A HUNGER FOR AESTHETICS

Enacting the Demands of Art

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Annabel Manning and Sonia Kelly-Manning, my wife and daughter, have enriched me daily for many years already, whether in a loft in Manhattan, on a farm in Pennsylvania, or now in Charlotte. May they be as many years ahead for our party of three.
But what role can the visual arts play in reexamining one of America's greatest social failures [New Orleans after Katrina]? "Not much" is the pessimistic conclusion I came to, followed by a close examination of a line of thinking familiar to Blacks, as expressed by my grandmother: "All you have to do in this world is stay Black and die." This phrase sums up multilayered experiences of suppression, resentment, and rage. I have asked the objects in this book to do one more thing. Instead of sitting very still, "staying Black," and waiting to die, I have asked each one to take a step beyond its own borders to connect a series of thoughts together related to fluidity and the failure of containment.

*KARA WALKER, AFTER THE DELUGE*
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...aesthetics proves to be not so much obsolete as necessary. Art does not stand in need of an aesthetics that will prescribe norms where it finds itself in difficulty, but rather of an aesthetics that will provide the capacity for reflection, which art on its own is hardly able to achieve.

—THEODOR ADORNO, AESTHETIC THEORY

In 1963, Robert Morris issued a notarized “Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal”: “The Undersigned, Robert Morris, being the maker of the metal construction entitled Litanies, described in the annexed Exhibit A, hereby withdraws from said construction all esthetic quality and content and declares that from the date hereof said construction has no such quality and content.”1 So he appeared to take an anti-aesthetic stance in order to legitimate his early conceptual art, where “stance” implies a rather permanent position on aesthetics, not just a passing attitude, since the withdrawal was prospective.2 Yet in 2008, Morris published the essay “Toward an Ophthalmology of the Aesthetic and an Orthopedics of Seeing,” in which he asks questions that entail a critique of his earlier stance: “Do we just want to think that the aesthetic can be liposuctioned out of art? If so, don’t we have here a misplaced philosophical longing for a testosterone-drenched strategy that could banish the aesthetic?”3 Whereas Morris earlier seemed to think that all aesthetics needed to be withdrawn from his conceptual work in order for it to be considered art, he now says that aesthetics is all-important to art as
“an innate faculty, a capacity concerned with affective responses. Leave it at that.” Over the course of forty-five years, a removal of aesthetics has given way to a renewal of aesthetics—or a removal, as Morris proposes to call it.

Why the radical change in Morris’s stance toward aesthetics since the 1960s? Did he change or did aesthetics or both? Is the link between aesthetics and ethics that Morris highlights at the beginning of his recent essay (while referencing philosophers as diverse as Immanuel Kant, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Charles Peirce) a clue to how we might answer these questions? That is, was the absence of ethics in 1960s aesthetics a reason Morris chose to withdraw aesthetics from his work? And what is the “misplaced philosophical longing” he has in mind, beyond the “testosterone-drenched strategy” he seems to disavow? Might the link to ethics and the longing turn out to be the common ground between his seemingly contradictory statements, rendering them compatible after all? If so, is the apparent anti-aesthetic stance embodied in the “Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal” actually a sign of a hunger for aesthetics, though only after it has been better calibrated to contemporary art and the moral demands it makes on us? Moreover, if Morris’s apparent change of heart is not his alone but is indicative of a more general cultural transformation, what transpired in contemporary art from the 1960s to the present to reveal a hunger for aesthetics underlying the anti-aesthetic stance?

We can easily generalize from Morris’s case because he, of course, did not originate the anti-aesthetic stance and is not the only one to abandon it. For example, Marcel Duchamp reported at the turn of the twentieth century that his choice of ready-mades in the local hardware store and, more important, the concept of the ready-made itself were “never dictated by esthetic delectation,” which is why he is often regarded as the patron of the anti-aesthetic stance. Since Duchamp is clearly a pivotal, if controversial, figure in many narratives of modernism and postmodernism alike, his embrace of this stance has helped to sustain it within art over the last century. In 1961, however, when Duchamp was asked why the ready-mades nonetheless looked so beautiful or aesthetic when they first appeared (not just decades later), he reportedly said, “Nobody’s per-
Lisa Saltzman argues that Newman’s critique of aesthetics was simultaneously a call for “a kind of ethics” that would be integral to the new aesthetics he imagined. What might this call entail? Is it related to the ethics Morris envisions? Is it a demand being placed on art or (equally) a demand that art places on us? Is art likewise linked to politics? If so, what impact do the links to ethics and politics have on today’s conception and practice of aesthetics? However, Newman might have answered these questions, even asking them confirms his point that the model of value-free science is inappropriate for aesthetics.

Newman’s comment on ornithology is thus not an attempt to dismiss aesthetics, as John O’Neill claims, or even “an attack against aesthetics as a branch of philosophy,” as Melissa Ho argues. On the contrary, Newman hungered for theoretical aestheticians who would correct some of their common philosophical errors about art (e.g., that it could be construed as independent of ethics), who would be willing to engage contemporary art, and who would provide (indirectly, at least) a more responsible guide for practicing aestheticians and the public as they make aesthetic judgments. To satisfy this hunger, Newman believed it was necessary to abandon the model of the sciences and, instead, to regenerate aesthetics by reinstating its links with ethics (or politics) that were broken when aesthetics aspired to be value-neutral. In terms to be developed here, Newman’s ornithological comment was the enactment of a hunger for aestheticians to become more, rather than less, engaged with contemporary art.

A similar dynamic in which a hunger for aesthetics unwittingly underlies the anti-aesthetic stance is evident in the influential, contemporary theoretical expression of this stance: the anthology *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983). Hal Foster argues in the preface that the anti-aesthetic marks a denial of “the idea of a privileged aesthetic realm” or autonomous art (i.e., the idea that art is independent on the level of production, experience, or judgment from nonartistic values, interests, practices, and institutions) because “its criticality is largely illusory,” even under the guidance of Theodor Adorno’s attempt to transform art’s autonomy into the basis of its criticality. Aesthetics is rejected because it is thought to be constitutionally committed to the belief in the autonomy of art and, for that reason, prevented from providing an effective form of art critique, that is, one that “destructures the order of representations in order to reinscribe them.” However, as Robert Kaufman argues in a recent article on the concept of aura and Adorno, “those currents in twentieth-century art and criticism that emphatically celebrate an ‘anti-aesthetic,’ and that one-sidedly indict or eschew auranic aesthetic autonomy... thereby contribute—however unwittingly—to the destruction of genuinely critical response.” That is, to reject all interpretations of the autonomy of art is to undermine art critique because it has proven to be impossible, historically as well as conceptually, unless art has had some measure of autonomy. So any proponents of the anti-aesthetic stance motivated by art critique should recognize that their rejections of artistic autonomy and aesthetics actually reflect a hunger for a type of aesthetics that can provide a new model of artistic autonomy for the purpose of critique. If indeed an analysis of the rationale behind the anti-aesthetic stance represented in *The Anti-Aesthetic* anthology reveals a hunger for aesthetics, then, as Ranciere claims, this kind of analysis turns the arguments of the anti-aesthetic stance on their heads.

The logic underlying and, in the end, undermining Duchamp’s, Newman’s, Morris’s, and Foster’s iterations of the anti-aesthetic stance is that they all believed (or were mistakenly thought to believe) that their critiques of particular aesthetic theories or concepts entailed a rejection of all aesthetics. To return to the example of Duchamp (or the early Morris), one iteration of the anti-aesthetic stance began as a reasonable critique of theories that judge art in largely perceptual terms and had the aim of opening up the conceptual dimensions of art. But over time, this particular critique was refined and misdirected at all aesthetics because (in part) the word *perceptual* is easily conflated with the word *aesthetic*—the rest is familiar Duchampian anticiular history (with which the early Morris is sometimes associated). Another reason for this reification is that aesthetics, being philosophical, is assumed to be committed to static universal claims about art because, traditionally, it has trafficked in concepts (beauty, autonomy, meaning, intentionality, expression, etc.) that often seem static as well as universal, even when...
they are understood to take form and acquire content only in particular historical settings. Critiques of aesthetics are often aimed at such universality, which is reasonable because some universal aesthetic claims are indeed problematic, as Rancière points out, for philosophers sometimes “pass off conceptual prejudices as historical determinations and temporal delimitations as conceptual determination.” But what is not reasonable is to assume or, worse, to insist that a critique of any specific universal aesthetic claims entails the abandonment of aesthetics, not just a rejection of static or false universal claims. Foster makes this assumption, in effect, when he announces that the title of The Anti-Aesthetic was intended to signal “that the very notion of the aesthetic, its network of ideas, is in question.” Artists and theorists alike need to be careful not to reify any critique of aesthetics that is merely the result of disillusionment with a particular aesthetic theory or concept for any of its failures (say, to grasp contemporary art in all its moral-political dimensions). Although critics may be right about certain failures, that is not grounds for a rejection of all aesthetics; it is really a demand for a new kind of aesthetics (say, one that can heed the call of ethics and politics).

In the end, despite the popularity (even canonicity) of the anti-aesthetic stance, it is untenable for two fundamental reasons. First, to deny aesthetics is to deny art because no work of art can be produced, experienced, or judged without some kind of aesthetics. Aesthetics is critical thinking about the affective, cognitive, moral, political, technological, and other historical conditions constitutive of the production, experience, and judgment of art. Such critical thinking is practical as well as theoretical because it is integral to the set of strategies artists utilize to realize their various goals (effects and affects), as the earlier examples of Duchamp, Newman, and Morris demonstrated. Although these artists represent only a small slice of modern and contemporary art, they are exemplary in their particularity because they recognized, despite adopting the anti-aesthetic stance at times, that aesthetics is integral to art practices. Their exemplarity means that a natural locus for a critique of the anti-aesthetic stance is art, where we will continue to find examples of artists who defy this stance, not by arguing against it theoretically—though some (like Morris) do—but by adopting concrete strategies in their work that demand to be understood in aesthetic terms. In implementing their strategies and thereby raising the demand for aesthetics, artists undermine one of the common kinds of justification of the anti-aesthetic stance articulated by theorists, most explicitly by Jean Baudrillard: “I find some justification for speaking as an iconoclast in that art itself has for the most part become iconoclastic.” So artists will play central roles here in the critique of the anti-aesthetic stance, for they best demonstrate the hunger for aesthetics today and, in turn, help us to recalibrate the practical as well as theoretical values of aesthetics.

Second, an interest in art critique is a rationale shared by many proponents of the varied iterations of the anti-aesthetic stance, but such critique cannot be fully realized without aesthetics; so the full realization of this stance would also be its undoing. Most anti-aesthetic theorists would agree that despite the major differences between modernist art (as represented theoretically by Clement Greenberg) and postmodernist art (as represented theoretically by Jean-François Lyotard), critique is a constant between them. So critique is historically and conceptually embedded in contemporary (modernist or postmodernist inspired) artistic practices, though the object of critique varies from art itself to society (see the introduction). Now, if aesthetics is understood as critical thinking about art, it is a form of critique and is also integral to contemporary artistic practices. To reject aesthetics by adopting the anti-aesthetic stance is to weaken or undermine art that aspires to be critical, which is clearly self-defeating as long as a major rationale for this stance is critique. As it turns out, the demand for art critique is a hunger for aesthetics. Aesthetics just is the art critique that often has motivated the anti-aesthetic stance, which means a remaining role for this stance is a vigilance to ensure that art critique is indeed carried out effectively in—better, as—aesthetics. In short, to recognize that the anti-aesthetic stance undermines the criticality of art is, in principle, to initiate the regeneration of aesthetics in the name of art critique.

If we focus on moral-political art critique in particular, the hunger for aesthetics is even stronger, perhaps surprisingly so. Whereas Newman and Morris insist that ethics is an integral part of aesthetics because it provides purpose(s) for art, anti-aesthetic theorists
often insist there is a dilemma between aesthetics and ethics/politics in contemporary art. They argue that if art is ever to be critical in any moral or political sense, we first have to withdraw aesthetics from it, on the early Morris model. This alleged dilemma is implicit in the long-standing charge of aestheticization often at the center of the anti-aesthetic stance: art committed to aesthetics can only beautify ethical and political problems for pleasure's sake alone, which—whatever else it means—implies that art cannot be critical of such problems. However, as we have seen (and will see in more depth later), one of the lessons of contemporary art is that this is a false dilemma. Moral-political critique is possible in art only through aesthetics—that is, through critical thinking about the conditions under which artists operate, especially the ethical and political conditions and effects of the artistic strategies they utilize in their work. So moral-political critique requires aesthetics in the form of critical thinking, which is the best possible way to answer the charge of aestheticization.

In the interest of art, and ultimately in the interest of the needs that compel us to demand art and that, in turn, make us hunger for aesthetics (see the introduction), it is time to move beyond the domineering anti-aesthetic stance. This does not mean that skepticism about art is no longer appropriate or that art critique no longer has a place. On the contrary, as Bruno Latour rightly emphasizes, once we acknowledge the power of aesthetics, the result will actually be a "revision of the critical spirit" in aesthetics, art theory, and the arts alike.

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INTRODUCTION:
THE DEWEY EFFECT

Aesthetics refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships (which presupposes certain ideas about thought's effective).

—JACQUES RANCIÈRE, THE POLITICS OF AESTHETICS

The anti-aesthetic stance may have been productive at times when, for example, it opened up space for conceptualism in contemporary art, as we saw with Robert Morris in the preface. But it is clearly problematic when it is dominant for too long, as has been the case since the 1960s. To some extent, the dominance of the anti-aesthetic stance began to diminish in the 1990s when the contemporary art world renewed its engagement with aesthetics, often under the guise of a return to beauty. But I do not yet share the optimism of James Meyer and Toni Ross, who believe that this reengagement shows "little sign of abating."¹ People committed to the anti-aesthetic stance are simply too well entrenched in the art world, and especially within academia, to welcome aesthetics back without considerable reservations. At the same time, I do find it very promising, if ironic, that the reemergence of aesthetics has occurred within some of the very same disciplines that not long ago were hostile to aesthetics.² Also, some examples of art that would have been discussed only in anti-aesthetic terms just a few years ago are now said to be shaped by aesthetic strategies (as we will see). I welcome these
last developments but prefer to speak of the *regeneration* of aesthetics because it is undeniable that the central concepts, principles, and strategies in aesthetics need to be recalibrated after being the target—for several decades—of severe, sometimes justified, critiques motivated by a host of philosophical, political, and cultural concerns. The ultimate aim of the regeneration of aesthetics here is to find a third way between the total rejection of aesthetics entailed by the anti-aesthetic stance and the uncritical restoration of the status quo ante implied by some of the recent revivals of aesthetics.\(^3\)

**CRITIQUE OF ART, CRITIQUE BY ART**

On the face of it, the regeneration of aesthetics should not be problematic because, as we saw in the preface, modernist and postmodernist artists did not completely escape aesthetics when they aggressively tried to free themselves from it. In Theodor Adorno’s words, even as “aesthetics fell out of fashion, the most advanced artists have sensed the need for it all the more strongly.”\(^4\) Barnett Newman and Morris are exemplars of artists in this regard, as their critiques of aesthetics conceal a hunger to regenerate it using their own types of art as inspiration. Likewise, when theorists generalized critiques of particular aesthetic concepts (e.g., meaning, autonomy, beauty) into critiques of all aesthetics, they always appealed to new or recalibrated aesthetic concepts, such as the sublime, the abject, the uncanny, and the like. So their critiques could also reveal a latent hunger for aesthetics, albeit only for a regenerated aesthetics. In the interest of art critique, these artists and theorists seem to want to get beyond conceptions of aesthetics that do not allow for art’s moral-political power—but the result is still aesthetics. Recognizing that aesthetics must be recalibrated as the material conditions of contemporary art and society change, Adorno describes well the challenge aestheticians face: “In the age of the irreconcilability of traditional aesthetics and contemporary art, the philosophical theory of art has no choice but, varying a maxim of Nietzsche’s, by determinate negation to *think the categories that are in decline as categories of transition.*”\(^5\) In this light, the resil-

ience of aesthetics when it is confronted with the anti-aesthetic stance takes the form of a self-critique aimed at developing new concepts, principles, and strategies that, if successfully recalibrated, would constitute a regeneration of aesthetics. We should encourage and welcome the transformed truth of the concepts that should emerge from the self-critique of aesthetics because without some recalibrated versions of these or related concepts, art is unintelligible to us, and, moreover, it is ineffective when unintelligible. Art’s efficacy (or effectivity) is inseparable from its intelligibility, which means its efficacy is inseparable from aesthetics, though only if aesthetics renders art intelligible through art critique.

So, in the interest of rendering contemporary art more intelligible, we should analyze the hunger for aesthetics instead of uncritically lending credence to the anxiety that its regeneration is merely reactionary.\(^6\) Of course, to ensure that the regeneration is not reactionary, we need to ask: “Which aesthetics?” and “Whose aesthetics?”\(^7\) Though the answers to these questions are varied and complex, one basic component of any answer is that aesthetics must enable us to critique the varieties of contemporary art, where critique requires first, that we recognize that art makes demands, or claims, on us and then, that we analyze the artistic, moral-political, historical, and philosophical conditions shaping these demands and determining whether they can be satisfied (i.e., realized). Aesthetics will be regenerated, and the hunger for it satisfied, only if it is up to the task of responding to these demands through art critique.

Relative to the various contemporary art practices, art critique is the purpose of philosophical aesthetics and the measure of its success, just as a critical understanding of the historical and philosophical conditions of contemporary scientific practices is the purpose and measure of the philosophy of science. The operative idea of art critique here has two distinct, interrelated modes that are practical and theoretical at the same time: critique of art, where art is principally the *object* of critique; and critique by art, where art is principally the *agent* of critique.

*Critique of art:* critical thinking about the philosophical and historical conditions making art possible and effective on affective
and cognitive levels, conducted mainly by theorists but also by artists so that artistic practices remain self-critical. This mode is where the key aesthetic concepts—such as affect, meaning, autonomy, pleasure, beauty, and the like—need to be recalibrated. The philosophical and historical issues here are varied: ontological (e.g., the human needs that give rise to art and the resulting ontology of works of art); epistemological (e.g., the relationships between art and imagination, knowledge, affect, and cognition); social (e.g., the reciprocal influences between art and various forms of identity: gender, race, ethnicity, class); scientific (e.g., new insights into art arising from evolutionary biology and neuroaesthetics); and religious (e.g., the spiritual needs that are expressed in art). But I will focus on moral-political issues here because they are most relevant to the critique of the anti-aesthetic stance: how is it possible for art to have a critical and sustainable moral-political impact on individuals in society?

**Critique by art:** critical thinking about society, conducted mainly by artists (directly or indirectly) but also by theorists and with the participation, in principle, of the people who experience art. Although the range of social issues critiqued by art is varied as well, I will again focus on moral-political (for the same reason as just given). What are the enabling and limiting conditions of art’s moral-political critique of society? What degree and type of autonomy, if any, does art have? If works of art are able to make moral-political demands, or claims, on us, what are the best aesthetic strategies for doing so? Finally, what responsibility do artists and the public share for the satisfaction of the moral-political demands that particular artworks make on us?

If we pursue both modes of art critique distinctly but concurrently, we will be better able to regenerate aesthetics while also sustaining the main critical and moral-political impulses behind the anti-aesthetic stance. One of the mistakes made by anti-aesthetic theorists has been to overlook the critique of art either because they think it is covered by art alone (in the form of its self-critique) or because they favor critique by art because it makes art morally and politically engaged with society. But neither mode of art critique is effective without the other because the first mode helps to clarify how the second is possible, while the second mode materializes the possibilities envisioned in the first. After anti-aesthetic theorists confine themselves to critique by art, they often argue that it is a failure, leaving them without any mode of art critique, not merely without aesthetics. But even the failure of critique by art should not lead us to abandon aesthetics. Rather, it should lead us to develop a new model of critique by art and to do so in combination with the critique of art, for the latter may help us to understand the failure of the critique by art and its conditions of success going forward. Even if we are convinced that the causes of such failure are beyond the power of contemporary aestheticians or artists because societal conditions at a particular time do not allow art critique to succeed, we still should not abandon aesthetics. On the contrary, such a predicament should inspire us to regenerate aesthetics in new directions in the interest of art critique, though only if we acknowledge that aesthetic concepts, principles, and strategies need to be recalibrated as art and society change. In the process, it is important to note that we, not artists alone, are responsible for realizing the moral-political demands that art makes on us through the two modes of art critique. Finally, although artists (like Newman, Morris, Gerhard Richter, and Doris Salcedo) are perhaps in the best position to appreciate these two modes because their art is impossible without them (or else unintelligible and ineffective), aestheticians are needed equally to articulate and strengthen both modes of art critique so that artistic practice and aesthetic theory are complementary.

**RESTORING AGENCY IN AESTHETICS AND ART**

A regeneration of aesthetics is in order because modern and postmodern art and art theory have transformed aesthetics from being the premier agent of critical thinking about art into being primarily a target of such thinking. This transformation is evident in longstanding fields such as art history that aim to supplement aesthetics with new forms of critique and in the new fields (visual studies,
cultural studies, etc.) that were formed in part with the explicit aim of displacing aesthetics, even though they have recently begun to turn back to aesthetics.\(^8\) To regenerate aesthetics is to restore its agency as art critique.

The regeneration of aesthetics is somewhat complicated by the fact that in the hands of anti-aesthetic theorists, \textit{art} has likewise been largely the target rather than the agent of critique in recent years—confirming the link between the anti-aesthetic stance and anti-art associated with Marcel Duchamp.\(^9\) For example, Rosalind Krauss overextends her critique of the aesthetic concept of universal meaning in art to the point that she argues that art has no meaning or that meaning is simply not the theoretical question to be asking of art. Rather, art is generated by, and even about, the \textit{informe} that dissolves form from within a work of art: “The formless . . . is not just an erasure of form but an operation to undo form.”\(^10\) As form is part of the constellation form-meaning, however, the undoing of form is also the undoing of meaning, as Krauss explicitly states: everything in art (e.g., the signified, the meaning) is first assimilated to form and then the informe undermines it all. In the end, the express purpose of the concept of the informe is to allow art theory to fulfill its postmodernist destiny of “liberating our thinking from the semantic.”\(^11\) Based on this, however, a work of art becomes something about which it is virtually impossible to have \textit{any} theory, not just an aesthetic theory, for what else can be said about art here other than that it undermines any intelligible form and, as Adorno warned, thereby defies any form of intelligibility required for theory? The likely Kraussian response that the only intelligible form of art is precisely the form of its \textit{unintelligibility}, resulting from the informe, is merely to confirm this point on a metatheoretical level. Though common in postmodern art theory, this type of response is as unsustainable as the anti-aesthetic stance from which it stems because of the iconoclastic conception of art underlying it.

As Boris Groys argues, once art theorists shift the focus of theory from the message (signified) to the medium (signifier), they open up “the possibility of strategically deploying iconoclasm as an artistic device” (e.g., the informe) used only “to highlight the materiality of the medium concealed behind any ‘spiritual’ message.”\(^12\) Rather than being used to produce images with new messages (meanings), these iconoclastic devices generate icons of materialism that assert the power of artistic media over any message or meaning. As Susan Sontag observed in the 1960s, modern art seems to be “as much an act of criticism as an act of creation.”\(^13\) Or, in Groys’s words: “The image is therefore transfigured into the site for an epiphany of pure matter, abandoning its role as the site for an epiphany of the spirit.”\(^14\) As Adorno anticipated, however, the kind of materialism inspiring today’s anti-aesthetic stance (e.g., Krauss’s) is inseparable from iconoclasm: “The materialist longing to grasp the thing aims at . . . the absence of images . . . Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. Materialism brought that ban into secular form [art].”\(^15\) At the same time, as Adorno also points out, materialism cannot function effectively—that is, cannot achieve the critique of society that motivates it—without some mode of aesthetics because social reality is unintelligible unless it is given affective form through art or aesthetic experience more generally, for social reality has to be apprehended affectively to be recognized and critiqued. Once again, the anti-aesthetic stance shows itself on its own terms to be as unsustainable as it is tenacious.

A further consequence of the latent iconoclasm of the anti-aesthetic stance is that it creates the perception that theory (or criticism) now flourishes at art’s expense. As Krauss provocatively—and affirmatively—puts it, the focus of art theory is now on its own method because that is now “what criticism is, seriously, read for.”\(^16\) In turn, however, the prioritization of theory over art leads to exaggerated critiques of theory, generating antitheory as the revenge against the anti-aesthetic.\(^17\) But then we have exaggerations all the way down, which will lead nowhere if we are trying to understand contemporary art that continues to make demands on us and if we believe that theory’s task is to render these demands intelligible. An alternative response to the anti-aesthetic stance (besides rejecting all theory) is to recognize that aesthetic concepts need to be recalibrated. Take the concept of meaning critiqued by Krauss, for example, and recalibrate it in such a way that, as Jacques Ranciere envisions, we can understand how art is still able to “transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations.”\(^18\)
That is, some concept of artistic meaning is still needed and still possible, and it is the task of aesthetics to recalibrate that concept, among others. To take this task seriously is a clear way to regenerate aesthetics.

Consider another example of a potent critique of contemporary art with implicit anti-aesthetic commitments. T. J. Clark argues, "art, in our culture, finds itself more and more at the limits, on the verge of emptiness and silence. So that practitioners have continually been forced to recognize how little space, or representational substance, they are given to work with in the all-consuming world of goods."19 The globalized markets of late capitalism have little, if any, room for art to engage in social-political (or any other form of) critique. Speaking of Georg W. F. Hegel's notion of the end of art, however, Clark says that what Hegel did not see "was that the full depth and implication of this [art's] inability—the inability to go on giving Idea and World sensuous immediacy, of a kind that opened both to the play of practice—would itself prove a persistent, maybe sufficient, subject."20 The very subject, or content/meaning, of artistic practice from early modernism to the present has allegedly been art's own inability or deficiency due to social conditions. At best, art is conceived as a placeholder for itself (or its replacement), sustaining negative space until its deficient representational substance can be overcome (or until something else takes its place). But how can a representational practice lacking substance occupy any space, even negative space? By negating its own negation, as Peter Osborne suggests in an essay on Richter's paintings? But even Osborne concedes that such a strategy only allows artworks to "mark time, the historical time of their production, the time of the crisis of painting."21 Moreover, he also acknowledges that marking time is a theoretical stance that is not sustainable in/as practice. So it is impossible for artists to sustain art practice(s) under such a conception, though theorists may still be able sustain art theory. In this light, art qua representational practice that represents only its failure to represent is theory rather than practice, which brings us back to Krauss’s point.22

Clark’s art theory is problematic not just because of the placeholder metaphor, though it makes it seem that art will be anemic forever, or because of the talk of negative space, which has its own logic, even if not enough to generate art. The more serious problem, as Clark realizes, is that the negation of art has to be determinate to have any content and to be effective. But such determination can come only from the aesthetic strategies enacted by artists, not from the philosophical arguments of theorists. That is, every artistic practice (even conceptual art) involves some type(s) of aesthetic strategies that are the target when art is negated as well as the grounds of determination that complete the negation and, at the same time, allow art to move beyond it. To put it another way, since, according to Clark, art has been negated, artists have to provide the determination needed to complete art's negation and, where possible, to move beyond it. Morris's trajectory from aesthetic withdrawal in 1963 to aesthetic reaffirmation in 2008 is a good example of an artist who has come to recognize the role of aesthetics in the determinate negation of art. However, Clark seems unwilling to countenance any role for aesthetics, which means he cannot fully conceptualize the very negation of art that is the logic of his own project. In short, his theory is incomplete without new aesthetic strategies, and only artists can develop them by making artworks that can achieve more than the confirmation of art's lack of representational substance.

Yet the reestablishment of art's substance is virtually impossible today at the level of artistic practice, according to Clark. He believes that the roots of art's failure to have any representational substance lie outside art where, because of the logics of modernity and postmodernity, art has no power.23 Art’s autonomy, long praised in modernism and passionately rejected in postmodernism, is merely a symptom of art’s marginalization in contemporary capitalist society rather than a positive achievement that could reestablish its substance—on the contrary, autonomy secures art’s “end.” Though insightful, this theory has negative philosophical implications for art because its resistance to failure now seems to require that its critical power extend beyond itself to the roots of that failure, which Clark seems to think is a crucial part of that which makes art modern, yet art’s autonomy (whether as achievement or as symptom) prevents it
from engaging in anything more than a placeholder strategy because it has no power in society. So how is any resistance to art’s alleged failure possible within art, since the failure of modernism seems to be owing to the success of modernity because it excludes the satisfaction of certain human needs? At the same time, if aesthetics is confined to a reflection on art’s failure and thus to being a placeholder for a more robust notion of art, aesthetics is not critiquing art’s impasse: its inability to represent anything other than its inability to represent. In this light, the only option left to aesthetics seems to be resignation, expressed as mourning, because artists cannot represent anything of substance or engage in critique. This mourning is so much reflected in aesthetics that, according to Rancière, “‘aesthetics’ has become, in the last twenty years, the privileged site where the tradition of critical thinking has metamorphosed into deliberation on mourning.”23 The mourning in aesthetics for art has become so pronounced that contemporary artists are caught in a double bind, powerfully described by Bruno Latour: artists are compelled by social as well as more personal experiences to make works of art, yet at the same time they are confronted by the seemingly undeniable fact, given the dominance of the anti-aesthetic stance, that “there is no longer any legitimate way of making” art in today’s society.26 In effect, the anti-aesthetic stance is the discursive certification of art’s socially determined delegitimization.

Latour describes an unsustainable predicament for artists—and no less for theorists. So why, other than faute de mieux, would artists or theorists ever be attracted to the anti-aesthetic stance if it creates or exacerbates this predicament? As we can hardly negotiate contemporary society without needing to understand art, this is not just a theoretical question confined to the art world. On the contrary, it is also a very urgent moral and political matter, as the 2002 Iconoclasm exhibition and text demonstrate, because so many contemporary political, scientific, and religious debates are mediated by images, whether in art or in other media, as Judith Butler also now argues.27 Just picture the political effect of the Abu Ghraib images (to be discussed later) without turning to aesthetics to critique and understand their effects. At the same time, although anti-aesthetic theo-
for realizing these dreams. Such responsibility lies with all of us. By making such responsibility an urgent moral-political issue, artists can elicit critical reflection on who needs to take responsibility and how, if possible, that responsibility can be carried out.

I do not mean to suggest that all contemporary art is moral-political, though it is true in at least a general sense that most art is affected by or has effects on the ethics and politics of contemporary society. Although there are many kinds of art besides those that have explicit or even implicit moral-political aims or effects, I discuss only moral-political works of art here because, paradoxically, they best express the hunger for aesthetics that I am trying to address. Just as it has been in the interest of such works that the anti-aesthetic stance has taken hold in contemporary art, art theory, and aesthetics, it is likewise with the help of such works that this stance can best be challenged. Once aesthetics is again on firmer ground, it should also be better able to help us understand other types of art.

And finally, the call for a regenerated aesthetics is not an appeal to a counterfactual account of art, nor is it an idealistic wish that there be morally and politically effective artists in today's world or that such artists would emerge if only theory could first articulate and defend this wish. Rather, this is a materialist call to aestheticians to explain the kinds of moral-political power that contemporary artists are already realizing in their work. There are examples of contemporary art enacting the moral-political power that theorists committed to the anti-aesthetic stance still insist art can no longer have. Moreover, some of the contemporary artists supported by anti-aesthetic theorists (e.g., Richter and Salcedo) enact the very power that these same theorists continue to deny is possible. Similarly, there are many examples of photographs and other images outside art that also enact the kind of moral-political power thought to be impossible. The counterevidence is there for them—and for all—to see. The success of the regeneration of aesthetics hangs on this evidence of art’s moral-political power.

THE POP, SONTAG, RICHTER, AND SALCEDO EFFECTS

An important step in the effort to counterbalance today's anti-aesthetic stance is to challenge the claim that aesthetics is incapable of critiquing contemporary art, particularly when moral-political issues are involved. This claim is made on the belief that aesthetics is an autonomous practice committed to universal concepts (meaning, beauty, intentionality, expression, and the like), whereas contemporary art enacts new culturally particular sensibilities, often with a problematic relationship to any kind of universality. In this scenario, aesthetics represents the timeless tradition against which contemporary art asserts itself as the present not just in the present—hence contemporary art's internalization of the anti-aesthetic stance, as we saw with the early Morris example. Moreover, the history of modern philosophy seems to be working against aesthetics on this score, if we invoke Hegel's famous "owl of Minerva," which spreads its wings only at dusk after a shape of contemporary art has grown old (i.e., no longer contemporary) and revealed its universality. The predicament here seems to be that if aestheticians attempt to critique contemporary art, they should expect to do so without the owl's help, without wisdom—hardly an encouragement to regenerate aesthetics. However, Hegel himself added an all-important twist, barely a page later in his Philosophy of Right, that philosophers must understand the universal in their own time rather than fashion an ideal to replace it. If we accept the Hegelian challenge, though not the Hegelian idea of the universal, there is a normative expectation embedded in aesthetics that philosophers must engage in contemporary art critique. The stakes here are high: if aestheticians cannot critique contemporary art, Newman would be right after all that aesthetics is for the birds, and mourning might indeed be the only thing aesthetics would have to offer.

With Morris's dramatic 1963 removal of aesthetics silently in the background, I begin making a case for the regeneration of aesthetics by analyzing how several philosophers—Sontag, Arthur Danto, Stanley Cavell, and Umberto Eco—actively critiqued contemporary art, especially Pop art as it emerged in the 1960s, ironically just when Morris’s removal was taking place. I call the legacy of these
philosophers' engagement with contemporary art at that time the *Pop Effect* (chapter 1). If this effect is accepted as the true legacy of 1960s art for today's aestheticians, and if we appreciate the irony of Morris's dismissal of aesthetics for not engaging contemporary art just as aesthetics began to do so, then we should be better able to recognize and satisfy the hunger for aesthetics that is unwittingly driving the anti-aesthetic stance. Although clearly there were other art forms or movements in the 1960s besides *Pop*, and although *Pop* does not signify a unified art style or movement, it is a good example for my purposes because it is the contemporary art that a number of philosophers (even beyond the four I discuss) first felt compelled to respond to, setting the stage for the rest of the decade when minimalism and conceptual art, to take just two later examples, also posed important philosophical challenges. 29 A reason for analyzing *Pop* art rather than more contemporary art is that it is important to analyze art that is temporally close enough to be contemporary yet distant enough that we can ascertain whether aesthetics was successful in critiquing it. If aestheticians indeed succeeded in the case of *Pop*, which in turn remains central for our current conception of contemporary art, they should be able to reestablish their credentials as legitimate agents of contemporary art critique. That is, if aesthetics was sufficiently successful with *Pop*, it should be acknowledged as being able to critique art that is even more contemporary, which is discussed in the chapters that follow.

Despite the success of these four philosophers in engaging contemporary art in the early 1960s, however, all but Sontag mostly neglected or failed to engage the ethics and politics of *Pop* art. Since ethics and politics were very much constitutive of *Pop* art at that time, to elide them was to miss something about the art, which seems to be a major reason for these philosophers' exclusion from historical accounts of 1960s art (with the relative exception of Sontag). The "miss" here is not merely on the interpretive level (criticism) but, more philosophically, at the ontological level, where the very conception of art is at issue. Of the four philosophers I discuss in chapter 1, Sontag understands the significance of ethics and politics for art, but her critique of 1960s art is not ontological, at least in any systematic or sustained way. Unfortunately, while Danto, Cavell, and Eco explicitly present ontological arguments about contemporary art yet seem to overlook or undervalue its ethics and politics, Sontag seems to understand the ethics and politics of 1960s art but does not fully appreciate just how significant they are for the ontology of art. It is as if she took the "contemporary" expressed through the ethics and politics of early 1960s art so seriously that she lost sight of its ontology, as if the recognition of art's contemporaneity implied the abandonment of its ontology, as if ontology cannot be historical. By contrast, Danto struggled with art's contemporaneity and historicity because he recognized their problematic implications for the ontology of art. In the end, however, he tries to indemnify art's ontology against history as a solution to that struggle. In the discussion to follow, with an eye to giving art's ontology, contemporaneity, and history their due, we will indirectly examine the links between them enacted in our affective experiences of the ethics and politics of contemporary art.

To take an example of Sontag's tendency to weigh art's contemporaneity over its ontology, she understands the ontology of photography solely in terms of its contemporary forms and conditions in the 1960s and 1970s. While examining the role of photography in the moral-political critique of society at that time, she concludes in *On Photography* (1977) that photography fails to have moral-political efficacy at any time. This conclusion, if not derived from an anti-aesthetic stance, became its iconic expression for several decades. You could hardly study art or art theory in the United States in the late 1970s through the early twenty-first century without encountering Sontag's argument about the moral-political impotence of contemporary photography and, by extension, all art. In 2003, however, Sontag published *Regarding the Pain of Others*, in which she revisits and repudiates the main conclusion of *On Photography* just as forcefully as she originally defended it. 30 I call the significance of this repudiation for aesthetics the *Sontag Effect* and try to explain its positive implications for the regeneration of aesthetics. To do so, it is necessary to discuss photography because Sontag argues that all contemporary art "aspires to the condition of photography," and Krauss claims that photography is historically, if not constitutively, anti-aesthetic: "photography opened the closedunities
of the older aesthetic discourse [the uniqueness of the art object, the originality of its author, and the individuality of self-expression] to the severest possible scrutiny, turning them inside out."

Combining these two influential claims, many theorists besides Sontag and Krauss could conclude that all contemporary art aspires to the anti-aesthetic. As it turns out, however, Sontag’s Regarding the Pain of Others provides a basis for forestalling this conclusion and challenging photography’s alleged role in perpetuating the anti-aesthetic stance. Ultimately, Sontag acknowledges aesthetics as a means for photographers to achieve and sustain moral-political power in their work, whether as art or not. So the contrast between Sontag’s two texts—On Photography and Regarding the Pain of Others—is the focus of chapter 2. Following Sontag, I examine photographs that have moral-political power, mainly in connection with terrorism, war, and other sources of suffering. Although not all photography representing suffering, violence, and death is art, and although politics does not always involve suffering, violence, or death (or vice versa), my focus is on photographs that represent these matters because they are often the preferred type of images of theorists committed to the anti-aesthetic stance.

To pursue the issue of contemporary photography’s and contemporary art’s moral-political efficacy beyond Sontag, I discuss some examples of contemporary art in more depth. Of all the contemporary artists I could discuss, Richter and Salcedo are exemplary because many anti-aesthetic theorists believe that they embody and justify the anti-aesthetic stance. I devote separate chapters to each artist because, contra these theorists, Richter and Salcedo resist and undermine the anti-aesthetic stance. Moreover, to explain their art is to acknowledge and account for their aesthetic strategies that, ironically, are designed to achieve the art critique that inspired the anti-aesthetic stance in the first place. These artists are engaged in the very type of moral-political issues that anti-aesthetic theorists still believe contemporary artists can no longer handle critically. For the sake of the regeneration of aesthetics, not just moral-political art, we need to demonstrate that this belief is mistaken. Richter and Salcedo deliberately and convincingly provide significant evidence for such demonstration.

To begin with, I analyze Richter’s Baader-Meinhof painting series—entitled October 18, 1977 (chapter 3). Granted, these paintings have received considerable attention from many critics, pro and con, since they were first exhibited in 1989. But I am convinced they have not been understood adequately because Richter’s paintings are too often seen through the eyes of anti-aesthetic theorists who insist that they mainly mourn the impossibility of contemporary history painting, or any other genre of painting attempting to engage moral-political issues. As such, Richter’s art is often seen as the embodiment of the anti-aesthetic stance. To make a case that his paintings reflect more than the mourning of their own medium, I analyze their profound effect on Astrid Proll, a former member of the Baader-Meinhof Group who claims that Richter’s paintings allowed her for the first time to approach photographs of the Baader-Meinhof history and to come to terms with that history—which I call the Richter Effect. How can this effect be explained, especially when it is extended to those who were not as directly involved in the Baader-Meinhof history? If the Richter Effect is extended to other viewers, does that mean that they are sympathizing with terrorists, as Richter has been accused of doing? Also, how can the explanation of the Richter Effect contribute to the regeneration of aesthetics? I do not intend to put all these issues on Richter’s back. Yet, although no one artist can establish new possibilities for painting that anti-aesthetic art theorists think contemporary material conditions do not allow, it is enough for Richter to resist the anti-aesthetic stance just once for its firm grip on contemporary art (and hence on art theory and aesthetics) to be loosened. To add a second, more recent, example of Richter’s work, I also discuss his War Cut (2004), an art book reflecting critically on the launching of the Iraq War by the United States in March 2003. Here we have another case of an artist critically engaging contemporary politics in a way that anti-aesthetic theorists argue is no longer possible—the Richter Effect again. Once we have two clear examples demonstrating that those theorists are mistaken about an artist whom they wholeheartedly support, we can see more concretely what it means for aesthetics to follow the lead of an artist and to proceed on that basis to regenerate aesthetics.
In chapter 4, I focus on Salcado because her work concerns a variety of political issues: violence in Colombia, immigrants in Europe, detention centers around the world, and other examples of suffering experienced by people because of social injustice (i.e., humans inflicting suffering on other humans). How does Salcado's artwork enact such suffering? If it succeeds in doing so, is that enough to deem it politically and morally effective—the Salcado Effect? How can she avoid the criticism, raised in a classic fashion by the early On Photography about what Sonya Sayres calls the treachery or burden of aesthetics. But these comments ultimately point to a hunger for a regenerated aesthetics, one that incorporates the sensuous and affective dimensions of art, along with its broader moral-political roles. To say the least, Sontag has a conflicted, but also nuanced and self-reflective, view of aesthetics that is evident already in her early, influential essay “Against Interpretation” (1964). For even though the title suggests the logic of total negation similar to that which generates the anti-aesthetic, Sontag is very clear that she does not reject all interpretation. Rather, she has a very specific notion of interpretation in mind: not the broad Nietzschean idea that there are no facts, only interpretations, which she accepts qualitatively, but the narrower notion of “a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain ‘rules’ of interpretation,” what she later called a “reductive way of accounting for art” according to its meaning without regard for its formal dimensions or functions. For example, in speaking of the film Last Year at Marienbad (1961; Alain Resnais, director; Alain Robbe-Grillet, writer), Sontag argues that interpretation focused on a film's meaning or content “indicates a dissatisfaction (conscious or unconscious) with the work, a wish to replace it by something else.” In this light, some types of interpretation seem to be anti-art. Sontag proposes instead that we look at “the pure, untranslatable, sensuous immediacy of some of its images, and its rigorous if narrow solutions to certain problems of cinematic form.” She wants more attention paid to art's form—that is, its aesthetics. So not only is Sontag’s argument against interpretation not to be associated with the anti-aesthetic, it is actually an argument for aesthetics, another instance of a hunger for aesthetics being mistaken for a critique of it.

More specifically, starting with chapter 1, Sontag is one of the philosophical critics discussed in the account of the Pop Effect because she critiqued 1960s art as it was emerging. In doing so, she made it clear that her principal interest was not just to render “the particular judgment about the particular work of art” but “to expose and clarify the assumptions underlying certain judgments and tastes.” She thereby demonstrated that philosophy was central to the critique of contemporary art at the time and, subsequently, helped to shape the development of contemporary art theory and aesthetics—or, at least, she may now begin to shape it. The topic in chapter 2 is the Sontag Effect, so she is clearly a main figure at that point. Although Sontag is not discussed explicitly in chapter 3, her claims that all contemporary art aspires to the condition of photography and that photography in turn changes our conceptions(s) of art are reflected in Richter’s Baader-Meinhof paintings because they are based on photographs and compel us to rethink our idea of contemporary art. Also, in On Photography, Sontag strongly criticizes the compassion generated by art that enacts political events because she argues, among other points, that this emotion is difficult to sustain. Since I argue that Richter’s paintings generate compassion as well as grief, I have to answer her objection. Fortunately, Sontag becomes my ally because she comes to believe that compassion is needed in art and argues convincingly that it is possible and
sustainable. If Sontag does not have a strong presence in chapter 4, whose focus is the Salcedo Effect, it is only because she has become less thematic as her impact has deepened. By creating art that elicits compassion and has moral-political power, Salcedo demonstrates in practice that which Sontag imagines is possible in her Regarding the Pain of Others. Not only do the aesthetic strategies enacted in Salcedo’s work not hinder such “regarding,” they make it morally and politically effective.

In following the lead of contemporary artists engaging in moral-political critique, we see that they can indeed achieve some of the effects that anti-aesthetic theorists still claim are no longer possible. Of particular concern here are both the moral-political effects of art and, because of this, its critical role in society. Throughout, I want to keep the following encouraging, though somber, statement from Richter in mind: “Our state of impotence [in the face of historic catastrophes] hasn’t changed much—or, to put it another way, it’s not only the perils that have grown; the possibilities of doing something about them have grown too.” Artists are the agents of these possibilities, while aestheticians have the task of ensuring that artistic agency is no longer hampered by the anti-aesthetic stance. Aesthetics and art can thereby regenerate one another.

THE DEWEY EFFECT

There are human needs outside art that drive the history of art and, in turn, the history of aesthetics. In Adorno’s words: “The concrete historical situation of art registers concrete demands. Aesthetics begins with reflection on them: only through them does a perspective open on what art is.” To clarify the role of such needs or demands in the regeneration of aesthetics, especially in connection with moral-political art, let me paraphrase John Dewey, a philosopher relevant to most discussions of aesthetics. Art is, among other things (pleasure, revelry, play, etc.), the enactment of human needs through sensuous forms that are apprehended on affective and cognitive levels before (or as) the underlying needs are recognized and satisfied. That is, art as enactment combines the moral-political de-

mand for the apprehension of our needs by others with the moral-political demand for the recognition and satisfaction of these needs by others. This combination of moral and political demands involving apprehension, recognition, and satisfaction is what I call the Dewey Effect. In Dewey’s own words: “Every need, say hunger for fresh air or food, is a lack that denotes at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a demand, a reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium. . . . These biological commonplace are something more than that: they reach to the roots of the aesthetic in experience.” But what does biology have to do with art and the regeneration of aesthetics understood as art critique?

If “hunger” is understood as the complex, evolving, and historical set of human needs, desires, hopes, fears, pleasures, pains, and the like, and if “environment” is understood in social-political as well as natural terms, then we can easily see that our relationships with our environment are replete with examples of “temporary absence of adequate adjustment.” Dewey believes such absence can be experienced best, if not only, when it is enacted through artistic form that enables us to separate this type of experience from the general amorphous flow of everyday experience—hence Dewey’s title, Art as Experience, which serves as a condensed expression of his aesthetic theory. Art is the enactment in public of our response to an absence of adjustment with our environment after it has left its affective and cognitive imprint on us, which means that art here is as much effect as cause—in Dewey’s language, an “undergoing” before a “doing.” In turn, art as enactment provides in nascent form at least the demand for future restoration of an equilibrium with our environment—that is, the imagined elimination of the absence of adequate adjustment. So art as enactment is also a “doing” in response to an “undergoing.” Or, in the language of trauma, which emerges at times throughout the discussions that follow, art as enactment is a symptomatic manifestation of suffering that is otherwise too overwhelming to be experienced affectively, let alone to be rendered intelligible cognitively. In Elizabeth V. Spelman’s words, although suffering is an ineradicable part of the human condition, it is also part
of our condition to “attempt to give form to suffering—be it our own, that of those close to us, or that of strangers near and far.”

Art provides the forms of (or for) our affective and cognitive experience of suffering, while aesthetics is the critique of these affective and cognitive forms against the social-political and ontological background of suffering (as well as other dimensions of human life). Just as hunger generates art, art in turn generates a hunger for aesthetics.

Art as enactment means that hunger is given affective and cognitive artistic form that enacts the moral-political demand that the hunger be apprehended and recognized publicly (objectively) so it is not merely an internal (subjective) affect or idea. In turn, the artistic form demands, but also helps to engender, a moral-political commitment to satisfy the hunger once (or as) we apprehend and recognize it, thereby avoiding the criticism, in principle, that art is merely the aestheticization of hunger (i.e., aesthetic pleasure created at the expense of those in hunger). At the same time, by enacting the moral-political demands for apprehension, recognition, and satisfaction, art implicates audiences for they (not artists alone) bear the responsibility for meeting them. To be sure, acceptance of this responsibility is not guaranteed because even a person’s having compassion for somebody else’s suffering does not necessarily imply any obligation to alleviate that suffering. For example, most people apprehend that more than 40 million individuals in the United States lack health-care insurance and that these same individuals are suffering, and many also recognize that some of this suffering is causally due to a lack of access to adequate health-care. Despite such apprehension and recognition, however, many of these people still believe that they do not have any moral-political obligation to take action to alleviate the suffering of the uninsured by providing them with health-care insurance. Nonetheless, we can still attempt to narrow, if not close, the gap between apprehension and eventual satisfaction of human hunger if the moral-political demands originally placed on art after hunger affects us are transformed into moral-political demands made by art.

A main goal of aesthetics today (as the two-mode model of art critique outlined earlier) is to explain how the transformation of demands on art to demands by art is already a reality in some con-

temporary art. In this light, aesthetics is the critical analysis of artistic form in relation to the underlying hunger that generates an enactment that, in turn, demands apprehension, recognition, and satisfaction of that hunger. Although we can understand art as enactment only by understanding the hunger that art enacts, we understand hunger only through its enactment in art. So we have a circle running between hunger and art. Aesthetics operates mainly in this circle, which is broken only when these demands are satisfied because the satisfaction can take place only outside the art world—that is, in society. Just as there is transitivity from our hunger to art and, in turn, to aesthetics, we regenerate aesthetics with the hope that this transitivity is possible in reverse as well.

On this generally Deweyan view of aesthetics, it is hard to imagine why it would ever be necessary for anybody to flee from aesthetics to make and understand contemporary art or why anybody would be attracted to the anti-aesthetic stance. As we have seen, however, the flight from aesthetics has already occurred. Even though the return flight may be in progress, we cannot take its success for granted. One way to ensure its success is to ask: How can we counter the ubiquitous anti-aesthetic claim that contemporary art is incapable of having or sustaining any moral-political power in society? The answer is that contemporary art defies this claim and, so, hungers for aesthetics. Aesthetics will be regenerated if it enables us to apprehend, recognize, and satisfy this hunger.