding ourselves and the world anew. In art criticism, one is responsive to the artwork's Janus-faced appearance: artworks both appear to be meaningful, and yet they cannot be decisively understood. To interpret the artwork, involves a responsibility to the way in which the artwork resists our normalized standards of meaning and understanding. It is not that the critic simply enters into nonsense, for then there would be no understanding, and nothing could be said.⁶⁴ It is rather a matter of allowing one's understanding to be moved towards that which is unthinkable relative to prevailing norms of meaning and understanding. Norms of cognition are brought into question in and through interpretation, that is, in the play between ourselves and the artwork. In art-critical *play* there is a movement in the norms that govern communicability.

We do not encounter the artwork in a neutral way, but from a particular perspective framed by tradition, culture, and norms of meaning. Fine art challenges the critic to question and move beyond the norms of meaning with which they are familiar. It is not that something determinately meaningful is presented to us in an indeterminate way. Criticism must respond to an experience of something that cannot be fully grasped or fixed in place by concepts. The critic risks losing the stability of normalized meaning structures. They open themselves to instability, to not knowing the answer, to questioning aspects of the world that they took for granted and assumed themselves to know.

To say that we enter into a condition of *play*, is to say that the understanding that we bring into critical engagement is itself brought into a counter-movement between sense and non-sense: as we move into new frames of understanding, others recede into non-sense. This is the respect in which, in aesthetic response, a reciprocal relation obtains between sense and nonsense.

In and through critical thought we open ourselves to possibilities of sense-making that are marginalized by the norms that ordinarily regulate our thought, talk, perception, feelings, and actions. The artwork provokes us beyond our habitual ways of thinking and perceiving, and I take this to be a way of saying that the artwork invites the critic into critical thought. Through art-critical interpretation we seek that which is marginalized by the understanding we bring to the encounter. Our understanding

⁶⁴ Without conceptual distinctions there isn't even the possibility of thought. Eugen Fink—with a nod to Hegel's criticism of Schelling—articulates this point nicely: "all comportment toward the dark ground is to be experienced as comportment when a residue of clearing remains, because in the absolute night not only all cows are black, but also all understanding is obliterated" (Fink 1993, p.146).

is brought up against its own limits by the artwork, and is motivated to exceed these limits. This is to enter into play with the artwork, wherein the conditions are apt for new possibilities of sense-making to emerge.

In living our lives according to certain standards of meaning, we thereby perpetuate norms that necessitate the denial of other ways of seeing the world. We can get locked into these norms, and suffer from insensitivity to alternatives. Critical thought is necessary to cultivate a sensitivity to foreclosed and marginalized possibilities of sense-making. Critical engagement with an artwork brings us to see that to which we are ordinarily blind as we go about our lives according to prevailing norms of thought and talk. Artworks prompt us to consider possibilities of sense-making that these norms discount. This is why Schiller's analysis of *play*, as reciprocity between two oppositional drives, can be productively applied to the kind of interpretation proper to art criticism. Recall that for Schiller, play-as-reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) involves a meeting of the drives by way of mutual grounding, formation, and reversibility, and that play will "introduce form into matter and reality into form" (L14, p.127). I propose that the kind of interpretation proper to art criticism has this form. That is, art criticism involves reflection on possibilities of sense-making that are rendered nonsense or are marginalized by normalized ways of thinking and perceiving. Through art-critical interpretation, nonsense is brought into sense, and sense into nonsense. This is a counter-movement between sense and nonsense, a mutual formation and reversibility that Schiller analyzed as play.

Art-critical play is available to us as a condition of our being participants in language. Any meaningful conduct (thought, perception, imagination, discourse) makes this movement into marginalized or negated possibilities of sense-making available. This is because what is marginal or negated is relative to the standards which determine what counts as meaningful. Fink (1993, p.136) suggests that in a certain sense, one is thereby always already 'familiar' with the concealed dimension of meaning. That is, as a condition of participating in a language, we enact the marginalization and negation of certain possibilities of meaningful exchange.⁶⁵ As our norms of meaning and understanding become normalized we become increasingly insensitive to these marginalized and negated possibilities. We stick to the rails of that which is socially accepted and thereby become numb to alternative ways of thinking and perceiving. To think of that which is nothing or marginal relative to the norms that customarily regulate our thought and talk is not a move we can force—a point that Heidegger articulated as follows: "the interpretation of a poem can never bring about the hearing of its poetic word by force" (2018, p.245). But we can prepare for this move by questioning the artwork.

The possibilities that the critic thinks of in response to the artwork are neither arbitrary, nor lawfully necessary. Normalized thought and negated possibilities do not stand in a one to one relation, i.e. one standard of sense, for one negated or marginalized possibility of sense-making. Rather, we are to see that the domain of non-sense and marginalization is immeasurable.⁶⁶ In a critical response to an artwork, our thought is oriented towards this immeasurable domain. As Gadamer observes: "The peculiar nature of our experience of art lies in the impact by which it overwhelms us" (1986, p.34). There is therefore a leeway—a playroom—for where the critic's thoughtful response will lead to. The artwork will offer some direction, but the sense discerned in and through the play will not be disclosed

⁶⁵ In his interpretation of Heraclitus' fragments on *logos*, Fink says, "A human has a Janus-like face; he is turned as much to the day as to the night" (1993, p.131).

⁶⁶ In an ontological register, Fink makes this point in the following way: "αληθεια [un-concealment] is surrounded by ληθη [concealment]" (1993, p.131).

with any lawlike necessity. There is randomness and surprise in our critical response to works of art.⁶⁷ This is an important part of the reason why I read Rimbaud's criticism of van Eyke's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* as especially playful. The fact that many elements mentioned in Rimbaud's text cannot be located in the painting is not evidence of deficiency. Rather, it is indicative of Rimbaud's playful interpretation of the artwork. The artwork offered direction to where his thought led, but not with any law-like necessity. Were Rimbaud bound to the properties of the artwork that in fact obtain, his interpretation would be constrained in its play. Rimbaud was productively responding to the artwork in light of its resistance to interpretive determination. The prevailing norms of discourse that regulated Rimbaud's thought were not adequate to interpret the artwork. In consequence to this resistance, his thought was prompted to fanciful images such as a fragrant abyss and a meadow of bounding flames, and to seemingly contradictory constructions such as his depiction of the angels' location: are they "on the slope of the bank" or "in the pastures of steel and of emerald"?

This is a form of play that accords with what Schiller called the 'laws of beauty'. The play of art criticism cannot be regulated by a series of rules given independently of the play. The critic will not be able to foresee the way their understanding will develop and adjust to the artwork, but they can remain responsive to the possibilities of sense-making that exceed the normalized ways of thinking and perceiving that the critic brings to the play. Recall Schiller's claim that the 'laws of beauty' allow us to determine ourselves "by means of freedom" (L27, p.176), and that when play accords with the laws of beauty we are not bound by any pre-existing or prevailing law. My proposal is that in art criticism we are free to interpret the artwork in ways that do not conform to communally recognized standards of meaning and understanding. In art criticism, interpretation involves the play between prevailing norms of cognition, and negated or marginalized possibilities of thought and perception.

The answer to the question of what an artwork means is obscure. Failure to arrive at a determinate answer is not a failure of understanding. The critic needs to resist the temptation to subject the artwork to rational determination, on pain of failing to think critically. This is why I take the norm of critique to be a constitutive norm of art-critical interpretation: the critic's thought needs to conform to this norm for it to count as being appropriately and productively responsive to the work of art. To think critically—to question and to keep questioning—is to allow one's understanding to change in ways that are initiated by the resistance of the artwork to our understanding. This is what I call participation in the 'playroom' of art criticism. To think critically—to be in the playroom—requires that one is

⁶⁷ We find reflection on this form of play in pre-Socratic thought, in a fragment from Heraclitus:

Lifetime [ζιὼν] is a child at play [παῖς ἐστὶ παίζων], moving pieces in a game. Kingship belongs to the child. (D.52, 2001, p.71)

First, note that the child at play is identified with 'lifetime' *aion* [ζιὼν]. According to Charles Kahn (2001, p.228), *aion* has the sense of 'vitality', '(human) life'. Life is not mechanical, it involves play, randomness, indeterminacy. Second, the child is described as being kingly. The opposition between the king and the child can be correlated with the opposition between the kinds of play identified by Piaget and Lugones, respectively. It is worth noting that Schiller makes a similar association. While in the condition of play, "even the mightiest genius must divest itself of its majesty, and stoop in all humility to the mind of a little child" (L27, p.178).

I propose that the phenomenon at issue, located in the idea of the kingly child, involves a reciprocal relation between law-like rationality and arbitrary chance. The movement of *aion* is characterized as play-like. There is a lawful yet arbitrary character to the world in which we live. The claim is that all that is present to thought and perception is meaningful in ways that are consequent to the king-child's play. Heidegger (1991, p.24) says that when Heraclitus speaks of 'father' or 'ruler', he is speaking of an ἀρχή [ultimate principle]. So we could infer that, according to Heraclitus, the game played by the kingly child sets the measures of meaning that regulate our thought, talk, perception, and action.

continually responsive to the artwork's indeterminability, and this requires one's thought to conform to the norm of critique.

The 'playroom' of art criticism is a space in which familiar ways of thinking and perceiving are drawn into unfamiliar thoughts and looks. By thinking of the space of criticism as a playroom, we are able to see better how art criticism is neither subjective nor objective, but an interplay between oneself and the artwork's resistance to one's understanding. It is not about subjective intentional mental states, and it is not about objects and their properties; it is not about subjective feelings, nor universally valid norms of meaning, although it is in a sense about all of these. In art criticism one thinks in a *playroom* that consists in the reciprocity (counter-movement) between one's efforts to understand the artwork and the artwork's resistance to those efforts. In this 'playroom' we can thereby question the ways we understand ourselves and the world in which we live. This space is disruptive for any tranquil sense of self because the norms that govern our self-understanding face a challenge. We are forced to acknowledge that we are always available for self-critique and transformation. Moreover, in and through critical thought one achieves a richer self-understanding because one can take up new perspectives on the norms of sense that ordinarily regulate our thought and talk.

Art-critical play is a form of thought in which new possibilities for sense-making are reflected upon. More specifically, this is a form of thought that accords with the norm of critique. Unlike other rule-bound activities, critical play involves spontaneity and creativity. The player must be responsive to the play as it happens. This is why they must continually question both the artwork: "what does it mean? What is it saying?"; and themselves, "do I understand the artwork? Are the words I speak actually appropriately responsive to the artwork?" The answer to each of these questions is that there is no final answer. This is what Schiller's 'laws of beauty' provide: a normativity that governs the conditions of freedom from pre-existing and prevailing norms of sense-making. Play is at once normatively structured and a condition of freedom.

When one's thought is productively and appropriately responsive to a work of art, the relation between the artwork and oneself is a play governed by the norm of critique. What this means is that an artwork spontaneously develops a form that feels as though it is presenting something that is discontinuous with prevailing norms of cognition. There is a normativity to this, but it is a normativity that has not been determined. You are at a free jazz gig and the musicians start to play something they didn't know they were going to play before they started playing it, or a theme is developed and turned into something else. The logic of play is that you start to perceive the path of the improvisation, it starts to make sense to you. And then you are in the *playroom*, and you can suddenly see the usual state of things in its counter-tension with this exceptional case. The improvisation enters into a playful opposition with the normal way of playing in such a way that you come to understand the normal state of things more fully.

When Rimbaud writes of "Meadows of flames bound to the summit of the hillock," and that "Behind the ridge on the right is the line of orients, of progress," he displays that the artwork has prompted his thought to the demise of something existing—that which his going up in flames—and towards the possibility of something new—"the line... of progress." Indeed, the text ends with the "fragrant and blue [abyss]." Rimbaud's thought is brought to the point of non-sense—an 'abyss'—where pre-existing and prevailing standards of meaning and understanding give out and can no longer provide the terms to meaningfully speak of that towards which he, Rimbaud, is thinking. My proposal is that this piece of criticism displays a playful engagement with the artwork. That is to say, Rimbaud's discourse displays the movement of reciprocity between sense and non-sense. New possibilities of

thought and sensation emerge from out of this playful engagement: Rimbaud's thought is oriented towards "progress." Art-critical play allows us to understand ourselves and the world differently, and since we have entered into a *counter*-movement between sense and nonsense, we cannot just simply switch back into the ways we thought/ perceived/ felt prior to our critical encounter.

Chapter 3

The 'Poetic' Quality of Art Criticism

Aesthetics, past as well as present, is an intellectual wasteland, and the fault lies with the aestheticians themselves, who have been insensitive to the variety and flexibility of the language of criticism and the uses to which it is put.
(Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, 1983, p.10)

The question I want to explore in this chapter is one towards which contemporary philosophical work in aesthetics turns a blind eye. And yet, it is a question on which, deliberately or not, philosophers who reflect on questions pertaining to art criticism take a stand. The question is as follows: *What would it be for the language of art criticism to be both appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?*

Broadly, responses to this question can be interpreted as falling within two camps. On the one hand, there is a prevailing commitment to what I will call 'prosaic' discourse, in the sense that art critical discourse must be 'prosaic'. The 'prosaic' view is committed to the claim that art criticism, when it is good, determinately designates something true of the artwork. This is of course perfectly consistent with the idea that there are an innumerable number of ways to determine the 'value', 'meaning', or 'content' of an artwork. But the principle thought is that the critic *can* tell their interlocutor what is of value in the artwork.⁶⁸

On the other hand, there are those who see the need for a 'poetic' quality in art criticism. For instance, in *The Abuse of Beauty*, Arthur Danto reflects on "poetic and subjective" criticism, and concedes that he is himself drawn to such an approach. However, on those occasions when philosophers do express sympathy with 'poetic' art criticism, the 'poetic' is presented as a literary genre, i.e. as *poetry* that is about or inspired by another work of art. So in this sense 'poetic' criticism is art about art. Accordingly, Danto and I part ways on the respect in which the language of art criticism counts as 'poetic'.

The 'poetic', in the sense at issue in this chapter, is not to be identified with a literary genre, nor with *poiesis* understood as simple creativity. Rather, the 'poetic' is a form of discourse that brings forth new possibilities of sense making.⁶⁹ The poetic quality of language marks a refusal or evasion of determinate meaning. Accordingly, this chapter offers an examination of the respect in which art criticism counts

⁶⁸ Prominent examples of this view include Noël Carroll's (2008) and Richard Wollheim's (1980) assessments of art criticism. According to Carroll, criticism primarily consists in evaluation grounded in reasons. So the critic *can* tell their interlocutor, by way of a discourse that consists of reasons, what is of value in the artwork (cf. Carroll 2008, p.9). Wollheim argues that criticism is an inquiry geared towards retrieval of the creative process that issued in the artwork: "The creative process reconstructed, retrieval complete, the work is then open to understanding" (Wollheim 1980, p.185). Also see Mary Mothersill (*Beauty Restored*, 1983) and Antonia Peacocke 'What a Great Critic Does' (*Aesthetics for the Birds*, 2019).

⁶⁹ Hölderlin, drawing on Plato, construes poetry in this way. For instance, in the *Symposium*, Diotima tells the young Socrates: "everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry;" (205c). In German the word for poetry is *Dichtung*, which carries a resonance with *dicht*, meaning 'thick' or 'dense'. Heidegger (1992, p.8) states that *dichten* derives from the Greek *tikto* (τίκτω), "to bring forth". In his lectures *Hölderlin's Hymns 'Germania' and 'The Rhine'* (2014, p.28-29), Heidegger suggests that to poetize (*dichten*), refers to the Latin *dictare*, meaning "to write down (*niederschreiben*), to fore-tell something to be written down, to tell something that, prior to this, has not yet been told. A properly unique beginning thus lies in whatever is said poetically." Heidegger claims that the Latin *dicere* itself comes from the Greek *deiknumi* (δείκνυμι: to show, to make something visible, to make it manifest by way of a specific pointing), indicating that the roots of *Dichtung* are double, being derived from both *tikto* and *deiknumi*. In his 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (2013, p.73), Heidegger writes that 'poetic' discourse prepares the sayable from out of the unsayable, that is, it brings the unsayable into communicable discourse.

as an intervention in a public discourse because it liberates language use from pre-established and prevailing norms of communication, i.e. from norms established independently of the critical encounter with the artwork.⁷⁰

Criticism is performed in and through its writing or speaking. The examination of the ‘poetic’ quality of criticism thereby places an emphasis on the practice of art criticism. Whereas communication aims to accord with prevailing norms of meaning and understanding, art-critical thought brings one’s understanding to the limits of communicability and looks to move productively beyond those limits without merely speaking nonsense. In and through critical thought the limits of meaning are experienced. In this respect, the practice of art criticism presents us with a puzzle. On the one hand the critic’s discourse needs to accord with the norms governing communicable discourse; on the other hand, the critic needs to articulate the respect(s) in which an artwork defies norms governing communicable discourse. In this chapter, I argue that the ‘poetic’ quality of art criticism obtains because this is a form of discourse that breaks (as a *caesura*) from established norms of cognition towards new possibilities of sense-making. This means that the critic’s interlocutor or reader must be open to a peculiarly challenging, peculiarly difficult discourse, whose ‘difficulty’ is motivated by the challenge the artwork presents to understanding. The discourse or art-criticism is ‘difficult’ because the meaning of the concepts therein articulated is not settled.⁷¹

With an interest in this tension, my goal in this chapter is to defend an account of what it is for the language of art criticism to be both appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art. I do so by acknowledging the appeal in both ‘prosaic’ and ‘poetic and subjective’ forms of discourse. To this end, I submit that a Hölderlinian sensitivity to poetic language retains the merits of each while avoiding their limitations.

My positive proposal will be based on a Hölderlinian interpretation of Kant’s claim that in response to works of fine art we achieve an ‘expanded mind’ (*erweiterte Denkungsart*). This is an interpretation that draws on Hölderlin’s poetic translations of Sophocles. My reasons for adopting this strategy are as follows. In Kant’s reflections on judgments pertaining to fine art, several remarks are offered regarding the way that fine art can enrich “social communication” in unforeseeable ways. Hölderlin was very much inspired by Kant’s work in his Third Critique regarding the kind of freedom that can be achieved in aesthetic experience. Working with and beyond Kant’s transcendental framework, Hölderlin continued to reflect on the capacity for language itself to inaugurate new possibilities of thought and talk. In this chapter I propose that Hölderlin’s ‘poetic’ translations of Sophocles offer a vivid demonstration of his thoughts about the revolutionary potential of poetry. I hope to show that a close look at Kant’s reflections on fine art and the ‘expanded mind’, reveal an important cue for Hölderlin’s most developed poetic work. By exploring this historical connection, I aim to defend an account of what it is for the language of art criticism to be both appropriately and productively

⁷⁰ James Elkins (2019) calls for art criticism to speak from outside of a system, practice, or precedent and laments the increasing predictability of art criticism: “I would like to be seriously challenged by art criticism: I want to not recognize what I’m reading, not understand the claims, and not see the structure. I’d like art criticism to make good on the values it celebrates in art: difficulty, novelty, independence” (2019, p.4). This is a way of framing what I take to be performed by the ‘poetic’ quality of art critical discourse.

⁷¹ Adorno articulates the oppositional impulse intrinsic to critical thought in his *Negative Dialectics*: “The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal.” (1983, p.10); “[We] must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept.” (1983, p.15)

responsive to a work of fine art. This is a proposal that doesn't exactly reconcile the tension inherent to art criticism, but rather draws on the productive potential of this tension.

I begin in Part I §1 with a presentation of Mary Mothersill's case for the claim that the language of art criticism needs to be prosaic. I will argue that Mothersill's Kantian framing itself reveals the need for a 'poetic' quality in art criticism. In Part II §2, I present Danto's interest in 'poetic and subjective' art criticism. I argue that this kind of 'poetic' discourse is not appropriately responsive to the way in which artworks resist pre-established and prevailing norms of communication. To set the stage for my presentation of 'poetic' art criticism, in Part II §1, I present Kant's claim that aesthetic judgments of fine art 'expand' both mind and concept. In Part II §2, I offer a Hölderlinian interpretation of the expanded mind by bringing Kant's reflections on the expanded concept into conversation with an interpretation of Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles' *Antigone*. My proposal is that the *caesura* or 'pure word' is the mark of genuinely poetic discourse. Finally, in Part III, I argue that for art criticism to be appropriately and productively responsive to an artwork, the articulated concepts undergo expansion. This is to say that the discourse brings forth new possibilities of sense-making, as possibilities of sense-making *to come*. There is not a simple, crude redefinition of terms. Art criticism is still bound by norms of communicability, but its discourse expands beyond those norms *towards* new possibilities of sense-making, where these new possibilities are present *as* possibilities *to come*. I argue that though this quality of discourse is present in an intensified form in Hölderlin's translation, it can also be seen to be present in *bona fide* cases of art criticism. Accordingly, my proposal is that when done well, the language of art criticism needs a 'poetic' quality.

Part 1 §1 'Prosaic' Criticism & Poetry as Criticism

In a broadly Kantian vein, Mothersill is forthright with the claim that a theory of beauty will not provide 'principles of criticism' (1983, p.2). In reflecting on what it might be for something to be beautiful, she acknowledges that beauty might be thought of as "[belonging] to the domain of 'that whereof one cannot speak.'" (Mothersill 1983, p.9). "But what does this mean?" says Mothersill. She denies it means that beauty or artistic merit do not admit of formal definition, because ultimately she offers a formal definition of beauty. For Mothersill, a 'test' of an aesthetic theory is the extent to which it illuminates and makes less mysterious the possibility and practice of art criticism (Mothersill 1983, p.428).

On art criticism Mothersill says that it is neither an "exact science nor a quixotic dream;" (Mothersill 1983: 30). She argues for two theses on what counts as good art criticism. The first thesis, explicitly following Kantian thought, is that there are no principles of taste (1983, p.115). Mothersill endorses Kant's claim that what she calls the *First Thesis* is central to aesthetics, and that Kant was correct to hold that nothing more fundamental could be derived from this thesis (1983, p.143).

Mothersill (1983, p.153) offers an assessment of what she calls 'genuine judgments'. These are judgments that the judging subject takes to be true and to have been uttered in the public domain. They can be challenged and debated, and the judging subject will listen to these challenges. For Mothersill (1983, p.164), a judgment counts as 'genuine' if it is contingent, meaning that it can be either true or false; if it admits of being challenged and tested by others; if there are determinate confirmation procedures that can be specified in advance; the judgment must be determinably consistent or inconsistent with other judgments; and the judgment must be adequate to play a role in inference, and to justify entailments. Mothersill's *Second Thesis* is that some judgments of taste are

‘genuine’. Mothersill offers these theses as “[truths] that any aesthetic theory must preserve,” (1983, p.164).

Mothersill sees that an important implication of *First Thesis* is that there are no determinately specifiable good-making characteristics of artworks. She acknowledges that in light of this implication we might be tempted to follow our “romantic forebears” and hold that “it is impossible by means of concepts to ‘grasp the essence of the artistic fact’,” (Mothersill 1983, p.340). But this is not the route that Mothersill opts for. She looks for an account that will explain critical analysis and description. She is clear in her belief that aesthetic properties are not mysterious or incomprehensible. Rather, they are properties of an individual entity which is disclosed to us only through sensual acquaintance with that individual object (Mothersill 1983, p.352). Indeed, she argues for a version of the ‘default’ theory of aesthetic value, combining Aesthetic Hedonism with Aesthetic Formalism, such that an artwork’s value consists in the way its aesthetic properties are disposed to cause pleasure in appreciating subjects. So for Mothersill, it is in virtue of an artwork’s aesthetic properties that it causes pleasure (1983, p.376). A primary aim of art criticism, then, is to cultivate shared pleasure by acquaintance with the artwork’s aesthetic properties (Mothersill, 1983: 379).

Mothersill underscores that the unity of an artwork’s aesthetic properties can be complex, multi-layered, and partly hidden. In the case of such artworks, this unity—what Mothersill calls the ‘expressive character’ or ‘soul’ of the artwork—“[is] not to be taken in at a glance, and long study leaves room for fresh discoveries” (1983, p.423). Mothersill says that one’s acquaintance with an artwork’s aesthetic properties is a matter of degree, and that improving one’s acquaintance takes time and work. The more developed one’s understanding of the artwork, the greater will be one’s capacity to convey to others the nature of that artwork’s ‘soul’. For Mothersill (1983, p.425-426), criticism consists in the capacity to discriminate through reflective analysis the various aspects of an artwork which one takes to be beautiful, and through the use of creative imagination to find words that will convey one’s findings to others. For instance, in calling an artwork ‘melancholy’, a critic might cite the colors, the line, or the tonality, in creative and especially illuminating ways.

I take Mothersill to be an important and challenging interlocutor because though she commits to a ‘prosaic’ form of art criticism she at least sees why a ‘poetic’ approach might be taken. Her analysis is committed to prosaic criticism because she believes that the critic can *determine* the causes of their pleasure in the artwork by describing the various aesthetic properties and the way in which they form a unity in the artwork. So for Mothersill, the critic can determine what is of value in the artwork, and can cultivate a shared appreciation of that value. However, by accepting the first thesis, namely, that there are no principles of taste, i.e. there are no rules for determining the correctness of one’s aesthetic judgment, she recognizes that we may be led to think of beauty as “[belonging] to the domain of ‘that whereof one cannot speak.’” (1983, p.9), and that we might thus follow our “romantic forebears” and hold that “it is impossible by means of concepts to ‘grasp the essence of the artistic fact’,” (1983, p.340). Mothersill’s argument is that recoiling to our ‘romantic forebears’ would be to give up on art criticism. In what follows, I argue that it is precisely by turning to our ‘romantic forebears’ that we can discern what it would be for the language of art criticism to be optimally productive and responsive to an artwork, as a work of *fine art*.

My central contention is that the ‘poetic’ quality of art criticism articulates the possibilities of sense-making made available in and through our critical engagement with works of fine art. An important feature of my proposal is that these possibilities present themselves as possibilities of thought *to come*. The discursive movement towards these possibilities is performed by the ‘poetic’ quality of art

criticism. To indicate what I do not mean by ‘poetic’ art criticism, let us turn to Danto’s presentation of what he refers to as “subjective, romantic, and poetic” criticism. In *The Abuse of Beauty*, Danto concedes that he is partial to this kind of criticism. To illuminate this kind of criticism Danto refers to Rilke’s poem ‘Archaic torso of Apollo’ (2003, p.128). According to Danto, Rilke’s poem is about how a work of art can get us to ask what we are, and what we must settle for, given our mortal and human finitude. For Danto (2003, p.128), this example is supposed to illustrate that “subjective, romantic, and poetic” criticism ought to have something like the effect on the reader that the sculpture had on the poet.⁷² I want to make a parallel point about art criticism, but in what follows I will argue that there is a categorical difference between an artwork that stands in a referential relation to another artwork, and criticism of an artwork. My proposal will be that criticism is distinguished by opening a conversation that is motivated by the artwork, so that the possibilities of sense-making made available by interpretation of the artwork are *directly* brought into public discourse.

To bring the phenomenon at issue into view, let us consider John Ruskin’s ‘The Image of the Sea’. This is a short text that criticizes J.M.W. Turner’s sea paintings (1964, pp.363-364):

[In Turner’s paintings] both ships and sea were things that broke into pieces... The sea up to that time had been generally regarded by painters as a liquidly composed, level-seeking consistent thing, with a smooth surface, rising to a water-mark on sides of ships; in which ships were scientifically to be embedded, and wetted, up to said water-mark, and to remain dry above the same. But Turner found... that the sea was *not* this: that it was, on the contrary, a very incalculable and unhorizontal thing, setting its “water-mark” sometimes on the highest heavens, as well as on sides of ships;—very breakable into pieces; half of a wave separable from the other half, and on the instant carriageable miles inland;—not in any wise limiting itself to a state of apparent liquidity, but now striking like a steel gauntlet, and now becoming a cloud, and vanishing, no eye could tell whither; one moment a flint cave, the next a marble pillar, the next a mere white fleece thickening the thundery rain. He never forgot those facts; never afterwards was able to recover the idea of positive distinction between sea and sky, or sea and land.

⁷² Despite his interest in ‘poetic’ art criticism, Danto’s own approach is ‘prosaic’. According to Danto, the critic tries to say what a given artwork means, and how that meaning is embodied in the material object itself. For Danto, works of art express thoughts in non-verbal ways. The critic aims to grasp the thought expressed by the work based on the way the work is organized. Danto’s analysis of the meaning “embodied” in an artwork takes the form of Hegelian ‘absolute spirit’. On this view “[embodied meaning] connects the art of a given culture with humanity.” The artwork’s meaning reflects something about the social norms that regulated the thought, talk, and sensual tendencies, in the society within which and from out of which the artwork was created. According to Hegel, absolute spirit had three ‘moments’: art, religion, and philosophy. According to this view, art is a sensual manifestation of spirit’s self-understanding. Which is to say that it shows human beings what it means for them to be the bearers of that self-understanding. According to this view, artworks not only express their cultures, but express the vision of the world under and in terms of which their cultures live. In this way art has philosophical significance. For Hegel, it was philosophy in a displaced form. Hegel famously claimed that this philosophical work was no longer a possibility for art, and that it had been superseded by philosophy proper. Danto agrees and disagrees with this ‘end of art’ thesis. He disagrees insofar as he denies that art has been superseded by philosophy (2003, pp.136-137).

To exemplify his method, Danto guides us through his approach to criticizing Wtewael’s *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*. Danto says that when appreciating this painting he tries to feel himself addressed “as part of the rare and refined audience for whom he must have painted.” Danto asks, from the perspective of his imagined audience, “what does the story mean for us, sitting here in our castle, on top of the world, enjoying the good things of life,” (2003, p.142). Danto proposes that the artwork’s meaning is philosophical and “internally related to its viewers. It puts their lives in perspective. It tells them what, really, they already know,” (2003, p.142).



J.M.W. Turner, 'Snow Storm—Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth' (1842), *Tate*.

From Mothersill's perspective, Ruskin's criticism would not count as an optimally appropriate or productive response to Turner's painting. Ruskin does not describe the aesthetic properties that might or indeed *ought* to cause pleasure in the appreciator. For instance, one might cite the subtlety of the coloring, or the harmony and balance of the composition. Clearly Ruskin does not aim towards cultivating a shared acquaintance with these kinds of properties. Equally, Ruskin does not write a poem in response to the artwork. His criticism is not itself an artwork. Danto might approve of the way in which Ruskin attempts to articulate the artwork's meaning. However, as a work of fine art, this meaning cannot be determinately specified. Rather, it raises questions about our understanding of the world in which we live.

Recall that for Kant, the 'aesthetic idea' expressed by a work of *fine art* presents a concept (KU §49, p.186). Let us say that Ruskin's criticism suggests that the concept 'presented' by Turner's artwork is *sea*. In responding to the artwork, Ruskin articulates a contradiction which invites a renewed understanding of modernity. On the one hand the Enlightenment tells us that the sea is "a liquidly composed, level-seeking consistent thing, with a smooth surface, rising to a water-mark on sides of ships; in which ships were scientifically to be embedded, and wetted, up to said water-mark, and to remain dry above the same." On the other hand, the sea is experienced as "a very incalculable and unhorizontal thing, setting its "water-mark" sometimes on the highest heavens, as well as on sides of ships;—very breakable into pieces; half of a wave separable from the other half, and on the instant carriageable miles inland;—not in any wise limiting itself to a state of apparent liquidity," That which

counts as *sea* does not conform to the demands of science: there is no determinate *place* where things in the sea can be located; there is no determinate physical state of the sea, in the sense that the sea is between liquid, gas, and solid. Beyond the sea, Ruskin's criticism suggests that Turner's artworks call into question our understanding of *nature*. Ruskin proposes that Turner's paintings call into question the distinctions that seem most obvious to us. That is, we question the positive distinctions "between sea and sky, or sea and land." Ruskin's criticism opens up a conversation, motivated by Turner's artworks, of what counts as 'nature' and as the 'sea'. If nature resists calculation and measurement, what is it? Where Ruskin brings forth the contradiction between the scientific ideals of the Enlightenment, and our experience of nature, we find the formation of a new rule by which to understand the concept *sea*.

The question that motivates this chapter concerns the language that we find in this kind of criticism. For instance, when Ruskin questions the legitimacy of "a positive distinction between sea and sky, or sea and land," my proposal is that this is not 'prosaic' language because it does not *determine* the meaning, value, or content of the artwork. Rather, the language itself begins to inaugurate a change in our norms of communication. And yet, the critic's discourse is intelligible, so it must both conform to recognized standards of meaning and understanding, and serve as the advent for a change in these norms. I contend that such criticism is 'poetic', and that this 'poetic' quality is needed for art criticism to count as offering an appropriate and productive response to the artwork's indeterminability.

'Poetic' art criticism brings new possibilities of sense-making into communicable discourse. The criticism moves towards that which is to be said in response to the artwork without fully being able to say it. This is both to take seriously the nature of the artwork's refusal to be determinately grasped, and to see the productive potential of critical engagement.

II §1 Kant's *erweiterte Denkungsart*

The primary claim in this chapter is that the language of art criticism has a 'poetic' quality. In this section, I will set up the primary claim by looking to Kant's proposal that aesthetic judgments of fine art 'expand' our concepts. This will set the stage for a Hölderlinian interpretation of the expanded concept, according to which the concept is 'expanded' by bringing forth new *possibilities* of thought and talk. My claim is that this 'expanded' concept marks the 'poetic' quality of the language of art criticism.

Kant proposes that fine art (*schöne Kunst*) expresses 'aesthetic ideas' that symbolically present rational ideas, empirical concepts, or emotions.⁷³ The 'aesthetic idea' refers to the unity of diverse aesthetic attributes, namely, imaginative representations. Kant connects aesthetic ideas to the productive imagination and its capacity for "[creating], as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it" (KU §49, p.182).⁷⁴ In acts of aesthetic judgment, we feel our freedom from laws of association, laws which are followed in the reproductive exercise of the imagination. Aesthetic ideas are representations consequent to a play of the imagination that does not yield to the laws of association (KU, s.49, p.182). The imagination is thereby productive of new representational associations. The aesthetic idea stimulates thought towards the concept it 'presents'.⁷⁵ An aesthetic

⁷³ This marks my agreement with Matherne's (2013) argument that aesthetic ideas do not only present ideas of reason.

⁷⁴ Kant identifies aesthetic ideas as 'intuitions' and as such, as "presentations of the imagination" (KU §49, p.182).

⁷⁵ Kant's examples of rational ideas presented by works of fine art include, "invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation." His examples drawn from within experience include "death, envy, and all the other vices,

idea is an imaginary ‘presentation’ [*Darstellung*] of a concept: “the imagination, in its freedom from any instruction by rules, but still as purposive for exhibiting the given concept” (KU §49, p.186). Yet aesthetic ideas outstrip cognition. They involve an intuition—a representation of the imagination—that is so rich and complex that no concept could be adequate to it.⁷⁶ Kant emphasizes this point with regard to the limits of language and conceptual description:

by an aesthetic idea I mean a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] *concept*, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it.
(§49, p.182)

Kant claims that aesthetic ideas “[emulate] the example of reason in reaching for a maximum” (§49, p.183). Just as we form ideas of reason in an effort to achieve a maximal understanding, so too does the artist form an aesthetic idea in an effort to offer a maximal presentation of a concept. Even in those cases where an aesthetic idea ‘presents’ an empirical concept the example is presented “with a completeness” (§49, p.183) that reaches past the limits of pre-established norms of cognition.⁷⁷ Kant argues that aesthetic judgments of fine art serve cognition *indirectly* (§49, p.185). Such judgments lead to an expansion of our cognitive capacities, which, in turn, serves cognition.^{78 79}

For the purpose of this chapter, my primary interest is in the respect in which Kant claims aesthetic judgments of fine art expand empirical concepts. Kant writes that the aesthetic idea expressed by a work of fine art “aesthetically expands the concept itself in an unlimited way” (KU §49, p.183). For Kant, we can think of the content of an empirical concept as involving both ‘logical’ and ‘aesthetic’ content. A concept’s ‘logical content’ grounds our theoretical cognition as that which is analytically true of the concept. A concept’s ‘aesthetic content’ includes subjective connections and ‘feels’. Works of fine art can contribute to this latter kind of content, hence Kant’s claim that aesthetic ideas can supply “a wealth of undeveloped material” which had not been true of the concept (KU §49, p.185). Aesthetic attributes can expand a concept with subjective qualities, like memories and affective associations, while preserving the concept’s logical content. Aesthetic judgments of fine art thereby indirectly contribute to richer cognitive experience of the world.

According to Kant, a concept’s expansion amounts to the addition “of much that is ineffable [unnameable], but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which

as well as love, fame.” The imagination strives to give sensible expression to such qualities in a way that exceeds the empirical possibilities of their presentation.

⁷⁶ By contrast, a rational idea is a concept for which no intuition (presentation of the imagination) could be adequate.

⁷⁷ According to Hande Tuna, to count as beautiful, the aesthetic idea should display both *originality* and *exemplarity*. Originality consists in breaking with pre-existing rules; exemplarity consists in creating a new rule for judgment (§46). Tuna’s proposal is that works of fine art exceed our expectations because they defy existing laws of association. According to Tuna (2016), this allows for the concept to be “presented in unexpected ways.”

⁷⁸ “we assess the value of the fine arts by the culture [or cultivation] they provide for the mind, taking as our standard the **expansion of those powers that have to come together in the power of judgment in order for cognition to arise,**” (KU, §53, p.199, bold emphasis added).

⁷⁹ Though my own focus in the chapter is on the ‘expanded’ concept, Kant is also interested in the ways aesthetic response to fine art can ‘expand’ both the imagination and the understanding. For Kant’s analysis of the ‘expanded’ imagination see §49 (p.184), and for his analysis of the expanded understanding see §51 (p.190). Matherne (2013, pp.26-27) offers a nice interpretation of these passages.

otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit” (§49, p.185). Through new associations the concept presented by the aesthetic idea gets expanded and we enjoy pleasure in this expansion. This gives rise to what Kant calls a ‘feeling of life’ in the judging subject, namely, a feeling of freedom from preexisting norms of cognition. Works of art do this, not by giving rise to determinate thoughts, but by arousing a feeling which corresponds to the capacity for creating aesthetic ideas, namely, the faculty of spirit.⁸⁰ So it is by way of the ‘expansion’ of the judging subject’s concepts, and the concomitant felt freedom from normative constraint, that language is connected with spirit in aesthetic judgments of fine art.

To express that which had been excluded from acts of cognition, and to make that excluded quality universally communicable, we need ‘spirit’, namely, the capacity for the imagination’s productive free play. In aesthetic response to fine art, ‘spirit’ is brought into play with the understanding in such a way that the productive activity of the imagination can be communicated. This requires that thought and talk consequent to aesthetic judgments of fine art are free from the constraint of pre-existing rules for cognition. Kant says that the concepts consequent to this play are “original” and thereby “reveal a new rule that could not have been inferred from any earlier principles or examples” (§49, p.186).

For Kant concept-expansion consists in the addition of ‘aesthetic attributes’ to that which is correctly subsumed by the concept. By contrast, the Hölderlinian interpretation of concept-expansion that I will now offer, places emphasis on a concept’s ‘logical attributes’. This is to say that the meaning of the concept, in the sense of a concept’s intension, changes. There is a change in the universal itself. This is what I take to be at play in Hölderlin’s ‘poetic’ translations of Sophocles, and so it is to these translations that we now turn.

II §2 Translation, Tragedy, Metaphor

In the preceding section we looked to Kant’s claim that aesthetic judgments of fine art expand both mind and concept. We paid particular attention to the way in which our response to fine art expands a concept’s ‘aesthetic content’. In this section I want to show how my construal of ‘poetic’ discourse is inspired by Hölderlin’s reflections on tragic poetry, and his translations of Sophocles in particular. This entry into Hölderlin’s thought will set up the following section in which I provide an interpretation of his reflections on the *caesura*, or ‘pure word’, as it features in his ‘poetic’ translations of Sophocles. My proposal will be that the *caesura* constitutes the ‘poetic’ moment of language.

In his essay, ‘The Ground of Empedocles’, Hölderlin says that tragic poetry reveals our finite, mortal condition, and yet presents an experience of “profound [*Innigkeit*: intimacy]” (1988, p.51) with Being. The ‘profound intimacy’ with Being tempts us to hubristic claims of full comprehension of Being.⁸¹ However, as we have seen in chapter 1, Being is necessarily inaccessible to modern subjective consciousness, despite our pretensions otherwise. Recall Hölderlin’s claim in *Judgment and Being* that Being can only be known in “intellectual intuition.”⁸² For Hölderlin, tragic poetry expresses humanity’s

⁸⁰ “Spirit [*Geist*] in an aesthetic sense is the animating principle in the mind... I maintain that this principle is nothing but the ability to exhibit *aesthetic ideas*,” (§49, p.182).

⁸¹ ‘Being’ will refer to being as such; ‘being’ will refer to an individual being.

⁸² In *Judgment and Being*, Hölderlin writes (translated by Jacqueline Mariña, bold emphasis added):

Being – expresses the connection between subject and object.

longing for and mourning of unity with Being; but at the same time it offers a glimpse into what is withheld from subjective consciousness. Tragic poetry “is the metaphor of an intellectual intuition” (1988, p.83), and thereby involves a glimpse beyond the limits of cognition.⁸³

Hölderlin’s affirmative use of the term ‘intellectual intuition’ marks an important departure from Kant. For Kant, any unity that the world may have in-itself is a matter beyond theoretical purview. By contrast, for Hölderlin, it is important that there is some form of access to the primordial unity of Being, antecedent to any attempt to represent that unity. Tragic language responds to a demand for a form of discourse that exceeds the structure of representation and judgment.⁸⁴ In his poem *Homecoming*, Hölderlin writes, “Hearts beat yet speech lags behind” (Hölderlin 2018, p.102). We experience Being, yet we remain unable to cognize it. Instead, we have a series of strategies for approaching Being: through anticipation or memory, grasped only retrospectively, or indirectly. This deferral is not accidental, but follows from the demands of the subject matter. Poetic discourse is one such mode of deferred access.⁸⁵⁸⁶ Hölderlin argues that Being cannot be known except from what he calls in ‘Remarks on Antigone’, an “askew perspective” (1988, p.116).

For these reasons, Hölderlin took an interest in translation. Hölderlin’s view on the productive potential of translation was outlined in a letter written to his friend Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff (December 1801). Through his translations of ancient Greek poetry, Hölderlin aims towards opening the possibility for a revolution in modern subjective consciousness.⁸⁷ Hölderlin writes that the natural mode of the ancient Greek *psyche* was that of a “sacred pathos,” meaning that the ancient Greek way of life was one in which they lived in unity with Being, and thereby with nature and the gods. According to Hölderlin’s letter, it was by learning that which was foreign to their way of living, namely, by cultivating rational calculative capacities, that Greek culture was fully able to flourish. Indeed, the

Where subject and object are absolutely, not merely partially unified, in such a way that no division could be presupposed without damaging the essence of that which is to be divided, **there and in no other way can we speak of absolute Being, as is the case in intellectual intuition.**

Indication of the aesthetic character of ‘intellectual intuition’, is also present in a letter to Friedrich Schiller dated September 4, 1795. Hölderlin writes, (in reference to Fichte whose lectures he attended in Jena, bold emphasis added):

I am attempting to work out for myself the idea of an infinite progress in philosophy by showing that the unremitting demand that must be made of any system, **the union of subject and object in an absolute ... I or whatever one wants to call it, though possible aesthetically in an act of intellectual intuition**, is theoretically possible only through endless approximation.

⁸³ Quoted from Hölderlin’s essay, ‘On the Difference of Poetic Modes’.

⁸⁴ Adorno writes that with Hölderlin’s poetry, “loss has migrated into the concept” (1992, p.125). For Hölderlin, poetic language offers a promise of reconciliation in the paradoxical acknowledgment of loss.

⁸⁵ This commitment is important in the move from Kant’s “transcendental idealism” to the “absolute idealism” of Schelling and Hegel. The key idea of Hölderlin’s absolute idealism is that aesthetic experience is a, if not the, paradigmatic form of this “intellectual intuition” of the primordial unity of Being (cf. Guyer 2014b, p.21).

⁸⁶ Guyer (2014b, p.5) claims that Kant’s combination of the aesthetics of play with the aesthetics of truth as well as the aesthetics of emotional impact were rejected by Hölderlin in favor of a purely cognitivist aesthetics. I do not agree with this interpretation. If truth is rethought as that which is known in intellectual intuition, and play is understood in terms of the Heraclitean *polemos* of the One differentiated in itself—articulated by Hölderlin himself in *Hyperion* as the very structure of Being: “εν διαφερον εαυτω (the One differentiated in itself)” (1990, p.67)—then a unified aesthetics of play with an aesthetics of truth can be seen to be just as true a description of Hölderlin’s aesthetic ‘theory’ as of Kant’s.

⁸⁷ Hölderlin hoped that his translations of Sophocles, published in 1804, would serve as scripts for the theater in Weimar, directed at that time by Goethe. The plays were never produced during Hölderlin’s lifetime.

ancient Greeks cultivated their rational capacities to such an extent that their own natural tendencies were forgotten.

For his own age Hölderlin makes the contrary diagnosis: since the natural tendency of the modern German *psyche* is “clarity of presentation (*Darstellung*)” they must learn the “passion” which was natural to ancient Greeks. That is to say, modern self-consciousness is apt to objectify nature, to calculate nature, and thus to set itself apart from nature. Since we are each of nature, we also set ourselves apart from each other. For Hölderlin this is not only a theoretical concern, it is a practical and political concern of the highest order. Like many of his contemporaries, during the 1790s Hölderlin was deeply inspired by the utopian promise of the French revolution for a form of society that realized the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The revolution’s catastrophic failure—culminating in war, terror, and empire—led many to speculate that the very structure of modern subjective consciousness precluded the possibility of realizing the revolution’s utopian vision. Hölderlin’s project of translation is an attempt to open the possibility for realizing this vision. Displaying his Classicist background, Hölderlin suggests that we can learn from the ancient Greeks’ willingness to learn what was foreign to their own natural tendencies. Through the translation of ancient Greek tragedy, we can learn what it would be for us to cultivate capacities and tendencies that are foreign to our own modern way of life—namely, the capacity to live with each other in natural unity. This would, in turn, allow for us to flourish together as modern rational subjects. Hölderlin puts this point in the following terms: “the free use of what is one’s own is the most difficult” (1988, p.150). Hölderlin thus conceived of his translations as provoking us into thinking and perceiving in ways that are not authorized by the parameters of modern subjective consciousness.

II §3 *Caesura*, Pure Word, Counter-Rhythmic Rupture

Hölderlin’s translations foreground what he considers to be the hidden “lively” aspect of Sophocles’ Greek, namely, the natural but forgotten tendency for ancient Greeks to live in unity with Being, and hence in proximity to nature.⁸⁸ The thought is that Hölderlin’s translations allow for that which is concealed by the prominent meaning of Sophocles’ words to be brought to the fore. The ordinary meaning of Sophocles’ words presents the rationality that the ancient Greeks had cultivated for themselves. Hölderlin’s ‘lively’ translations bring to the fore that which was forgotten by the ancient Greeks themselves, namely, their natural proximity to Being. By revealing that which had been marginalized by the Greeks’ dominant form of self-understanding, Hölderlin’s translations count as

⁸⁸ To give a couple of examples of productive (mis)translations endowed with a new meaning (cf. Böschstein (2020) for further instances):

(i) Ismene exclaims to Antigone “You reckon recklessly,” and a few lines later says to Antigone, “You have run wild” (2018, p.322). The equivalent lines in the Robert Fagles translation read: “What work, what’s the risk?” and “So desperate” (1984, p.61). This is to move the translation in the direction of ‘madness’. Böschstein makes the point that ‘madness’ is often used by Hölderlin where there is no exact equivalent in Greek, because “holy madness” for Hölderlin represents the spiritual possibility of Antigone’s contact with the gods.

(ii) After Antigone’s act of disobedience, Creon asks, “Why did you dare to break a law like that?” Antigone is translated by Hölderlin as responding: “Because. *My* Zeus did not dictate that law” (2018, p.335). The possessive pronoun “my” is added by Hölderlin to show Antigone as under the sway of Zeus. The point is that from now on her behavior will only be determined by divine spirit, a point that is intensified by this ‘lively’ translation. Hölderlin views the capacity to hear and identify with the word of the gods as distinctive to the ancient Greek sensibility, a form of sensibility that is cruelly absent to modern subjective consciousness. To highlight the ‘liveliness’ of Hölderlin’s translation, compare Antigone’s response to Creon in the Fagles translation: “Of course I did. It wasn’t Zeus, not in the least, who made this proclamation—not to me.” (1984, p.82).

genuinely 'poetic'.⁸⁹ They bring forth that which is marginalized by the norms of rationality that came to dominate Greek culture.⁹⁰

To achieve this foregrounding, Hölderlin introduces the *caesura*, a development described by Benjamin in 1922 as being of "fundamental significance for the theory of art in general, beyond serving as the basis for a theory of tragedy."⁹¹ ⁹²In his 'Notes to Oedipus', Hölderlin writes:

in the rhythmic sequence of the representations wherein *transport* presents itself, there becomes necessary *what in poetic meter is called caesura*, the pure word, the counter-rhythmic rupture; namely, in order to meet the onrushing change of representations at its highest point in such a manner that very soon there does not appear the change of representation but the representation itself.
(1988, p.102)

Hölderlin tells us that the '*caesura*' is the point at which the "Sign... = 0" (1988, p.89) and that "there does not appear the change of representation but the representation itself."⁹³ This does not mean that the *caesura* involves a complete absence of meaning. Rather, the 'pure word' is poised on the jointure between sense and nonsense.⁹⁴ For Hölderlin, the *caesura* marks both the limits of finite human cognition and the turning of sense into that which has been non-sense. Through Hölderlin's translations we are brought into thinking of that which had been forgotten by the Greeks themselves, namely, their natural capacity to live in proximity to Being. The 'pure word' or '*caesura*' allows that which is denied by prevailing norms of rationality to be foregrounded. In other words, the *caesura* allows the natural propensity which had been marginalized by the rationality that the ancient Greek had learned and cultivated, to be brought to the fore. My proposal is that the 'poetic' quality of the translation shows itself in the *caesura*. Hölderlin's translations thus turn towards that which was present

⁸⁹ William S. Allen (2007) explains this point by reference to a letter Hölderlin wrote to his editor Friedrich Wilms in September 1803. In this letter Hölderlin says that he aims "to present Greek art to the public more vivaciously (*lebendiger*) than usual... by bringing out further the orientalism it has denied and correcting its artistic bias, wherever it comes forward." That is, Sophocles needs to be translated into what he most essentially is but never actually was.

⁹⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe ('The Caesura of the Speculative', 1978, p.210) argues that a "new kind of writing" emerges in and through Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles.

⁹¹ Benjamin, 'Goethe's Elective Affinities', in *Selected Writings*: Vol. 1, 1913–1926, (2004, p.340). In this essay Benjamin extends the range of the *caesura* beyond tragedy by bringing it into connection with what he called "the expressionless," which is "a category of language and art" (2004, p.340). For Benjamin, *caesura* brings that which is non-sense to expression without fully conforming to language, thereby pointing towards the 'truth content' of the work.

⁹² *Caesura* is, literally, an incision (*caedere*, to cut off). In literary analysis, *caesura* refers to the place in a line of verse where the metrical flow is temporarily 'cut off'. For a historical review of poetic *caesura*, see *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Roland Greene, Princeton University Press (2012, pp.174-175).

⁹³ In the twenty-first and twenty-second letters of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, the human being in the "aesthetic condition" is defined as being in one regard "null" and in another regard the "highest reality." For Hölderlin, the 'sign' indicates both the disappearance of a world and a future that is concealed from view. New possibilities of meaning and understanding result from the indeterminability of its meaning. Only where 'poetic' language is a sign that equals zero, can the structure of language itself inaugurate new possibilities of meaning. This is the *caesura*, it is language without any determinate meaning.

⁹⁴ According to Hölderlin, within *Oedipus Rex*, the primary *caesura* occurs when Oedipus comes up against Tiresias' word. Tiresias' "pure word" is not Tiresias' own, it is the law of fate which jolts Oedipus "into the eccentric sphere of the dead" (1988, p.102). The blind seer Tiresias sees that which he is not able to see. His speech is called the "pure word," since it is a word that opens the possibility for saying that which he is not authorized to say.

in Sophocles' poetry only as an absence.⁹⁵ The *caesura* allows for a reorienting of one's thought towards new possibilities for understanding ourselves and the world in which we live.

The 'poetic' dimension of Hölderlin's translations is signaled from the very beginning of Hölderlin's version of *Antigone*.⁹⁶ Ismene's second line in the poem contains the phrase: "defois gar ti kalxainous epos," (δηλοῖς γὰρ τι καλχαίνουσ' ἔπος) which in the standard English translation becomes "you sound so dark, so grim."⁹⁷ Hölderlin's translation instead reads "du scheinst ein rothes Wort zu färben," which can be rendered as "you seem to dye your words with red."⁹⁸ The key word in the Greek, *καλχαίνουσ*, comes from *καλχαίνο*, meaning 'to brood' or 'to have dark thoughts', but it literally means 'to make red'.⁹⁹ The lifting of the metaphoric sense from *kalxainous* is poetically relevant.

By turning early nineteenth-century German back toward fifth-century BCE Greek, Hölderlin is not juxtaposing two static meaning structures, he is engaging the tension between sense and non-sense intrinsic to each language. Namely, a productive tension essential to the very possibility of meaning: that any determinate meaning precludes and marginalizes other possible ways of establishing a norm. The *caesura* does not primarily reveal any particular meaning. Instead it reveals this productive tension within language itself (as Hölderlin writes in the passage quoted above, "transport presents itself"). This is achieved by suspending the ordinary translation of *kalxainous* (*καλχαίνουσ*). By lifting the customary meaning, Ismene's line is present as an interruption in communicable discourse which reveals a tension intrinsic to language, as such.

Suspending the ordinary translation of *kalxainous* (*καλχαίνουσ*) relieves the word from the constraints of customary norms of meaning. In Hölderlin's translation the term no longer determinately means "to brood"; it no longer conveys a determinate meaning. Instead, the word touches on that which is denied by the prevailing norms of ancient Greek rationality, namely, their natural propensity to live in proximity to Being, and thus to nature and amidst the gods. For Hölderlin, when Ismene says to Antigone that her words seem to be dyed red, she is saying that her words are put into contact with Being conceived as Heraclitean fire. Antigone's word seems to catch fire by being in too great a proximity with Being. This *caesura* thereby marks the movement of sense into non-sense, and vice versa—a "counter-rhythmic rupture". By interrupting the ordinary translation Hölderlin has allowed a fragility to enter into the meaning of the word. The word is poised between sense and non-sense.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Lacoue-Labarthe argues that this explains the significance of translation for Hölderlin: "it was a matter of making Greek art say what it had not said... It was a matter of making it say by this means, quite simply, that which was said (but) *as that which was not said*: the same thing, then, in its difference [*en différence*]. *En diapheron beauto*." (1978, p.221).

⁹⁶ *Antigone* is considered by Hölderlin to be the most Greek of Sophocles' dramas because it centers upon the *passion* of its protagonist. This passion is what Hölderlin believes is necessary for modern Germans to acquire in order to counter their own clarity.

⁹⁷ Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*. Robert Fagles (trans.). London, UK: Penguin, 1984, p.60.

⁹⁸ English translation of Hölderlin by David Constantine, *Selected Poetry* (2018, p.321). For a developed analysis of Hölderlin's translation see Aris Fioretos' essay, 'Color Read: Hölderlin and Translation' (in *The Solid Letter*, Aris Fioretos (ed.), pp. 268–87).

⁹⁹ cf. Allen (2007, pp.144-145) for a more extensive development of this point.

¹⁰⁰ It is precisely this quality that Benjamin writes of in his 'The Task of the Translator' (*Selected Writings, Vol. 1*, pp. 253–63), and for which he sees Hölderlin's Sophocles translations as exemplary: "[Translations] prove to be untranslatable not because of any inherent difficulty but because of the looseness with which meaning attached to them. Confirmation of this as well as of every other important aspect is supplied by Hölderlin's translations, particularly those of the two tragedies by Sophocles. In them the harmony of the languages is so profound that sense is touched by language only the way an aeolian harp is touched by the wind... Hölderlin's translations from Sophocles were his last work; in them meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language." (2004, p.262).

For Hölderlin, the *caesura* allows for a free relation with meaning, that is, a freedom from prevailing norms of meaning. In this way, the *caesura* exposes the contingency of meaning. Accordingly, when Hölderlin lists the characteristics of poetic discourse he is forced to leave a blank:

the whole poetic operation in its metaphoric, its hyperbolic, and its [...] character in mutual effect (*Wechselwirkung*) with the element, which resists in its initial tendency and is diametrically opposed, to be sure, yet which unites with the former in the middle point.
(1988, p.65-66)

The poetic word is “hyperbolic,” in the sense that it throws beyond itself. It is an utterance for which there is not yet a norm that would allow for the utterance to count as meaningful. The blank space alerts us to something that exceeds conceptual form. That of which the poetic quality (*caesura*, pure word, counter-rhythmic rupture) speaks cannot be adequately articulated because it attempts to determine something that cannot be determined.¹⁰¹ In the above quotation, the blank space marks that which cannot appear in discourse.¹⁰² It indicates that the conceptual instantiation of poetic discourse is oriented towards the unrepresentable and the formless. And yet, that which exceeds our understanding is present as a possibility of sense-making *to come*.

As we move beyond established standards of meaning, new possibilities of sense-making come into view. This is a movement of thought that Hölderlin reflects on throughout much of his theoretical and poetic work. In a theoretical text posthumously entitled “Das untergehende Vaterland...” [The Declining Fatherland...], Hölderlin offers an analysis of the emergence of new socio-political possibilities from out of the dissolution of pre-existing social frameworks. By ‘fatherland’ Hölderlin means a world-configuration that constitutes one’s inherited and accepted standards of meaning and understanding. The text identifies the “moment,” as the temporal unity of dissolution and becoming:

This decline or transition of the fatherland... is felt in the parts of the existing world so that at precisely that moment [Augenblick] and to precisely that extent that existence dissolves, the newly-entering, the youthful, the potential [das Mögliche] is also felt.
(1988, p.96)

Hölderlin thus conceives of the ‘moment’ in which the “existing world” disappears as precisely the ‘moment’ in which the *possibility* of a new world dawns. The ‘new’, in the moment of perishing, has the status of possibility (das Mögliche) and not of actuality: “the possible [das Mögliche], which enters into reality [Wirklichkeit] as that reality itself dissolves, is operative and effects the sense of dissolution” (1988, p.97). For Hölderlin, “the possible,” indicates the formation of new categories, concepts, and relations between concepts. This analysis lays bare the structural limits of possible experience and the

¹⁰¹ Hölderlin’s poetry calls into question and subverts received categories of meaning. Adorno makes this a central feature of his essay on Hölderlin’s ‘late style’. Adorno writes: “It is in Hölderlin... that the poetic movement unsettles the category of meaning for the first time... The subject’s intention, the primacy of meaning, is ceded to language along with the legislating subject.” Where language is no longer regarded as the vehicle for the subject’s intentions, the structures of meaning are unsettled by the ‘poetic’ quality of the language (cf. Hamacher 2021: 20).

¹⁰² Hölderlin can be read as offering a distinctive interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of *catharsis*, whereby the word is purified of meaning.

transcendental structure by which new possibilities of worlds and languages emerge. ‘Poetic’ language is the effort to articulate these new possibilities.¹⁰³

Hölderlin writes both that the “creative act” must be the transition “between being and not-being” (1988, p.97), and that “from nothing there follows nothing;” (1988: 96).¹⁰⁴ The implication is that out of nothing comes nothing, but out of the approximation to nothing emerges new possibility. The movement “between being and not-being,” is the movement between worlds and languages passing away, and worlds and languages to come. To articulate these new possibilities is to poetize. For Hölderlin, then, the *caesura* is the “moment” of language generation.

III Poetic Criticism

The preceding section provided an interpretation of Hölderlin’s reflections on the *caesura* as the poetic quality of his translation. I proposed that the *caesura* is the point at which language is poised between sense and nonsense. Drawing on this analysis of the *caesura*, in this final section I will argue both that ‘prosaic’ art criticism cannot count as an appropriate or productive response to a work of fine art, and that ‘poetic’ art criticism is to be distinguished from poetry that refers to another artwork. To develop these arguments, I will draw on the above presented interpretation of *caesura* to provide a Hölderlinian interpretation of Kant’s claim that aesthetic judgments of fine art ‘expand’ empirical concepts. Second, where Hölderlin drew on the notion of *caesura* to detail the poetic quality of his translations, I will put this Hölderlinian interpretation of *caesura* to work in an analysis of art criticism. I propose that the expanded concept of art criticism involves possibilities of sense-making to come. It is not that the expanded concept *actually* articulates new sense. Rather, it is on the way to working out and interpreting the possibilities of sense-making made available in and through critical engagement with the artwork at issue. My proposal is that the poetic discourse of art criticism is a discourse incited by the possibilities for thought that the artwork provokes us to think toward. The ‘poetic’ quality of the discourse grants to communicable discourse new possibilities for thought and talk. It is a quality of language that permits thought and talk on what cannot be conceived in advance of the encounter with the artwork.

III §1 Prosaic Art Criticism?

Recall that our interest is in the kind of language used in productive responses to works of fine art. Kant says that artworks resist language and conceptual description: “no language can express [an aesthetic idea] completely and allow us to grasp it” (KU §49, p.182). And yet we are told that judgments of fine art are productive for enriched understanding and cognition. What would it be for language itself to realize the productive potential of art appreciation and criticism? Citing and describing the aesthetic properties that cause pleasure does not help us to productively respond to the artwork, *qua* fine art. Enjoying pleasure in the artwork is perfectly fine, but the language used is not responding to the way the artwork prompts us to see and think differently. Equally, a discourse that provides reasoned evaluations for one’s judgments, or that determinately demonstrates how the non-critic is to

¹⁰³ Wener Hamacher puts the point nicely, “For Hölderlin, language is original only when it is the mere possibility of a language as such. Original language—the language of poetry—is language ‘in the outermost limit’ of its mere possibilization,” (2021, p.126).

¹⁰⁴ The poetic “moment” as point of equilibrium “between being and non-being” can be read as preserving Schiller’s image of the balanced scales in the twentieth letter of his *Aesthetische Briefe* (L20, p.145). For Schiller, this image characterizes the “*aesthetic*” as a condition of “active determinability.” Hölderlin’s *caesura* preserves the equilibrium between sense and non-sense that Schiller identified as distinctively “*aesthetic*.”

perceive the artwork, cleaves excessively to the demand for communicability, and thus turns a blind eye to new possibilities of sense-making made available in the critic's interpretation of the artwork.¹⁰⁵ 'Prosaic' discourse is not optimally responsive to the artwork's indeterminability, and thereby risks aesthetic hubris by insensitively imposing an interpretation onto the artwork of interest. This not only means that the appreciator enjoys a sub-optimal experience of the artwork, it also means that the productive potential of aesthetic experience is not brought into the appreciator's critical discourse.

Art-critical discourse needs a 'poetic' quality in order to bring forth the possibilities of sense-making made available in and through the critic's interpretation of the artwork. Hölderlin's model of the 'pure word' or '*caesura*', points beyond itself towards a possibility of meaning which exceeds its established meaning. In this sense, the *caesura* effects a break in the prevailing norms of meaning and understanding.¹⁰⁶ It is an utterance for which the norms are not yet recognized which would allow for the utterance to count as being determinately meaningful.

When done well, the language of art criticism is an attempt to articulate something that feels true but we don't yet have the concept for. In art-critical discourse we attempt to articulate newly available meanings that we don't know how to say yet. *Sapere Aude!*, as Kant put it in his 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?" Art criticism involves at every moment an insistence on thinking for ourselves rather than thinking in terms of habitual or normalized patterns of thought and talk. Aesthetic experience, at its most basic, is where we are sensing that we are coming to understand something for which there is not yet an established way of thinking about it. Art criticism is articulated from out of the experience of art. The critic speaks from the feeling of breaking from established concepts, towards new concepts. My proposal is that when done well, the language of criticism itself inaugurates the formation of new concepts. This is what it is for the language of art criticism to be appropriately and productively responsive to works of fine art.

The critic gets to new understanding by using existing concepts, testing them, seeing where they will not take you, seeing how far they can carry thought towards a situation that those concepts do not apply to, and then the critic is out on a limb. But their effort is not random. The critic can draw on all knowledge acquired independently of their encounter with the artwork. But this knowledge will not be adequate; it won't be adequate to interpret the artwork. Critical writing involves surprise, a surprise of thinking towards newness. The critic is trying to articulate the new possibilities of understanding oneself and the world in which one lives that the artwork prompts them to think of. I propose that this is at play in Ruskin's claim that in response to Turner's paintings we are led to doubt "a positive distinction between sea and sky, or sea and land." What we mean by the concept *sea* is brought into question. Ruskin's point is that relative to an 'Enlightened' understanding of nature, Ruskin presents a truth about nature that exceeds what we can claim to know.¹⁰⁷ Turner's paintings motivate further thought on 'nature' as something which in itself resists scientific categories of measurement and calculation. These artworks invite us to rethink what counts as the 'sea' and as 'nature'. By articulating

¹⁰⁵ Noël Carroll (2008, p.9) argues that art criticism primarily consists in evaluation grounded in reasons; Antonia Peacocke (2019) argues that 'great critics' show non-critics how to appreciate artworks by "demonstrating" how to do it.

¹⁰⁶ "In the presence of a word that stops itself, in that silence, one has the feeling that something has passed us and kept going, that some possibility has got free. For Hölderlin, as for Joan of Arc, this is a religious apprehension and leads to gods." (Anne Carson, 'Variations on the Right to Remain Silent', *A Public Space*, Issue 7, 2008.)

¹⁰⁷ In an essay entitled 'Creativity', Ruskin writes, "take the commonest, closest, most familiar thing, and strive to draw it verily as you see it. Be sure of this last fact, for otherwise you will find yourself continually drawing, not what you *see*, but what you *know*." (1964, p.39). Moreover, Ruskin writes that "No human skill can get the absolute truth in this matter; but a drawing by Turner of a large scene... [is] as close to truth as human eyes and hands can reach." (1964, p.40).

the contradictions between the Enlightened conception of nature, and our sensory experience of nature, Ruskin enacts a suspension in the prevailing sense of what it means to be the 'sea' and to be 'nature'.

Poetic discourse involves thinking towards that which could not be brought to full expression in the discourse itself. In this way, 'poetic' art criticism involves a responsibility to its subject matter without claiming to determine it. It responds to the artwork's indeterminability with a discourse that is concomitantly fragile.¹⁰⁸ The fragility obtains because the norm is not yet established that would allow for the utterance to count as being determinately meaningful. Accordingly, the 'poetic' moment of the discourse is not a simple conceptual determination. It troubles communication since its very form undermines clarity and stability. The 'poetic' moment marks the turning of language into new possibilities of sense-making. It is an articulation of thought that is moving beyond established norms of communication.¹⁰⁹ This poetic quality incites thinking towards unexpected insights.

It is not that the 'poetic' quality of discourse consists in an actual new concept. It is not crudely a matter of redefining. It is rather the quality of the discourse that expands the concept towards new possibilities of thought to come. There is a turning in and at the limits of language and communicability, hence the fragile, provisional status of this 'poetic' quality. We would be correct to ask Ruskin what he means when he says that the "positive distinction between sea and sky, or sea and land" is brought into question. It is correct to wonder whether or not Ruskin is speaking non-sense, whether his discourse even counts as meaningful, because the norms are not yet established by which his utterances would count as meaningful. This is both to take seriously the nature of the refusal of the artwork to be determinately grasped, and to see the productive potential of critical engagement.

III §2 Criticism as Poetry?

I am not claiming that criticism needs to be poetry. I am claiming that it needs a 'poetic' moment or quality. This is to contrast my analysis of 'poetic' criticism from, for instance, Danto's. When Danto exemplifies what he calls "poetic, subjective, romantic" criticism, he cites Rilke's poem, "The Archaic Torso of Apollo" (2003, p.128). According to my proposal, a poem would not count as an optimally productive form of criticism because it is not *directly* opening a conversation motivated by the artwork. It is not bringing the artwork's sense into public discourse. An artwork cannot count as an optimally productive form of art criticism because it doesn't directly bring that which is thought of in the critic's interpretation *into* public discourse.

A 'poetic' quality or moment, as modeled on Hölderlin's analysis of the 'pure word' or '*caesura*', brings new possibilities of sense-making directly into public discourse. The criticism still proceeds in concepts and propositions, yet at certain moments the discourse is poised on the jointure between sense and non-sense.¹¹⁰ In this way, criticism appropriately and productively opens a conversation motivated by the artwork of interest. The 'poetic' quality of the discourse is intrinsically fragile, easily obscured, masked, or even erased by its conceptual articulation. The 'poetic' moment cannot be reduced to its

¹⁰⁸ cf. Adorno on the essay: "The way the essay appropriates concepts is most easily comparable to the behavior of a man who is obliged, in a foreign country, to speak that country's language... Just as such learning remains exposed to error, so does the essay as form; it must pay for its affinity with open intellectual experience by the lack of security, a lack which the norm of established thought fears like death." (1984, p.162).

¹⁰⁹ cf. Adorno: "Conceptually [the essay] wants to blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts," (1984, p.170).

¹¹⁰ Adorno: "even language that does not fetishize the concept cannot do without concepts" (1984, p.161).

informational content. Equally, the rhetorical flair of much art criticism ought not to obscure its 'poetic' quality.

The artwork compels the critic to think of possibilities of sense-making that were not conceivable prior to their encounter with the artwork. An optimally productive discursive response to the artwork brings these new possibilities of sense-making into public discourse. The discourse brings these possibilities to the fore, as possibilities, and thereby opens a conversation that is responsive to the artwork. In Ruskin's criticism the 'poetic' moment consists in his articulation of the contradictions staged in Turner's sea-paintings, and that we are invited to think of nature in a way that dissolves the distinctions between sea, land, and sky. By articulating these contradictions and questioning these apparently self-evident distinctions, Ruskin brings into public discourse the respect in which the artworks prompt us to think towards a richer understanding of nature and modernity.

Ruskin opens a conversation that is optimally responsive to Turner's artworks. Ruskin does not articulate new concepts. His discourse is at once bound by the demand for communicability, and the demand to say that which is marginalized by prevailing norms for communication. There is a 'poetic' quality to his language, because the contradiction that he articulates opens our understanding to new possibilities for thought, talk, and sensuality to come. Ruskin thereby opens a conversation that is motivated by the artwork. The norms are not yet established that would allow us to say what a revised and enriched understanding of the 'sea', of 'nature' would consist in. Instead, these possibilities are *to be* worked out amongst ourselves together in conversation.

Reading or listening to art criticism involves being brought to a limit in the communicable dimension of language. The 'poetic' moment in the discourse exposes the finitude of meaning: any determinate meaning negates other possible ways of establishing a norm. Art criticism is beset by the challenge to conceptually articulate the sense of an artwork in a way that is at once responsible to the demand for communicability, and the demand to give voice to that which is not sayable relative to the norms that ordinarily govern communication. My central contention is that the 'poetic' quality of art criticism articulates the new possibilities of sense-making made available in and through the critic's engagement with the artwork. The 'poetic' quality brings forth new possibilities for understanding ourselves and the world in which we live. It does not establish the validity of the interpretation being offered, but it does open a conversation in which these possibilities can be taken up and discussed.

Chapter 4

Diversity-in-Unity: Art Criticism in Conversation

What is it for art-critical communication to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art? Broadly, contemporary work on the nature and purpose of aesthetic discourse tends to prioritize one of two poles: the need for agreement in judgment and/ or sensibility, and the flourishing of individuality through aesthetic response. These two tendencies can be characterized in the following way:

Agreement: aesthetic discourse assumes a perspective according to which our judgments and/ or sensibility ought to align;

Flourishing Individuality: when done well, aesthetic discourse realizes a reciprocal appreciation of individuality, i.e. of the ways in which our thoughts and feelings do not accord with universal norms, but are instead expressions of our respective individuality.

In what follows, I propose that *Agreement* and *Flourishing Individuality* each express the legacy of Kantian and Schillerian thought, and moreover, that these two norms are constrained by Kantian structures of subjectivity.

For the Kantian, when a subject judges that ‘x is beautiful’, this involves a claim to universal validity. The judging subject calls for others to agree and takes up the perspectives of other possible subjects in order to ask themselves, ‘would I retain the claim to universality were I to occupy this alternative perspective?’ For the Schillerian, one subject can judge ‘x is beautiful’, and another can judge ‘x is distasteful’, but these judging subjects do not aim at agreement. Instead they appreciate the other’s judgment as an expression of their individuality. That is, they appreciate that the other is a free and equal being, capable of determining themselves in ways that are not authorized by prevailing norms of thought and talk. For both the Kantian and the Schillerian the judging subject is limited by the parameters of their own subjectivity. For the Kantian, I demand your agreement and I take on your perspective in order to test the universal validity of my judgment. I take on your perspective *as myself*. For the Schillerian, I appreciate that your aesthetic response is an expression of your own individuality as a free and equal being. My proposal is that a favorable alternative to both *Agreement* and *Flourishing Individuality* is available if we look to Friedrich Hölderlin’s way of characterizing the kind of communication that can occur between friends.

In a letter on the artist’s need for conversation and correspondence, Friedrich Hölderlin characterizes these forms of exchange as “a *psyche* among friends.” In this highly suggestive turn of phrase, Hölderlin points to a specifically communal form of thought and talk that ineliminably involves an encounter with that which is foreign to oneself. For Hölderlin, ‘*psyche*’ is a communal form of thought that has the structure of unity-in-difference.

In this chapter, I propose that the ‘*psyche* among friends’ can be reinterpreted as characterizing the structural dynamic of art criticism in its social dimension. This is a view which at once allows for a richer sense of growth and a more productive form of communality than *Agreement* and *Individual Flourishing* can allow for, respectively. What separates this vision of conversation from existing thought on art-critical communication is that it binds together the plurality of perspectives and voices constitutive of such conversation, with what it is for one’s individuality to flourish in and through aesthetic response. Drawing on Hölderlin’s thought, I submit the following as a norm on art-critical conversation:

Diversity-in-Unity: individual perspectives are reciprocally shaped in new and surprising ways. This allows for expanded understanding and preserves an ineliminable element of alterity.

When I refer to ‘art criticism’, I refer to a capacity within each of us. It is not merely the work of the professionally recognized and institutionally accredited *art critic*. *Diversity-in-Unity* takes art-critical conversation to be an agonal relation, that embraces dissensus, questioning, unrest, as a means to cultivate both shared sensibility and understanding between those involved. So even though judgments may not align, one’s sensibility and understanding flourishes in and through dissensus. Agonal conversation preserves the possibility for the artwork to surprise us in and through our critical engagement with it. A simple unity of views, such as that towards which *Agreement* aspires, would foreclose the possibility of continual surprise.¹¹¹ What we need in our critical engagement with an artwork is a communal form of thought and talk that constitutively allows for difference, i.e. a *Diversity-in-Unity*. The view advanced in this chapter contends that art criticism is not principally about commenting on or evaluating an artwork. Instead we are to see that art criticism is primarily geared towards opening a conversation that is responsive to an artwork. So that we, in our thought and talk about an artwork, can allow for new possibilities of sense-making to emerge.

In what follows I argue that neither the Kantian nor the Schillerian can provide satisfactory models of art-critical conversation. The Kantian overlooks an important consequence of their commitment to the indeterminable status of an artwork. Precisely because there is no rule for determining the artwork, I have to grant the possibility that my interlocutor’s interpretation can reveal something of the artwork that remains hidden to me. The critic needs plurality because the artwork is indefinitely open to interpretation. Their commitment to understanding the artwork, commits them to a plurality of interpretations and thus, I contend, to conversation as the ‘*psyche* among friends’. The Schillerian’s primary limitation is that they leave inadequate space for the development of thought. They do not place sufficient emphasis on the in-between dynamic of conversation. *We* are individuals *together* in conversation, and it is precisely this in-between dynamic that allows for growth in our understanding and for the flourishing of one’s individuality.

This chapter consists of three parts. In Part I §1, I show how Kant can be read as providing an answer to this chapter’s guiding question: *What is it for art-critical communication to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?* I do so by focusing on the place of *sensus communis* within his analysis of aesthetic judgment. In Part I §2, I argue that even though Kant offers a highly productive analysis there are certain aspects of aesthetic response, in its social dimension, that he cannot account for. I introduce Schiller’s analysis as an alternative to Kant. I suggest that although Schiller’s account has important merits, it is constrained by a Kantian conception of subjectivity. In Part II §1, I show how Hölderlin moved beyond these constraints, and that this allowed him to conceive of conversation as a form of communality that is not reducible to each interlocutor’s subjectivity. In Part II §2, I offer an interpretation of the ‘*psyche* among friends’. Finally, in Part III, I show how *Diversity-in-Unity* offers an auspicious response to the chapter’s guiding question. I argue that *Diversity-in-Unity* at once allows for a richer sense of individual flourishing than *Flourishing Individuality*, and a more productive form of communality than *Agreement*.

Importantly, this chapter’s proposal is restricted to a Kantian framing of what it is for something to count as fine art (*schöne Kunst*). In the *Critique of Judgment* (KU), Kant explains that an object counts as ‘fine art’ on the condition that it is intentionally created with the aim of arousing pleasure in its

¹¹¹ Anthony Cross has proposed that, “we return to criticism again and again to find new and worthwhile ways of engaging with artworks” (2017, p. 314). I agree that art criticism can be productively revisited, but this is not solely for the sake of finding new ways of perceiving the artwork. It is also for rethinking what the artwork allows us to understand about ourselves and the world in which we live.

respondents by provoking their cognitive faculties into a condition of free play (KU, §44, p.172).¹¹² Kant proposes that works of fine art express ‘aesthetic ideas’. An ‘aesthetic idea’ is a productive play of the imagination that is purposive for the ‘presentation’ of a concept (KU §49, p.186).¹¹³ Yet when an aesthetic idea ‘presents’ an empirical concept the concept is presented “with a completeness” (KU §49, p.183) that exceeds the limits of pre-established norms of cognition. Fine art resists conceptual determination because the aesthetic ideas that they ‘present’ outstrip cognition. Aesthetic ideas involve an intuition—a representation of the imagination—that is so abundant and diverse that no concept could provide adequate unity to it. Kant underscores this point with reference to language: “no language can express [an aesthetic idea] completely and allow us to grasp it” (KU §49, p.182). According to this Kantian framing, fine art blurs the boundaries between what is representable and unrepresentable, intelligible and unintelligible, imaginable and unimaginable.

I. §1 *sensus communis*

In this section I show how Kant can be read as providing an answer to this chapter’s guiding question. First, I focus on the place of *sensus communis* and ‘expanded mind’ (*Erweiterte Denkungsart*) within his analysis of aesthetic judgment. I argue that even though Kant offers a highly productive analysis, there are certain aspects of aesthetic response, in its social dimension, that he cannot account for. I introduce Schiller’s view as an alternative which has its own merits, and show that it too is constrained by a Kantian conception of subjectivity.

With good reason, conventional interpretations of Kant identify him as an advocate for *Agreement*. This way of reading Kant would focus on the universal voice in which judgments of the beautiful are made. For Kant, when I judge that an object is beautiful, this involves the claim that others ought to agree and to share in the pleasure I am undergoing. By making this normative claim on others, I thereby speak in a universal voice. Under the norm of *Agreement*, the demand to share in the pleasure that I enjoy characterizes an *appropriate* response to a work of fine art. However, given that for Kant there is no rule to determine the meaning or value of an artwork, the claim to universal validity remains under contestation. For Kant, our response to an artwork is *productive* to the extent that we actualize *sensus communis*.

Though the claim to universal validity cannot be justified objectively by a rule, it is justified by the feeling—the disinterested pleasure—of the judging subject. This feeling, says Kant, claims “subjective universality.” In our judgments of beauty, we thus appeal to something that *should* be common to us as subjects.¹¹⁴ Kant calls this normative commonality *sensus communis*.¹¹⁵ Kant analyzes *sensus communis* as “[putting] ourselves in the position of everyone else,” (KU §40, p.160, 294). This is what it is to achieve an “enlarged mind” (*erweiterte Denkungsart*) and to take up the “universal standpoint” (KU §40, p.161, 295). One’s individual perspective is “enlarged” by taking others into account. This does not involve understanding what others in fact feel or think: I do not imagine myself as being you. Rather, it involves thinking towards other possible perspectives that I, the judging subject, can take. I imagine

¹¹² By contrast, ‘agreeable art’ arouses pleasure on the basis of “mere sensations” (KU, §44, p.172). Agreeable art, Kant says, stimulates “loose talk” which is such that “no one wants to be held responsible for what one says,” and involves “no further interest than that of making time go by unnoticed” (KU, §44, p.173).

¹¹³ See Samantha Matherne (2013) for a compelling argument that aesthetic ideas can symbolically present rational ideas, empirical concepts, or emotions.

¹¹⁴ For a development of this point see Sophie Loidolt 2018, p. 215 and Hannah Ginsborg 1991, p. 309.

¹¹⁵ Matherne (2019) argues that Kant distinguishes between two kinds of common sense: aesthetic and cognitive. The interpretation I offer in this chapter is of the aesthetic kind.

myself in your perspective and ask myself, ‘what would *I* judge, were *I* judging from your perspective? Would *I* retain my claim to universal validity?’¹¹⁶ One’s own individuality is thereby preserved as a limiting factor on an ‘enlarged mind’.

On the one hand, aesthetic judgments presuppose *sensus communis* (KU §20, p.87, 238); on the other hand, aesthetic judgment actualizes *sensus communis*. I take into account different perspectives and thereby put my own judgment into question.¹¹⁷ Kant thus offers a model of non-coercive communal formation because agreement cannot be achieved by appeal to a pre-existing rule. The claim to universal validity in an aesthetic judgment actualizes *sensus communis* precisely because the claim is available for dispute. I aim to persuade my interlocutors to agree. This is a form of community that is realized only to the extent that the claim to universality is brought into public discourse. Aesthetic judgment, for Kant, has a subjective ground, but through *sensus communis* the communal efficacy of this kind of judgment is illuminated.

To illustrate Kant’s analysis of the social dimension of aesthetic response, let us consider a short exchange that occurs early in Oscar Wilde’s *The Critic as Artist*. In this essay Wilde not only offers a thesis on the creative status of art criticism, but demonstrates it by way of the conversational dramatic form of the essay. The essay consists in a dialogue between Gilbert and Ernest. In the following exchange, Gilbert and Ernest discuss the work of English poet and playwright, Robert Browning:

Gilbert: ... rhyme, which in the hands of the real artist becomes not merely a material element of metrical beauty, but a spiritual element of thought and passion also, waking a new mood, it may be, or stirring a fresh train of ideas, or opening by mere sweetness and suggestion of sound some golden door at which the Imagination itself had knocked in vain; rhyme, which can turn man’s utterance to the speech of gods; rhyme, the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre, became in Robert Browning’s hands a grotesque, misshapen thing... There are moments when he wounds us by monstrous music. ... Yet, he was great: and though he turned language into ignoble clay, he made from it men and women that live...

Ernest: There is something in what you say, but there is not everything in what you say. In many points you are unjust.

Gilbert: It is difficult not to be unjust to what one loves.
(Wilde, 2019, pp. 37-39)

Gilbert’s aesthetic judgment that Browning is ‘great’ is not a claim that he can prove because there is no rule to appeal to. Gilbert looks to persuade Ernest of the validity of the claim so that Ernest can share in the pleasure that he, Gilbert, takes in Browning’s poetry. Gilbert’s effort is to show that Browning’s poetry ought to be experienced as exemplary of new possibilities of sense-making: “rhyme, which in the hands of the real artist becomes... a spiritual element of thought and passion also, waking a new mood, it may be, or stirring a fresh train of ideas...” And yet the way in which this exemplarity

¹¹⁶ Loidolt articulates the point very nicely: “It is *always me* who judges—but *I move*” (2018, p. 220). Loidolt refers to this movement as ‘othering’ one’s own standpoint.

¹¹⁷ *Critique of Judgment*, §40, Kant writes: “We must take *sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense *shared* [by all of us], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (*a priori*), in our thought, of everyone else’s way of presenting [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones” (KU p.160).

is experienced as peculiarly ‘ugly’ or ‘distasteful’: “rhyme, the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre, became in Robert Browning’s hands a grotesque, misshapen thing... There are moments when he wounds us by monstrous music.” When Ernest responds by saying “In many points you are unjust,” it indicates that Gilbert’s effort at persuasion has not fully succeeded and that Gilbert’s judgment seems to Ernest to be a mere ‘judgment of the agreeable’, as Kant would say, i.e. a mere expression of Gilbert’s personal preference, in which case the judgment would be merely subjectively valid. A *sensus communis* is presupposed by Gilbert’s judgment, because in the absence of this prior condition his judgment could not make a claim to universal validity. And yet, the normative status of his judgment is explicitly questioned and disputed by Ernest.

I §2. A Kantian Constraint

The *Critique of Judgment* took on special importance for writers and artists from the 1790s onwards because it construed art and beauty as a source for community. As we have seen, the bridge from the subjective grounding of aesthetic judgment to communal formation is foregrounded in Kant’s reflections on *sensus communis*. In the following section I will highlight the ways in which Hölderlin stepped beyond the parameters of Kant’s analysis, while also appreciating that Kant was on the right track regarding the aesthetic impetus of community formation. However, we first need to acknowledge an important intervention by Schiller, for whom a diversity of judgments is a positive feature of our aesthetic lives.

Recall that according to *Flourishing Individuality* art-critical conversation thrives in the recognition of differences. I propose that this norm is a guiding principle of Samantha Matherne’s and Nick Riggle’s (2021) communitarian interpretation of Schiller’s *Letters on The Aesthetic Education of Man*.¹¹⁸ According to Matherne and Riggle, Schiller argues that aesthetic response makes us sensitive not just to the “claims of humanity... from within,” but also to the “claims of humanity from without” (L13, p.124fn). For Schiller, being sensitive to the claims of another’s humanity involves being responsive to that which makes them the unique *individual* that they are. Matherne and Riggle emphasize that for Schiller, aesthetic experience attunes us to the ‘full’ humanity of others as free and equal beings. As such, the social nature of aesthetic response does not amount to each of us thinking that others ought to agree with our judgments, since this would count as a failure to acknowledge the individuality and humanity of others. Instead, Schiller locates the social dimension of aesthetic experience not in shared judgments, but in the shared *structure* of aesthetic experience (cf. Matherne & Riggle 2021, p. 25). That is, I recognize that my aesthetic response is structured by the same capacity that your aesthetic response is, and you, like me, are free and thus capable of determining yourself in ways that deviate from pre-existing social norms. So even though each of us may respond differently to a given object, my response is structured by the very same capacities as yours. The fact that we can recognize what we share, while relishing the diversity of our responses, is a way of being aesthetically social. On Schiller’s view, becoming sensitive to these shared structures is what discloses the full humanity of the other to us as a being capable of self-determination (cf. Matherne & Riggle 2021, pp. 25-26).¹¹⁹ For Schiller, the sociality of aesthetic response is *productive* when each interlocutor flourishes in the actualization of their freedom, and *appropriate* when there is a reciprocal appreciation of each other’s humanity.

¹¹⁸ I focus on this interpretation of Schiller’s *Aesthetische Briefe* because it emphasizes the social and political dimension of Schiller’s work. For an alternative interpretation see Schutjer (2001) who argues that Schiller’s account of harmony is “a matter of intrapersonal dialogicity and harmony rather than an interpersonal exchange” (2001, p. 114).

¹¹⁹ In his *Kallias Letters*, Schiller writes that “[beauty] calls to me: be free like me.” (2003, p.173)

Relative to Kant, Schiller offers an almost polemically opposed view on aesthetic discourse. For Kant, aesthetic discourse achieves sociability by demanding a shared feeling and by taking up other people's perspectives as one's own. For Schiller, the sociability of aesthetic discourse is achieved by mutual recognition of each other as free and equal beings. My proposal is that neither Kantian forms of *Agreement* nor Schillerian forms of *Flourishing Individuality* place adequate emphasis on the in-between dynamic of conversation and its irreducibly social structure. Moreover, I contend that this is because they are both constrained by the possibilities of sociality made available by Kant's structures of subjectivity. Either I assume your perspective in order to test my demand for agreement, or I appreciate your difference from me and delight in our shared capacity for self-determination. For both Kant and Schiller one's own individuality is preserved as a limiting factor.¹²⁰ Only by moving beyond this constraint could Hölderlin make room for an essentially *communal* form of experience, namely, the experience of conversation.

II. §1 Inspired Conversation

Throughout his work, Hölderlin retained a concern that in modernity, in a time in which we have lost our relation with the divine, the conditions conducive for community are absent. In modernity we have turned away from *forms* of communality that a sensibility for the divine makes possible. At the very least, the *grounds* of community are in question. Hölderlin is preoccupied by the possibility of community under such conditions.¹²¹ Hölderlin looks towards a *form* of community that only presents itself in the absence of anything that had been conceived of as a grounding certainty, whether a transcendent principle, divine sanction, or necessary law. For Hölderlin, poetry cultivates an experience that can itself serve as a groundless ground for a distinctively modern form of communality.¹²² Groundless communality is presented as a possibility founded on a shared experience of spirituality *in its absence* and the faintest promise of a spirituality to come.

In a theoretical text posthumously entitled 'On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit' (Wenn der Dichter einmal des Geistes mächtig ist...), Hölderlin characterizes the kind of community cultivated by poetry as a 'communal soul' (*gemeinschaftliche Seele*):

once [the poet] has felt and appropriated, has held fast and assured himself of the communal soul [*gemeinschaftliche Seele*] which common to everyone and proper to each... which aims at [the] communality [*Gemeinschaft*] and unified simultaneity [*einiges Zugleichsein*] of all parts... once he has further realized that... such communality and interrelation of all parts, such spiritual import [*geistige Gehalt*] would not be tangible if these were not different in degree, as regards sensuous import [*sinnlichen Gehalte*]...

¹²⁰ In his letter to Christian Ludwig Neuffer, 10 October 1794, Hölderlin remarks that Schiller "has ventured a step less beyond the Kantian borderline than he should have done in my opinion" (2009, p. 34).

¹²¹ These reflections on community came as Hölderlin felt himself suspended between the demise of the old forms of community and the catastrophe of the new—i.e. the promise of the French Revolution leading to empire, terror, and war. A radically new form of communality was needed.

¹²² Hölderlin's interest in poetry, rather than in the fine arts more generally, can be understood to have arisen for at least two reasons. First, Kant himself says that it is in poetry that aesthetic ideas are most fully realized: "it is actually in the art of poetry that the power of aesthetic ideas can manifest itself to full extent," (KU, §49, p.183). Accordingly, Kant ranks poetry as the highest of the fine arts (KU, §53, p.196). Second, Plato's *Symposium*, a hugely significant text for Hölderlin's early thought, sees Diotima tell the young Socrates, "everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry;" (205c). So when Hölderlin is concerned to discern new possibilities for communal formation, for at least these two reasons, it is not surprising that he looks principally to poetry.

(Hölderlin, 1988, p.62)

Here we find that ‘communal soul’ has the structure of diversity-in-unity. Poetry aims towards the realization of a ‘soul’ that has a “unified simultaneity of all parts,” i.e. a unity between each of the individuals involved. Yet this ‘communal soul’ is not a simple unity. It is a diversity that achieves unity. Poetry consists in the sharing of individual experience, and ultimately in making these individual experiences communal. Hence Hölderlin’s claim that “such communality and interrelation of all parts, such spiritual import would not be tangible if these were not different in degree, as regards sensuous import.” If the ‘communal soul’ did not preserve sensuous individuality, then the communality could not involve a felt unity shared by all; and it is precisely in the felt unity that the promise of spirituality arises.

Hölderlin presents ‘communal soul’ in terms of conversation (Gespräch) and song (Gesang). In his hymn ‘*Friedensfeier*’ (1802), Hölderlin writes:

Much since morning time
When we became a conversation [*Gespräch*] and began to hear from one another
Has humankind experienced; but soon we shall be song [*Gesang*].
(Hölderlin, 2018, p. 128)

For Hölderlin, poetry allows us to articulate our own individual experience of the absence of spirituality in Modern life. Community is achieved in the conversational encounter of each individual’s vision. Through conversation we cultivate our own individual experiences—by listening to and responding to our interlocutors—and thereby achieve a *communal experience*, i.e. song. This is an experience that is at once deeply individual, and communally shared. Conversation thus changes the nature of our experiences. It opens each of us up to the promise of something new to come. Hölderlin thereby presents a model of community that takes the form of ongoing, generative conversation.¹²³

Like Kant’s analysis of aesthetic judgment and the actualization of *sensus communis*, for Hölderlin communal formation is founded in individual experience. And like Schiller’s analysis of aesthetic sociality, for Hölderlin each individual thrives in the recognition of the other’s freedom. However, unlike both Kant and Schiller, for Hölderlin one’s individuality is not preserved as a limiting factor. Through conversation I move towards my interlocutor’s perspective, and they move towards mine. Our experiences shape each other’s so that something new emerges in and through the conversation. Namely, a communal unity that Hölderlin calls ‘communal soul’ and ‘song’. I do not take on your perspective in order to justify my demand for shared feeling, *à la* Kant. Rather, I listen to you as an equal. However, I do not simply recognize your status as a free and equal being, as Schiller proposes. Instead, *we* together in conversation cultivate each other’s experience. Through conversation my own experience takes on new perspectives and new sensitivities. I move towards my interlocutor, but the new perspectives and sensitivities that I find myself with are not, and cannot be, identical to their perspectives and sensitivities. In this form of community, conversational partners retain their differences while flourishing together in reciprocity.

¹²³ Ulrich Gaier (2011, pp.168-169) interprets the above quote from ‘*Friedensfeier*’ in terms of the “tieferes Freundesgespräch” [“deeper conversation between friends” (my own translation)], that Hölderlin hopes for in his elegy ‘*Stuttgart*’. Gaier emphasizes that ‘conversation’ (Gespräch) can and must deal with differences of opinion, whereas ‘song’ (Gesang) is the expression and accomplishment of shared communal experience.

II §2. ‘*psyche* among friends’

Hölderlin’s vision of a ‘*psyche* among friends’ emphasizes the communal dynamic of conversation. It offers a form of communality that allows for a growth in understanding and for the flourishing of individuality. Three points will be emphasized in my interpretation of this phrase. First, ‘*psyche*’ refers to an essentially communal form of thought and talk, and not to the mind of an individual subject. Second, ‘*psyche*’ presents each interlocutor with perspectives that are non-identical to their own. Third, relative to any pre-existing norms of meaning and understanding, new possibilities of sense-making emerge from out of ‘*psyche*’. Each interlocutor learns from their conversational partners. By learning from others and bringing different perspectives to bear on yourself, your understanding is freed to achieve new unforeseeable possibilities of thought. Hölderlin wants us to see that conversation is an oppositional and dynamic relation that allows us to flourish as friends and as artists.

In a letter to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff (November 1802) Hölderlin appears to consider original poetic thought as possible to attain only in conversation and correspondence:

If you would just write to me soon. I need your pure tone. The *psyche* among friends, the origination of thought in conversation and correspondence is necessary for artists. (Hölderlin, 1988, p. 153)

In speaking of the “*psyche* among friends,” we are encouraged to think of an essentially communal form of thought and talk, i.e. a *psyche* of conversation and correspondence.¹²⁴

The use of the Greek term ‘*psyche*’—rather than the German *Seele*—points towards a social structure that for each interlocutor involves an ineliminable element of alterity. This is a theme that Hölderlin’s earlier letter to Böhlendorff (December 1801) directly addresses. Hölderlin writes: “with the exception of what must be the highest for the Greeks and for us—namely, the living relation and destiny—we must not share anything identical with them” (1988, p. 150). In the later letter Hölderlin introduces a Greek term to characterize the form of communication that he needs to have with his friend. Yet, according to the earlier letter, “we must not share anything identical with [the Greeks].” So, I propose,

¹²⁴ An extended interpretation of Hölderlin’s use of the term ‘*psyche*’ would involve reference to Heraclitus. Consider the following fragment:

You will not find out the limits of the soul [ψυχῆς] by going, even if you travel over every way, so deep is its report [λόγον]. (D.45)

To discern the *psyche* within oneself, is to discern the *logos* of nature, i.e. the rational ordering principle of all that is. Furthermore,

The soul [ψυχῆν] is an exhalation that perceives; it is different from the body, and always flowing. (D.A15).

The *psyche* presents itself as an exhalation and as always in flow. But to any movement of exhalation, there is a corresponding inhalation. So *psyche* is structured by both flow and counter-flow, or as Heraclitus says elsewhere, “an attunement [ἄρμονιῃ; harmony] turning back on itself.” Hence Heraclitus’ fragment D51, “They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself [διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῷ ὁμολογέει]; it is an attunement turning back [παλιντροπος ἄρμονιῃ] on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre” (Kahn 2001, p. 65).

In the context of Hölderlin’s letter to Böhlendorff, the ‘*psyche* among friends’ indicates a *psyche* that outstrips each friend, considered individually. The *psyche* is the rational counter-movement or to-and-fro characteristic of conversation. It is a communal and conversational dynamic structure of thought and talk.

in the *‘psyche among friends’* each friend encounters the presence of non-identity. The element of non-identity would not be implied were Hölderlin to have used the German term, *Seele*. Conversation is thereby framed as a communal form of thought that for each interlocutor involves an ineliminable encounter with something that outrips their finitude. The artist needs *‘psyche’* because exposure to a perspective that is non-identical to one’s own affords the opportunity for learning and for flourishing. As Hölderlin puts it: “the free use of what is one’s own is the most difficult [to learn],” (1988, p.150). We cannot free our own understanding and take on new perspectives without learning from and listening to others. Hitherto unforeseeable thoughts arise that can only be developed communally.

In the earlier letter to Böhlendorff, Hölderlin refers to Homer as a poet who was “sufficiently sensitive [*seelenvoll genug*: sufficiently soulful]” (1988, p. 149) to encounter that which was foreign to his nature as a Greek. In the later letter there is a reversal along lines of language and nationality. Hölderlin, as a modern German, needs *psyche* in order to encounter that which is foreign to his own nature. For both Homer and Hölderlin, ‘soul’ is needed to bring forth this foreign quality. The alterity of that which presents itself to the poet is marked by the language in which ‘soul’ is referred to. Homer needs soul as *‘Seele’*, Hölderlin needs soul as *‘psyche’*. In both cases ‘soul’ is to the poet as something foreign.¹²⁵

In the context of the 1801 letter, we can read Hölderlin’s use of the Greek term in the later letter as indicating that friends in conversation “must not share anything identical with [each other].” The presence of the Greek term indicates that in the kind of conversation needed by artists, each friend is exposed to their conversational partners as if to a range of foreign voices. That is, each friend is exposed to other people endowed with their own distinct first-person perspectives on that which the conversation is about. However, Hölderlin’s 1801 letter also suggests that *‘psyche’* constitutively involves unity, i.e. there is something the friends share. Namely, an exposure to what Hölderlin calls ‘destiny’. Each friend faces the destitution of their modern condition. They experience an absence of sensibility for the divine. But by being in conversation—by “[hearing] from one another,” as Hölderlin puts it in *‘Friedensfeier’*—each friend learns from the others. In conversation friends reciprocally free each other’s understanding, thereby allowing each friend to take on new perspectives. I learn from my conversational partners by bringing their diverse points of view to bear on myself. By being in conversation—and not just dialogue—with a diversity of interlocutors, my own thinking is freed. New possibilities of thought, talk, and sensuality emerge in conversation between friends.

Hölderlin associates the *“psyche among friends”* with “the origination of thought in conversation and correspondence.” In conversation about that which cannot be determinately cognized—i.e. the possibility of a Modern spiritual sensibility—new possibilities of sense-making emerge. Through listening to different perspectives, each friend moves towards an ever richer experience of that which they are talking about. No single articulation could be adequate to this experience, yet through conversation we approach adequacy in a movement of infinite approximation (*unendliche Annäherung*). The artist therefore needs to reach beyond the confines of their subjectivity and towards their friends.

The structure of ‘consciousness’ that Hölderlin illuminates here is not merely subjective. He is referring to the dynamic reciprocal expansion of each friend’s thought and sensuality. Hölderlin thereby steps beyond the possibilities of community conferred by Kantian structures of subjectivity. For Hölderlin, we neither simply identify with, nor dominate our friends.¹²⁶ The *‘psyche among friends’*

¹²⁵ See Pankow (1999) for a development of this point, especially as it pertains to Hölderlin’s epistolary novel, *Hyperion*.

¹²⁶ Cf. Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*) for whom *friendliness* is a mean between being obsequious and quarrelsome: “the man who is pleasant in the right way is friendly and the mean is friendliness, while the man who exceeds is an obsequious

is a reciprocal relation sustained by a shared experience of the possibility of spirituality in Modern life, i.e. an experience of that which exceeds the parameters of Modern life. In experiencing a possibility which transgresses the limits of understanding, *psyche* involves a communal experience of making sense in new ways, i.e. in ways that are new relative to any pre-existing norms of sense-making.

III. Diversity-in-Unity

Hölderlin's vision of a '*psyche* among friends' offers a highly suggestive model of the kind of thought necessary for artistic creation. I have put forward an interpretation according to which a '*psyche* among friends' is a distinctive form of conversation: '*psyche*' is an essentially communal form of thought, '*psyche*' presents each interlocutor with a perspective that is non-identical to their own, and relative to any pre-existing norms of meaning and understanding, new possibilities of sense-making emerge from out of '*psyche*' because each friend learns from the other.

In this section I offer a reinterpretation of the '*psyche* among friends'. I propose that this model of social interaction offers a promising alternative to prevailing views on the nature and purpose of art criticism in its social dimension. I will argue that art-critical conversation is grounded in our individual experiences of the artwork, and these experiences are shared, deepened, and reshaped in and through conversation.

Hölderlin offers this form of conversation in the midst of engaging with a set of problems that readers may no longer find gripping. For instance, central to the interpretation that I have offered is his emphasis on a need to experience both the absence and possibility of spirituality in Modern life. I submit that the core of Hölderlin's vision can be retained even if the context is jettisoned. I propose that we can reframe Hölderlin's presentation of spiritual experience in terms of the experience of fine art. Like the experience of a possibility for Modern spirituality, works of fine art resist understanding: they are ineliminably indeterminate. Accordingly, also like the experience of absent spirituality, the experience of art is productive for new possibilities of sense-making because artworks invite us to think, feel, and perceive in ways that deviate from normalized and habitual patterns of sense-making.

If we thus set aside some of Hölderlin's more contentious claims and concentrate on the form of conversation that he envisions, I submit that Hölderlin reveals a form of discourse that at once allows for individual flourishing and for productive communal exchange. I propose that the social dimension of art criticism can be understood to unfold under the norm of *Diversity-in-Unity*, according to which individual perspectives are reciprocally shaped in new and surprising ways.

Individuality in conversation implies both an articulate first-person perspective, and other first-person perspectives that are responsive to the communicating standpoint. *Diversity-in-Unity* in art criticism implies a plurality of individual perspectives, each of which is a perspective on the artwork. Through conversation each individual perspective is shaped in new and surprising ways because each individual offers an articulation of their own experience of that which cannot be determinately cognized. Through conversation, through listening to different perspectives and different articulations of individual aesthetic experiences, we each achieve an ever richer understanding of that which we are talking about, i.e. the artwork. No single articulation could be adequate to the artwork, yet through conversation we approach adequacy in a movement of infinite approximation. New possibilities of

person... and the man who falls short and is unpleasant in all circumstances is a quarrelsome and surly sort of person." (1108a26-30)

sense-making emerge from out of this to-and-fro of conversational exchange: the *psyche* among friends. Two factors are at play in the reshaping of our own individual perspective: (i) our own experience of the artwork in its ineliminable indeterminacy; (ii) a conversational encounter with the articulation of a first-person perspective that is non-identical to our own. These factors not only allow for our own perspective to change, but *draw us into* change. The ways we think, feel, and perceive change in and through art-critical conversation, in ways that outstrip our own individual volition and autonomy.

To appreciate the ways in which *Diversity-in-Unity* departs from existing views, let us return to the views presented in Part I. Recall that the norms of *Agreement* and *Flourishing Individuality* answer this chapter's guiding question: *What is it for art-critical communication to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?*

III §1. *Agreement?*

Agreement has assumed something approaching the consensus view for those reflecting on the normative force of aesthetic communication.¹²⁷ Those staying close to Kant also emphasize the inconclusive and indeterminate character of art-critical conversation.¹²⁸ However, it took Schiller and Hölderlin to recognize an important consequence of this. The inconclusive character of art-critical conversation means more difference, more perspectives, more interpretation, and therefore more possibilities for growth in one's own understanding, and thus for individual flourishing. Art-critical conversation allows for and thrives on disagreement.¹²⁹ Homogenized perspectives—conversation in agreement—narrows rather than broadens one's understanding. Disagreement keeps alive the possibility of surprise, and hence of genuine growth in one's understanding because disagreement brings out different aspects of the artwork than those already available to you.

To participate in conversation, to take up the roles of both speaker and listener, involves a structural symmetry. This opens up the possibility for each participant to move towards the perspective of their interlocutor. In speaking from one's own individual experience one offers something distinctive to one's own perspective. And yet, one's contribution to the conversation is always open to the possibility of being put into question either by the artwork or by others' interpretation of it. Every interpretation is partial. To claim otherwise is to lapse into dogmatic assertion. Interpretations may differ in many respects, yet each reveals the same work in different ways. Art criticism recognises diversity and difference not as a hindrance but as a spur to expanded understanding. In this way, art-critical conversation has the form of *Diversity-in-Unity*.

If I recognise the artwork as indeterminable, then I must also recognise that I am dependent on alternative perspectives for understanding more of the artwork than I do at present. Criticism implies an interpretive interdependence between 'friends'. It is precisely the otherness of alternative interpretations that makes them important to me. The critic's commitment to understanding the

¹²⁷ See, for instance, Arnold Isenberg's 'Critical Communication' (1949, p.336), and Mary Mothersill's *Beauty Restored* (1983, p.379).

¹²⁸ For instance, Stanley Cavell argues that a critic's judgments are vindicated by their cultivation of shared sensibility: "[the critic's] vindication comes... from getting us to taste it" (2015, p. 81). By reflecting on Kant, Cavell recognizes that there is no rule by which to persuade others to agree. So *Agreement* is subject to a caveat of *hope*, "the *hope* of agreement motivates our engaging in these various patterns of support" (2015, p. 87). For Cavell, "the *hope* of agreement" is a norm on art-critical conversation (in their paper 'The Hope of Agreement: Cavell on Aesthetic Judgment', Zed Adams and Nat Hansen argued in support of this norm at the 2022 ASA Pacific Division meeting).

¹²⁹ Anthony Nehamas articulates this thought in his 2007, pp. 83-84.

artwork, commits them to a plurality of interpretations and thus to conversation as the ‘*psyche* among friends’.¹³⁰ Through art criticism, personal experiences are expanded conversationally. We come to see more, and to see differently.¹³¹

I respond to the artwork by contributing to a conversation, by *appealing* to others to understand the way I perceive things. My contribution involves a call for reciprocal recognition. Vindication is in the recognition of my interpretation, not in agreement with my judgment. We are able to enlarge our perspective when we understand how our interlocutor perceives the artwork, whether or not we agree. We are perfectly capable of understanding another’s interpretation and of taking it into account, without agreeing with their account. Art criticism does not aim towards a final consensual conclusion; it aims to remain in discourse.¹³²

Wilde’s staging of the nature of art criticism by way of a conversation demonstrates the inadequacy of *Agreement* because he illuminates the productivity both of disagreement and of questioning. For instance, after Gilbert has sought to persuade Ernest of the ‘greatness’ of Robert Browning’s poetry, Ernest does not just agree: “There is something in what you say, but there is not everything in what you say.” (2019, p. 39). Later, in response to Gilbert’s claim that “self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one,” Ernest says: “I see what you mean, and there is much to it. But surely you would have to maintain that the great poems of the early world, the primitive, anonymous collective poems, were the result of the imagination of races, rather than of the imagination of individuals” (2019, p. 55). Ernest provokes further thought, further reflection, and a further effort to understand. Moreover, they each demonstrate that through conversation Ernest’s understanding is expanded—he sees the merits in Gilbert’s claims and interpretations—in spite of their disagreement.

Indeed, Wilde shows that even where agreement is reached, this does not bring critical inquiry to an end: “Ernest: You have been talking of criticism as an essential part of the creative spirit, and I now fully accept your theory. But what of criticism outside creation?” (2019, p 57). Agreement was achieved, but the questioning continued. This stance on the status of agreement in art criticism is made explicit later on:

Gilbert: Ah! Don’t say that you agree with me. When people agree with me I always feel that I must be wrong.

Ernest: In that case I certainly will not tell you whether I agree with you or not. But I will put another question.

¹³⁰ The reciprocal shaping and growth between interlocutors is an important reason as to why an analysis of art-critical conversation benefits from a construal of interlocutors as ‘friends’. Aristotle’s canonical exposition on friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics* takes “perfected friendship” [τελειά... φιλία] (1156b7) to have the form of a “mutual love” [ἀντιφιλοῦσι: loving in return] (1157b30). Through this reciprocal love, each friend is stimulated “to noble actions.” Aristotle also characterizes friendship in the perfected sense by quoting from Homer’s *Illiad*: “two going together” (“σὺν τε δὺ ἐρχομένῳ”) because “with friends men are more able both to think and to act.” (1155a15). Accordingly, for Aristotle, through the intimacy of friends, by their “going together,” and “sharing in discussion and thought” (1170b10-13), friends cultivate each other’s character through agonal, honest, and constructive criticism, and they do so for the sake of the other’s character. There is a good question as to whether or not Hölderlin’s analysis of friendship moves beyond Aristotle’s by recognizing that in such relationships an essentially communal form of thought can obtain.

¹³¹ Alva Noë (2023, p.164) makes a comparable claim, though with less of an emphasis on the indeterminability of artworks: “We bring artworks into focus through shared thought and talk and through shared culture... so, in an important sense, [aesthetic experience] is not private or individual.”

¹³² C. Thi Nguyen (2019) takes a similar line. He argues that aesthetic conversations are intrinsically worthwhile, and that any desire for a shared or correct aesthetic judgment is secondary at best.

(Wilde, 2019, p. 127)

Every question already stands in relation to something said. Something is put into question. The prioritization of the question is intended to indicate the dynamic and inconclusive character of conversation—there is no proposition at which the conversation can be concluded. This does not mean that conversation is nothing but questioning, it means that no statement or proposition is adequate to determine the meaning of the artwork.

III §2. *Flourishing Individuality?*

I turn now to *Flourishing Individuality* to present my argument that *Diversity-in-Unity* offers a preferable analysis of what it is for an individual to flourish in and through the communal dimension of aesthetic experience.

As I suggested in Part I, *Flourishing Individuality* can be seen to be a guiding principle of Samantha Matherne's and Nick Riggle's (2021) communitarian interpretation of Schiller's *Letters on The Aesthetic Education of Man*. According to Schiller, the social dimension of aesthetic experience resides not in shared verdicts, but in the shared *structure* of aesthetic experience (cf. Matherne & Riggle 2021, p. 25). I recognize that my aesthetic engagement is structured by the same capacity that your aesthetic engagement is, and that you, like me, are free and thus capable of determining yourself in ways that deviate from socially recognized norms.¹³³

While I have argued that the preservation of both individuality and diversity is an important feature of aesthetic response and communication, acknowledgement of a shared structure does not do justice to its productivity. Schiller, as exemplary of *Flourishing Individuality*, overlooks the importance of reciprocal learning and influence through persuasion. Under *Diversity-in-Unity*, the harmony that obtains between 'friends' involves a counter-movement of listening and responding. This preserves both the alterity of the other and the individuality of one's own perspective, and yet binds us together in conversation. For each interlocutor, their understanding of the artwork is enriched through the sharing of experience. Each 'friend' flourishes through the reciprocal enrichment of understanding and sensibility.

Flourishing Individuality proposes that art-critical conversation, when done well, consists in the mutual appreciation of each interlocutors' sensibilities. However, this cannot count as adequate for *critical* conversation on artworks, since there is no development of views. *Flourishing Individuality* as a norm governing aesthetic discourse overlooks the to-and-fro counter-movement characteristic of conversation. *We* are individuals *together* in conversation, and it is precisely this in-between dynamic that allows for learning and for the flourishing of one's individuality.

Wilde's presentation of art-critical conversation repeatedly demonstrates the mutual shaping of perspectives. Ernest, for instance, shows that he has been persuaded by Gilbert's claim that the ancient Greeks were a nation of art critics: "I am quite ready to admit that I was wrong in what I said about the Greeks. They were, as you have pointed out, a nation of art critics" (2019, p. 53). Ernest's perspective has changed in response to Gilbert's persuasion. Shortly thereafter Ernest expresses a

¹³³ Riggle (2022) argues for a version of *Flourishing Individuality* which he calls 'Community'. I read his argument as standing with Schiller. Riggle focuses on what he calls "everyday aesthetic discourse," which he takes to exclude art criticism. My argument for *Diversity-in-Unity* could be understood as explaining why the norm of *Flourishing Individuality* ought not to be thought of as extending to art-critical conversation.

more subtle change in his attitude when he says, “I see what you mean, and there is much in it” (2019, p. 54). Through their conversation, Ernest can take up Gilbert’s interpretative perspective for himself. He doesn’t adopt it as his own, but he does allow this expanded understanding to alter his own perspective. Ernest now has a richer understanding of both Gilbert’s perspective, and his own. This movement of understanding is the way in which individuality flourishes in the communal dimension of aesthetic response. As if to underline this point Gilbert says, “If you wish to understand others you must intensify your own individualism” (2019, p. 83).

Proponents of *Flourishing Individuality* are correct to suppose that *Agreement* does not facilitate the mutual appreciation of individuality. However, the social dimension of art criticism cannot just consist in the mutual appreciation of individuality, unless we say that this involves listening to and learning from our interlocutor(s), so that we ourselves change in and through the conversational exchange.

Art-critical conversation involves allowing oneself to be moved by the conversation in new and surprising ways, that is, in ways that outstrip one’s own individual agency. Conversation is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own interpretation, but of being transformed so that we together do not remain as we were. For Hölderlin, conversation as *‘psyche’* involves the dynamic nature of thought-in-conversation, i.e. the relation between ‘friends’ that are bound together in a counter-movement of thought and talk.

Through conversation, the critic’s initial understanding is exceeded and integrated into a broader context of possible perspectives. The conversation is a success if each has acquired a new perspective from which to perceive and understand the artwork—a perspective grounded in new insights. The critic is thereby held in a movement of disclosure that they did not fully create because the conversation develops through dissensus. This marks a transgression of the Kantian constraints that limit both *Agreement* and *Flourishing Individuality*, in so far as neither view can do justice to the in-between dynamic of conversation and its irreducibly social structure. By following Hölderlin’s thought, I have offered a view according to which the critic takes part in something larger than themselves—a *psyche* among friends. This is a communal movement of thought that preserves experience of the artwork in its indeterminacy, strengthens the bonds of sociality, and favors the flourishing of one’s own individuality.

Conclusion

What is it for art criticism to be done well?

This dissertation has been motivated by a philosophical problem distinctive to the criticism of fine art. On the one hand fine art resists our understanding; on the other hand, art criticism is an inquiry geared towards understanding the artwork in question. Through the course of these chapters I have offered a way of productively acknowledging the contradictory status of art criticism without simply dissolving the tension. One way of framing my leading question is as follows: if art criticism is an inquiry geared towards understanding the artwork of interest, and fine art brings us up against the limits of our understanding, then what is it to productively move beyond those limits without merely speaking nonsense? Approaching the problem from this perspective perhaps allows us to see why a Kant-inspired, Schillerian form of criticism is presented and developed in response to this question.

According to Kant, ‘critique’ is a method for achieving a form of self-knowledge that consists in knowing the boundaries of one’s cognitive capacities. The model of criticism that I advance in this dissertation draws on this aspect of Kant’s approach. Criticism of fine art involves reflecting on the limits of our understanding. However, to criticize ‘fine art’ involves going beyond these limits, and it is for this aspect of criticism that I turned to Schiller. Schiller interprets Kant’s aesthetics as allowing for a critical standpoint on the present. In the experience of beauty, wherein “the whole enchantment of beauty resides in its mystery,” (L1. p.88), Schiller finds a critical standpoint that allows for a suspension of our normalized ways of living. For Schiller, in our responses to fine art we achieve a condition of “aesthetic freedom”—regulated by the “laws of beauty”—whereby we can determine our own thoughts, feelings, and actions independently of pre-existing and prevailing social norms. The critical standpoint consequent to aesthetic experience allows one to think towards new possibilities of sense-making. That is, aesthetic experience confers a standpoint from which we can think towards ways of understanding ourselves and the world in which we live that were not conceived prior to and independently of one’s encounter with the artwork. This kind of thought constitutes the *critical* dimension of art criticism.

Given this specific framing, the dissertation has been guided by the following question: *What is it for art criticism to appropriately and productively respond to a work of fine art?* In responding to this question, I have offered a narrative arc that moves from inquiry into the kind of thought proper to art criticism, to the language consequent to this thought, and finally to the form of sociality that is emergent from this discourse.

Chapter one addressed the kind of thought proper to optimally productive forms of art criticism. The dissertation’s guiding question was refined in the following way: *What is it for one’s thought to be appropriately and productively responsive to fine art?* I argued that responses to this question face two opposing dangers. On the one hand responses risk ‘aesthetic servility’, whereby one either gives up on the need for interpretation or one has an unduly low regard for one’s interpretive capacities. This latter kind of case obtains where one restricts the work of criticism to description of the properties that cause pleasure in an appropriately situated subject. On the other hand, responses risk ‘aesthetic hubris’. Hubris obtains when the critic imposes theories or categories of understanding conceived prior to and independently of their encounter with the artwork. In this case the interpretations involved in art criticism would display an insensitivity to the artwork.

I argue that aesthetic humility corrects for both of these alternatives. More specifically, I argue that Hölderlin provides a promising model of aesthetic humility. In developing this model, I contend that

the artwork-directed dimension of aesthetic humility takes the form of ‘remembrance’. My proposal is that ‘remembrance’ consists in thoughtful attentiveness to possibilities of sense-making that have been or are being marginalized. The retrospective aspect of ‘remembrance’ in turn opens our understanding to new possibilities for thought and sensual experience to come. The primary claim in chapter one is that the kind of thought in terms of which we appropriately and productively respond to fine art, is a form of ‘remembrance’.

Continuing my focus on what it is to thoughtfully respond to works of fine art, chapter two contends that when done well, the kind of thought displayed by art criticism is a form of play. More specifically, I propose that it is a form of play governed by what I call the ‘norm of critique’: a norm to question, and to keep questioning. To develop my presentation of the play needed for optimally productive forms of art criticism, I turned to Schiller’s analysis of play-as-reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) in his *Ästhetische Briefe*. For Schiller, it is in the play between the two ‘drives’ constitutive of our humanity that we realize “aesthetic freedom.” I offered an interpretation of this form of play in terms of the relation between sense and non-sense. On this basis I provided an analysis of the play proper to art criticism.

In ‘remembrance’, as we think towards possibilities of sense-making that have been or are being marginalized by prevailing norms of thought and talk, there is a change in the way that we think about ourselves and the world in which we live. This movement of change is the movement of play between sense and non-sense. It is to be in, what I called, the ‘playroom’ between artwork and critic. Moreover, to participate in the ‘playroom’ requires that one’s thought conforms to the ‘norm of critique’. The critic needs to question and to keep questioning both the artwork: “what does it mean? What is it saying?”; and themselves, “do I understand the artwork? Are the words I speak actually appropriately responsive to the artwork?” The answer to each of these questions is that there is no final answer. This is what Schiller’s ‘laws of beauty’ provide: a normativity that governs the conditions of freedom from pre-existing and prevailing norms of sense-making. ‘Remembrance’ involves play in the respect that there is a leeway—a playroom—for where one’s thoughtful response will lead to. The artwork will offer some direction, but the sense discerned in and through the play will not be disclosed with any lawlike necessity. There is randomness and surprise in our critical response to works of art.

In chapter three I enter into reflection on the kind of language that is emergent from playful ‘remembrance’. With this turn in our inquiry the guiding question became the following: *What would it be for the language of art criticism to be both appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?* In this chapter I claimed that the language of art criticism needs a ‘poetic’ quality. ‘Prosaic’ criticism, I argued, is insensitive to the respect in which fine art resists understanding. Conversely, criticism-as-poetry cannot count as an optimally productive form of criticism because it does not directly inaugurate a conversation about its referent. I proposed that the language of art criticism brings forth new possibilities of thought and talk into communicable discourse, and that as such, the language counts as ‘poetic’. In this sense, when articulating the possibilities of sense-making that one playfully thinks towards in ‘remembrance’, one’s discourse will be ‘poetic’.

Art criticism is bound by norms of communicability, but its discourse expands beyond those norms towards new possibilities of sense-making. The ‘poetic’ quality of this discourse indicates that new *possibilities* for thought and talk are brought into communicable discourse. It does not indicate that the critic establishes these new ways of understanding ourselves and the world in which we live. The possibilities brought forth in art criticism are to be worked out in conversation with others.

The dissertation is brought to its concluding movement by reflection on the sociality of art criticism. In this chapter the guiding question is: *What is it for art-critical communication to be appropriately and productively responsive to a work of fine art?* Drawing on Hölderlin's reflections on the kind of communication that can occur between friends, I argued for Diversity-in-Unity as a norm on art-critical communication. Communication that accords with this norm binds together a plurality of perspectives and voices, with what it is for one's individuality to flourish in and through aesthetic response. My proposal is that the communication emergent in art criticism allows for individual perspectives to be reciprocally shaped in new and surprising ways.

According to the view being offered, if we cannot directly determine the 'meaning', 'content' or 'value' of an artwork, then this has important implications for the social dimension of art criticism. Art-critical communication that accords with Diversity-in-Unity takes the form of an agonal conversation. This is a form of conversation that allows for each interlocutor to recognize the contrasting first-person perspectives that are being articulated in the conversation. Through mutual recognition and through encountering challenges to one's own views, each participant can achieve a richer understanding of their own prejudices and interpretive insensitivities. The conversation is a success if each has acquired a new or enriched perspective from which to perceive and understand the artwork. The critic is thereby held in a movement of disclosure that they did not fully create because the conversation develops through dissensus.

Art criticism issues in the public exchange of personal experiences. The critic engages in a discourse that makes aesthetic experience a public affair. It is an attempt to embrace and publicize the challenge that fine art poses to our understanding. I submit that a discourse adequate to this task takes the form of a 'poetic' conversation.

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