

# The Subjects of Art History

Historical Objects in  
Contemporary Perspectives

*Edited by*

**Mark A. Cheetham   Michael Ann Holly   Keith Moxey**



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# Immanuel Kant and the Bo(a)rders of Art History

Mark A. Cheetham

ONE of the working titles for this volume – “The Contours of Art History” – incorporated the notion that a discipline or institution can be conceived spatially, that it has a *shape* defined by insides and outsides, borders and limits. If we believe that the field art historians create, inhabit with their various activities, and call their own does indeed have a shape that separates it – however provisionally and without any claim to internal unity or homogeneity, and necessarily depending upon the anamorphic angle from which it is conceived (Preziosi 1989) – from other disciplines and concerns, how are we to characterize these disciplinary limits, and in what ways might such descriptions be important historically, theoretically, and in the practice of art history today? Michel Foucault has argued that disciplines have developed historically as expressions and conduits of power/knowledge; it follows that the particular “shape” of a discipline at a given time will both reflect and fashion its policies of inclusion and exclusion regarding its legitimized objects of study, its methodologies, and its practitioners. As Timothy Lenoir argues, “disciplines are *political institutions* that demarcate areas of academic territory, allocate privileges and responsibilities of expertise, and structure claims on resources” (1993: 82). My first aim is to have us think about art history as a spatial entity in order to refine and answer questions about the field. Perceiving its shape (or shapes), how it came to be contoured this way, and how it changes can help us to understand where we are in a disciplinary sense and how this placement might affect our beliefs, claims, and behavior.

Rather than discuss a particular methodology, I will offer an apology – a defense in the Platonic sense – for the historiography of the discipline itself by focusing on Immanuel Kant’s remarkable yet underestimated role in shaping art history and indeed art practice. I will concentrate on his reception as opposed to that of other more obviously influential thinkers such as Hegel.<sup>1</sup> Kant and Hegel have arguably had the greatest influence of any philosophers on the discipline of art history and on artists, and their effects are perhaps equal in scope and significance. As Stephan Nachtsheim claims, “The development of the relationship between art history and the philosophy of art stands from the beginning

as evidence of the two authoritative, classic authors of German aesthetics, as Kant's and Hegel's mark" (1984: 10).<sup>2</sup> I do not want to assign one a greater importance than the other, but we nonetheless need to ask why so much more has been written about Hegel's roles in these areas than about Kant's.<sup>3</sup> Kant's influence, though pervasive, is less overt than Hegel's, and it frequently stems from his writings in areas other than art and aesthetics. Kant is, in addition, a quintessentially spatial, architectonic thinker<sup>4</sup> whose specific doctrines and terminology, as well as larger patterns of thought and assumptions about philosophy, have thoroughly infected art history and the practicing visual arts in part because of the persuasive, even seductive, form in which they are presented, a form that I believe is crucial in shaping disciplinary behavior. The use of "Kant" in art history can be thought of as paradigmatic of – if certainly not unique in – the relationship between this relatively new, nineteenth-century, field and philosophy, with its ancient traditions. If this claim can answer the question "Why study Kant in relation to art history?," it does so in ways that are not completely in concert with the recent resurgence of interest in his aesthetics. To generalize, negative readings see him as a paradigmatic Enlightenment figure, whose obsession with reason leads to abuses, to a Eurocentric absolutism in aesthetic judgment, for example, and to misogyny (Battersby, Eagleton, Mattick). More affirmative interest in Kant today often focuses on his theory of the sublime, to which I will return below. While my own contribution in no way denies the troubling implications of Kant's ideas, it does seek to recover some of the ways in which he has been influential historically in the visual arts and art history – an influence that can be seen as largely positive. His presence has been constant and can remain useful if we understand its history more fully.

## Kant and the History of Art

What we witness in the employment of the name Kant in art history and cognate fields is a practice that might best – if awkwardly – be deemed "Kantism."<sup>5</sup> The name becomes a synecdoche for his doctrines (or those attributed to him), which in turn, through their reception in the visual arts and its surrounding discourses, come to stand for philosophy, the discipline of which he is a part and whose supremacy he asserts.<sup>6</sup> "Kantism" exercises Kant's thinking in at least a minimal way. For Christopher Norris, Kant's philosophy "raises certain questions – of agency, autonomy, ethical conduct, reflective self-knowledge – which were also some of Kant's most important concerns throughout the three *Critiques*" (1993: 71). Frequently, as we will see, "Kantism" invokes "the broadly Kantian notion that consciousness constitutes its world" (Summers 1989: 373). Another formulation of Kant's basic contribution comes from Thomas McEvelley: "The foundation of the Kantian doctrine is the notion of a [disinterested] sense of taste through which we respond to art . . . this quality is



noncognitive, nonconceptual; it is a *sensus communis*, innate and identical in everyone; it is a higher faculty, above worldly concerns; it is governed by its own inner necessity” (1988: 125).

Kant remains an outsider, despite important work on several areas in which he has been instrumental to art history and to artists. Some examples of his reception are so obvious that they tend to slip from our consciousness. As Albert Boime has noted, many of the earliest responses to Kant were to the first *Critique*, to its apparent claims that we do not have access to the noumenal and that our knowledge of the world rests on our own faculties (1990: 329). Kant’s first *Critique* is also the source for the famous analytic/synthetic distinction used early in discussions of Cubism to distinguish both working methods and chronological developments (Green). In both cases, Kant’s terminology entered non-philosophical discourse, with artists, critics, and historians referring to the “thing-in-itself” or to “analytic” procedures in Cubist composition. The use of his terminology is neither innocent nor superficial. Thus for Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the art dealer and critic, Cubism’s

new language has given painting an unprecedented freedom . . . colored planes, through their direction and relative position, can bring together the formal scheme without uniting in closed forms . . . Instead of an analytical description, the painter can . . . also create in this way a synthesis of the object, or in the words of Kant, “put together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in our perception.” (1949: 12)

Kahnweiler read Kant and neo-Kantian texts by Wilhelm Wundt, Heinrich Rickert, and others in Bern during World War I (Bois 1990, Gehlen 1966). For him, the analytic/synthetic distinction, the notions of the thing-in-itself and disinterestedness, and the formal autonomy of the work of art provided nothing less than a way of conceptualizing Cubism.

Perhaps the two best-known uses of Kant’s name were by Clement Greenberg in his apologies for the European avant-garde and for post-World War II abstract painting (Crowther 1985, Curtin 1982, Stadler 1982, Summers 1994) and by the central founders of academic art history – Wölfflin and Panofsky especially – who used Kant to demarcate and ground the new discipline. These relations within art history have been expertly examined by Hart, Holly (1984), Podro (1982), Preziosi, and others, but it is worth emphasizing here that the *need* for grounding is itself a philosophical imperative and that the view that philosophy is the only secure place *for* grounding is a Kantian legacy, one that has done much to shape and place the discipline. This grounding can be metaphysical and epistemological, as in Panofsky’s famous and distinctly Kantian search for a stable Archimedean point *outside* the flux of empirical reality from which to judge individual works of art. Kant has also been used more recently to buttress what we might call an ethics of art-historical behavior: In the final paragraph of his essay on Hegel, Ernst Gombrich surprisingly invokes Kant’s “stern and frightening doctrine that nobody and nothing can relieve us of

the burden of moral responsibility for our judgement” as an antidote to the “theophany” that Hegel purportedly saw in history (1984: 69).<sup>7</sup> L. D. Ettlinger similarly looked to Kant as the defender of individual, humanist priorities in art history. In a lecture delivered in 1961 titled “Art History Today,” he mentions Kant only in his final remarks, relying on him as the ultimate defender of a renewed humanism, the focus on “those central problems which concern man and his works” (1961: 21).<sup>8</sup>

Largely forgotten today are examples of specific Kantian ideas that have been employed, with varying consequences, by artists. This partial amnesia is, I think, highly selective along the contours established between disciplines and says much about the typically hierarchical relationship between art history and artists as well as about the relationship of philosophy to both these areas. Yet recently artists as different but important as Joseph Kosuth and Barnett Newman in the United States and Anselm Kiefer in Germany have used Kant in various ways. While I certainly do not want to argue for a “pure” Kant or a pure reception of his work in any of these cases – philosophical ideas tend to blend when put into practice, as in Greenberg’s teleological and no doubt Hegelian invocation of what he saw as a Kantian insistence on auto-criticism and “formalism” (McEvelley 1991: 160) – I maintain that attention to specific artists’ uses of Kant demonstrates both the complexity and potency of his reception and its role in shaping disciplines. I will return to Kiefer, but let me first detail a fascinating use of Kant among artists and critics of his own time. My hope is to add concreteness to the excellent studies of Kant mentioned above and to adumbrate a new conceptual mapping of his importance to disciplinarity.

In 1796, the later eminent Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844) was commissioned to bring with him on his way from Northern Europe to Rome Kant’s recently published essay “Perpetual Peace” (*Zum ewigen Frieden* [1795]). His interest in Kant was made concrete by this text and gave him an entry into a vibrant German-speaking art community that based its sense of personal, artistic, and political autonomy largely on Kant’s *political* views (Schoch 1992), precisely and not coincidentally at the time when Napoleon declared Rome a republic and artistic freedom seemed to be guaranteed, however briefly, by political change. The leader of this artist colony in Rome ca. 1800, Asmus Jakob Carstens (1754–98), was sufficiently earnest about Kantian ideas to produce a drawing titled *Raum und Zeit* (1794). His rather literal yet allegorical rendition of the fundamental categories of space and time from the first *Critique* was the topic of correspondence between Goethe and Schiller in which the two dramatists criticized the artist’s flat-footed response to Kant. But Carstens employed the philosopher’s political thinking to greater effect. As Busch confirms, he adopted Kant’s distinction between public and private duty to justify his bold refusal to return from Rome to his position at the Prussian Academy in Berlin. “I belong to humanity, not to the Academy of Berlin,” he wrote in 1796, and “I am ready . . . to assert it in public, to justify myself to the world, as I feel justified in my own conscience” (Carstens 1970: 109). “By the public use of one’s reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it *as a man of learning* addressing the entire

*reading public*,” Kant stated in “What Is Enlightenment?” (Beantwortung der Frage: was ist Aufklärung?). Like Kant, Carstens asserts the “public” primacy of his conscience over the strictures of what Kant labeled any “private” “civil post or office” (Kant 1991: 55).

Another member of the circle Thorvaldsen sought to join, the Tyrolean landscape painter Joseph Anton Koch (1768–1839), evolved a particularist style of depicting nature’s phenomena which, in its emphases on amassing detail and on inclusive visibility, is very close to Kant’s innovative notion of the “mathematical” sublime in the third *Critique* (Cheetham 1987). But the most profound and sustained interaction between Kant’s philosophy and the Carstens circle was realized by the critic and historian Carl Ludwig Fernow, for whom Thorvaldsen’s copy of Kant’s new book was destined. Fernow knew Schiller (the main disseminator of Kantian ideas at this time) and had studied in Jena with the Kantian Karl Leonhard Reinhold from 1791 to 1793 before arriving in Rome in 1794. Fernow demonstrated that Kant’s philosophy was important to more than specialists and that in its reception, his thinking bore directly on the contemporary visual arts: In the winter of 1795–6, in Rome, he gave a series of lectures on Kant’s aesthetics to an audience of thirty-six artists, intellectuals, and art lovers, two of whom were Koch and Carstens. Fernow claimed that Kant “made palpable the full dignity and significance of art” (Schoch 1992: 21), and that his philosophy was helpful to the judgments of an active critic and historian (Einem 1935: 82). Though more concrete than Kant, Fernow largely agreed with the philosopher on the need to ground our knowledge of beauty and reality itself in the subject. His letters also reveal his interest in other aspects of Kant’s ideas. He notes favorably the formation of the contemporary Roman Republic while praising Kant’s “Perpetual Peace” (1944: 231); indeed, Fernow and his compatriots styled their “Künstlerrepublik” on Kant’s ideals and thus skillfully and effectively combined the political and aesthetic sides of his doctrine of autonomy, both his belief in personal freedom (under rules) and the necessary independence of artistic judgment from morality on the one hand and nature on the other. Through Fernow, Kant’s ideas on politics, ethics, and aesthetics went a long way in structuring the self-image and artistic goals of these important artists.

Students of the humanities know Kant as an important figure in the European Enlightenment and as central to this day in philosophical aesthetics, a field he consolidated with the publication of the *Critique of Judgment* in 1790. In his own time as today, his thoughts on aesthetics were held to be difficult, technical, and best adapted to a strictly philosophical setting. Yet as we have seen, Kant’s contemporaries and those in later times were not deterred from absorbing his theories directly or in some mediated form. In 1796, for example, Friedrich Grillo published “Ueber Kunst nach Herrn Kant,” written specifically “für denkende Künstler, die die Kritik der Urteilskraft nicht lesen” (p. 721)!<sup>9</sup> Many recent commentators, on the other hand, minimize the importance of Kant’s work with art in the third *Critique*. Cohen and Guyer, two of his most distinguished interpreters, refer to “mere digressions on some specific

issues raised by judgments about works of art” (1982: 4).<sup>10</sup> It is in some respects true that Kant’s writings have little to do explicitly with the historical or current arts, as he makes clear in the preface to the third *Critique*, where he apologizes – not without irony – for his book’s “deficiency” in empirical matters (1987: 7). Kant was seeking the transcendental conditions of the faculty of judgment, so, as D. N. Rodowick puts it, “the object of [his] *Critique* is not art per se” (1994: 100). For Kant, the transcendentially grounded possibility of judgment is secure *because* it precedes all manifestations of art, both metaphysically and temporally. But is it also true, as Rodowick asserts, and as we are frequently told, that “art or the making of art has no place in Kant’s philosophy” (p. 100)? Given the interest in Kant on the part of the artists and critics discussed here, it is more accurate and productive to see this issue of disciplinary place as crucial to Kant himself and in his reception, both early and recent. He habitually strove in the *Critique of Judgment* to legislate the “domain” of philosophy within the power of judgment precisely by excluding art and its history (and of course much else). Art isn’t properly “in” the corpus or purview of philosophy. Yet art visits the third *Critique* in the form of examples that are the occasions for Kant’s reflections on aesthetic judgments of the beautiful and the sublime. Art defines an edge, a limit for philosophy in one direction (the empirical), expressly by being outside, different, separate. As the examples from the Carstens circle have shown, Kant’s political, ethical, and metaphysical writings were at least as influential for artists and the development of art history as were his ideas on aesthetics. Kant established borders by being expert in so many different areas. His penchant for disciplinary and methodological delineation was itself what most influenced one of his most famous contemporaries. Goethe found Kant’s ability to *shape* and bring together seemingly disparate materials in the third *Critique* its most powerful aspect. “Here I saw my most diverse thoughts brought together,” the poet wrote, “artistic and natural production handled in the same way; the powers of aesthetic and teleological judgment mutually illuminating each other” (cited in Cassirer 1981: 273).

## Kant’s Place

Cassirer was himself an important neo-Kantian whose writings were effectual in the discipline of art history through his influence on Erwin Panofsky. Cassirer wrote that Kant “regarded philosophical reason itself as nothing else than an original and radical faculty for the determination of limits” (1951: 276), stating abstractly Goethe’s insight about Kant’s genius for structure. Even before his critical turn in the 1770s, Kant called metaphysics “a science of the limits of human reason” (Goetschel 1994: 77); the first *Critique* is fundamentally about limiting our knowledge and metaphysical speculations to realms in which we can be secure. Thus Kant also wanted to keep each discipline pure, to assign it a proper jurisdiction and keep it within these bounds. Referring to the relations between theology and philosophy, for example, he claimed that “as soon as we

allow two different callings to combine and run together, we can form no clear notion of the characteristic that distinguishes each by itself" (1979: 37).

Discussions of disciplinarity in general are increasingly present in art history, as they are across the humanities.<sup>11</sup> Though the determinants of the profile of any field arise from many sources, in art history a recurrent interest has been its relation to other disciplinary structures. Perhaps because of its relative newness as a discipline, it could not avoid shaping itself in response to extant disciplinary structures. Recently, art history has been portrayed as remiss in its belated acceptance of new methodologies pioneered in adjacent domains. Significant change in art history, this argument asserts in typically spatial terms that I have thematized here, is usually initiated from "outside" the discipline. As Norman Bryson – who, along with another self-styled "outsider" from literary studies, Mieke Bal,<sup>12</sup> has changed art history profoundly – wrote in 1988: "There can be little doubt: the discipline of Art History, having for so long lagged behind, having been among the humanities perhaps the slowest to develop and the last to hear of changes as these took place among even its closest neighbours, is now unmistakably beginning to alter." He goes on to describe the innovations brought to the field by a number of art historians, each of whom, "to varying degrees, . . . brings art history into relation with another field of inquiry" (1988: xiii). Serge Guilbaut is more blunt:

At a time when literary criticism went through an exciting autoanalysis, producing serious theoretical discussion about its goals and tools of analysis (from New Criticism and Barthes in the 1950s to the new texts by Edward Said, Terry Eagleton and Frank Lentricchia) liberating, shaking a field of study always on the verge of academicism, Art History was superbly purring along in the moistness of salons and museums. [It] did not produce a similar array of critical texts, of serious debates about the purpose of the profession, or of its tools of analysis. (1985: 44)

Art history has its own theoretical traditions, and there are what might be called disciplinary reasons for its sometimes reluctant associations with other areas of inquiry (Holly 1984). Increasingly, too, discussions of the discipline revolve around what is done in its name, rather than around what might be imported into an impoverished area (Bal 1996a, Bois 1996). Nonetheless, since the early 1980s, art history's connections with literary studies have often been claimed to be its most vital. Literary methodologies from semiotics to psychoanalysis are seen to have reinvigorated art history. But disciplinary interactions change, and they are launched from particular ideological angles. There are many contenders for the role of model discipline, the mantle of preexisting mentor for nascent art history: Anthony Vidler claims that "Art History is and always has been a discourse based on that of history" (1994: 408), and Joan Hart has noted that "philology was the most valued and privileged discipline in Germany" when art history was forming as an academic field (1993: 559). If we look at the

early mapping of art history's place among its disciplinary neighbors found in Hans Tietze's *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte: Ein Versuch* (1913), we find confirmation of art history's propinquity to both history and philology but also an emphasis on associations with "Naturwissenschaft," "Aesthetik," and "Kunst." As Goethe recognized, Kant's philosophy deftly mediated all three areas.

Kant's use of art and his ideas' various effects on art and art history can lead us to reconceive the spatiality of disciplinary relationships among art, art history, and philosophy. Instead of imagining a geometrical grid of lines, boundaries, and borders, or the stable architecture of a well-constructed edifice, we can better envision a multidimensional and radically pliable space that could conceptualize the "places" of art history, those locales where it is defined and practiced.<sup>13</sup> Kant clearly did imagine the relations among fields in the former very structured way, but this led him to posit clear and rigid distinctions between fields. More important, his vision could not do justice to the complex dynamism of spatial relationships at work in the definition of disciplines and their interests, whether in his own work or in his reception. Thinking instead of the specificity of place – as opposed to the abstractness of space/time – incorporates limits and boundaries, but is also as a model more dynamic and precise. What Edward S. Casey calls "emplacement" can apply to a disciplinary locale in the terms specified by Plato's contemporary Archytas, whom he quotes: "Place, by virtue of its unencompassability by anything other than itself, is at once the limit and the condition of all that exists" (Casey 1993: 15). Because Kant had to write "about" art – in the thematic and spatial senses explored by Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* – to establish the irrefragable borders of his own discipline, philosophy, in (superior) relation to its neighbors, he was in fact a *boarder* in, not just a neighbor to, discourses about art. He behaved as a temporary lodger who himself moved and who was subsequently injected by others, rather like an antidote (or infection), into and around the developing contours of these areas, and who shaped these areas because of his personal fame and the recognized leadership of the field he personified, philosophy.<sup>14</sup> What we might ironically call his "patronage" of the visual arts and art history can be understood as an example of the spatial procedures of the *parergon* – the mutual definition and reciprocal dependency of the work (*ergon*) and what lies outside it (*parergon*) – again delineated in *The Truth in Painting* and exemplified in recent research on disciplinarity. Using Derrida's term, we could say that for Kant art and art history are merely "ornamental" to philosophy.<sup>15</sup> The same is true of the inverse relation: Philosophy is ornamental for art and art history too, or, in a closely allied Derridean term, it is a "supplement." But just as a vitamin "supplement" is advertised as and perhaps can be essential despite the literal connotations of the term, so too philosophy as conceived by Kant proves to be central – both theoretically and historically – to the definition of both art history and art. The third *Critique* cannot function without art. What is more, philosophy has been and continues to be an essential bo(a)rder in and for art history in ways that mirror and in convoluted ways stem from the relations between art and philosophy in Kant's work. Michael Ann Holly's arguments

about how thinkers replicate the patterns of thought of their forebears is telling here (Holly 1996).

In general, “statements require the positioning of adjacent fields for their meaning” (Lenoir 1993: 74). Critic Thomas McEvilley – who makes reference to Kant frequently and to great effect – thinks (or hopes?) that we have witnessed “the overthrow of the Kantian theory” (1991: 171) in art history and philosophy, especially their emphasis on disinterestedness and the claims of auto-criticism. I claim that, on the contrary, “Kantian theory” as a structuring set of paradigms continues to define the disciplinary senses of inside and outside that maintain mutually constitutive distinctions between philosophy and art history. Except in the most literal sense of everyday awareness, then, neither is the “immense philosophical tradition of speculation” on art to which art history is “heir” – a tradition exemplified, even personified, by Kant – “remote from modern disciplinary practice and institutional organization” (Preziosi 1992: 374). While the “silent majority” of contemporary art historians in the West may not discuss or acknowledge the immediate relevance to their work of the philosophical tradition, or “theory” more generally (Elkins), it is also true that Kant especially is a central concern for theorists who work on the margins of philosophy, art history, and the visual arts: Crowther, Derrida, Lyotard, Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, and many others. Kant’s theories of the sublime – the limit discourse par excellence – are the prime interest of these contemporary writers (see Librett 1993). These authors see Kant’s struggle with the sublime as central to his aesthetics and indeed his entire critical project, not least because the sublime is by definition *beyond* reason, past the reach of Kant’s passion for control and disciplinary order. In this sense it is a “limit” discourse, that which stands just beyond us but which thereby defines who and what we are. Significantly, the sublime and its Kantian associations is also an active concern for many practicing visual artists (Cheetham 1995, Crowther 1995), sometimes as they variously envision the incomprehensible spectre of AIDS – Ross Bleckner and General Idea – or, more traditionally, as they image the overwhelming forces of nature (Paterson Ewen).

## Kant’s Forehead

I have claimed that Kant’s name has been used repeatedly in and around the visual arts from the 1790s until the present. It is impossible to isolate a “pure” philosophical strain, Kantian or otherwise, but his name and the names of other philosophers are cited and their ideas or patterns of thought employed. Yet “Kant” more than anyone is invoked to ground art-historical and artistic practices in the territory that he actively made the necessary reference point: philosophy. His name – and even his image, in an example I want to turn to now – continues to live in and form these places. The German artist Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945) produced three versions of the *Wege der Weltweisheit* (Ways of worldly wisdom) between 1976 and 1980. These evocative works contain miniature (and



**Figure 1.** Anselm Kiefer (German, b. 1945), *Paths of the Wisdom of the World: Herman's Battle, 1980*. Woodcut, additions in acrylic and shellac. 11'4 1/2" × 17'2" (344.8 × 528.3 cm). Art Institute of Chicago; restricted gift of Mr. and Mrs. Noel Rothman, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Cohen, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dittmer, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Goldenberg, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Manilow, and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Shapiro; Wirt D. Walker Fund, 1986. Photo courtesy of the artist and the Art Institute of Chicago. [Kant appears on the bottom row, fourth from the right.]

sometimes labeled) portraits of important figures from German history. Kiefer's preoccupation is with the roles these figures play in the formation of a contemporary sense of German identity. Significantly, all are involved – both pictorially and thematically – in “die Hermanns-Schlacht,” Arminius's Battle, a reference to a “German” victory over the Roman invader Varus in the Teutoburger Wald (Schama 1995: 128). In this work, Kiefer boldly conflates this early defining moment and myth with characters from the more recent past. Some are poets, some are Nazis, and one is Immanuel Kant, whose oddly hunched form appears in two of the three pieces from this series (Fig. 1). Kant is not the only philosopher brought by Kiefer to this meeting in the forest, the forest of and as history and the symbol, as Schama argues brilliantly, of Germanness, a fact that Kiefer reinforces with the woodcut technique used in this example. Kant is no more important to Kiefer than the other figures gathered here.<sup>16</sup> Given the contexts of his reception that I've examined thus far, however, what are we to make of his surprising simultaneous migration from philosophy into art and ancient history, as well as into the eternal present of reception? We have already seen how Kant's “Perpetual Peace” was carried across national and generic



borders by Thorvaldsen, how it operated as a shibboleth in a developing artistic community as well as being a political proclamation. Nationalism and national self-identity link the eighteenth-century example and the places established for Kant by Kiefer, a point reinforced by Kiefer's inclusion of another philosopher's portrait, that of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), one of Kant's inheritors, who clearly identified philosophy as a uniquely German trait and whose outspoken views on German nationalism were twisted to gruesome effect by the Nazis.

Kant was not portrayed often during his lifetime, but the one image for which he is said to have sat (in 1791, the year after he published his *Critique of Judgment*) is redeployed here by Kiefer. The original is by Döbler. It shows a three-quarter-length view of a rather intense Kant. His face is distinguished by large eyes, a prominent straight nose, and especially its high, receding forehead. The forehead and eyes come across strongly in Kiefer's cropped version of this famous picture. I want to speculate that Döbler's portrait conveyed in the late eighteenth century as it does today the rational intelligence and integrity of *the* German philosopher. Kant's forehead is, like his name but now literally in art, a synecdoche for philosophy as the "master" discipline that crosses borders into other contexts, as it necessarily does in a generic sense by becoming a picture. The contours of the head were the focus of the highly influential eighteenth-century preoccupation with "physiognomy," that "science" pioneered by Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801). Lavater's book of the same name was first published in Germany in 1775; by 1810, there were fifty-five editions, with no fewer than twenty available in England (Stafford 1991: 91; Stemmler 1993). On the frontispiece of one of these English editions is Lavater's pithy definition of his obsession: "Physiognomy is reading the handwriting of nature upon the human countenance" (Lavater 1869), reading it in the visual, in the visage. Lavater identifies the "peculiar delineation of the outline and position of the forehead . . . [as] the most important of all the things presented to physiognomical observation" (1869: 47). In specific remarks about this feature, he claims that "the longer the forehead, the more comprehension and less activity. . . . Above it must retreat, project beneath" (pp. 48, 50). In Döbler's portrait and in Kiefer's faithful if expressionistic reproduction of it – as well as in many of the other late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century portraits of Kant – the forehead is remarkably large and decidedly retreating. Was Kant's forehead shaped this way in these images because he was a philosopher, or, to follow the implications of Lavater's system, was he a philosopher because of the intellectual acuity manifested by his forehead? Kant and Lavater were correspondents on theological matters, and Lavater cites Kant in the *Physiognomy*. It would be hard to imagine that contemporary German painters didn't know of Lavater's theories, though that is not to say that any applied them in creating portraits in the same way that we can in seeing them today. While there is no evidence that Lavater himself depicted Kant in one of his famous "shades" or silhouettes, I suggest that Döbler's image of the brainy Kant incorporates the late eighteenth-century ideal of philosophy as powerful rational intellection.

Kant's skull was remarked on by his early nineteenth-century biographers and was the object of a detailed phrenological analysis in 1880. The remarkable monograph titled *Der Schaedel Immanuel Kants* (The skull of Immanuel Kant), by C. Kupffer and F. Bessel Hagen, was made possible by the exhumation of Kant's body in that year. Among pages of measurements and statistics, we learn for example that Kant's skull outscored the median statistics for a hundred "Preussische Maenner" by several millimeters (p. 30). Phrenology was closely related to Lavater's physiognomy and was born at about the same time. More than Lavater, though, its many proponents sought to predict and thus control human behavior through phrenological study. Kant was clearly the paradigmatic philosophical type. Lest we are tempted to ignore the possible contemporary impact of this sort of "science," we should remember the current controversy over the ownership and alleged dissection of Albert Einstein's brain.

If Kant appears in Kiefer's *Wege der Weltweisheit* as the personification of philosophy, then he is working again in art and amidst the "battle" of forces represented by figures as diverse in the formation of German identity as the poet Hölderlin and Wiprecht von Groitzsh, an "eleventh-century German prince who colonized Eastern Europe and was later celebrated by the Nazis" (Rosenthal 1987: 157). Kant's stature as a thinker does indeed play a role in German nationalism. Two examples from the time of Prussia's military and political adventures ca. 1866–70 are significant in the context developed here, because they tie Kant's Germanness, even philosophy's Germanness, to Jakob Asmus Carstens. Carstens' reputation was recuperated at this time of German national pride. Thus Friedrich Eggers wrote in his 1867 book on Carstens: "The Kantian philosophy, the intelligence of the great poets, the ideas of liberal culture, that is what the German people have now accomplished more than anyone else" (p. 22).<sup>17</sup> In *Carstens Werke* of 1869, Herman Riegel expressed a similar pride in German artistic and philosophical accomplishments: "It was stipulated by inner necessity that with the rise of German poetry, as in music and philosophy, so too the visual arts prepared themselves for a rebirth."<sup>18</sup> Eggers shows that Kant's name was associated with this rebirth. No longer, it seems, was philosophy to be represented allegorically as in Ripa's *Iconologia*, which in Hertel's famous illustrated German edition of 1758–60 was subtitled *Die Welt Weisheit*, and which found wide currency in Germany. As a German, "Kant" could represent the national identification with this field much better than the person Hertel actually used in his edition of Ripa, Pythagoras. Given the Germans' penchant for Greek culture, perhaps we can even see Kant as the new Pythagoras. In Kiefer's image of *Weltweisheit*, Kant's forehead does the same referential work in the context of nationalism and identity. The *line* of the forehead betokens rationalism, a force of good in historical and current nationalistic self-definition.

Kant's preoccupation with drawing conceptual lines is found throughout his copious writings. In his 1764 *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, he tries to keep morality and aesthetics apart in ways that will become crucial to his position in the third *Critique*. More generally, the architecture of the three *Critiques* was designed to maintain autonomy and thus proper

relations among scientific inquiry, ethics, and aesthetics respectively. But of course the *Critique of Judgment* was also Kant's self-consciously constructed bridge between what we can know of the world and how we ought to behave in it. As he makes clear in his late *Conflict of the Faculties*, independence and proper relationships guarantee fruitful interactions among equals; they assure the sorts of comparisons that Goethe found wonderful in the third *Critique*. This habit and method of delineation is maintained on the most minute level in Kant's texts. In §17 of the third *Critique*, for example, "On the Ideal of Beauty," Kant presents a difficult discussion of how the mind arrives at the notion of the "average" or "common standard" (Kant 1987: 234).<sup>19</sup> He begins with an example of how we judge the average size of a man by looking at a thousand examples but moves immediately to a (not immediately helpful) "analogy from optics: in the space where most of the images are united, and within the *outline* where the area is illuminated by the color applied most heavily, there the *average size* emerges . . . and that is the stature for a beautiful man" (p. 234; first emphasis mine). In trying to explain how it is that we compare sizes by perceiving their overlapping extremities, Kant typically underscores outline (*Umriß*) rather than color. More than simply a neoclassical preference for linear simplicity, Kant's insistence on the supreme value of line is epistemological. In contour he can accurately *measure* the average or standard, the perfect line between too much and too little. Applying the result of this seeming digression in a comment that is reminiscent of Winckelmann's interest in bodies' outlines, he then adds that it is in each case "this shape which underlines the standard idea of a beautiful man" (p. 234). To this statement he adds a qualification that takes us back to Lavater's interest in national and racial physiognomy (on which he cites Kant from another text): the "standard" operates "in the country where this comparison is made. That is why, given these empirical conditions, a Negro's standard idea of the beauty of the [human] figure necessarily differs from that of a white man, that of a Chinese from a European." "Rules for judging," he concludes, become possible not because of experience, but vice versa (p. 234): in effect, we discover the standard, the perfect contour that divides inside from outside, in ourselves, never in empirical experience. This is part of the reason for Kant's belief in a universally applicable faculty of judgment, a notion that has been widely accepted in art history and often applied in ways that suggest the hegemony of a Western perspective on art (Moxey 1994: 37, 67). It can be said that for Kant, judgment works with form, and "form came to be regarded as the universal common denominator of human things. . . . It was largely under such auspices that the history of art came into existence and currency as an intellectual discipline" (Summers 1989: 375). The precision allowed by measurement, by perceiving the contour here or the line of a forehead in physiognomy, is, perhaps, also related in a causal way to what Donald Preziosi has identified as art history's habit of "siting" works of art and their authors, what he specifies as the obsessive "assignment of an 'address' to the work within a nexus of synchronic and diachronic relationships" (1993b: 220).

In another “exotic” reference, Kant follows the same procedure in his discussion of the estimation of the overwhelming size of the pyramids as an example of the mathematically sublime (§56, p. 252). Again it is the line (literally in the sand), placed by the observer who is in the right place, neither too close to nor too far from the monuments, that allows the feeling of the sublime to occur. The sublime is in us; it is not a response to external art or nature. It is typical of Kant to invent a species of sublimity that relies upon – instead of dismissing, as in Burke’s model – the specificity and legibility of line and position within a “field.” The sublime marks the outer limit of what we can know. In a disciplinary sense too, Kant is the master of emplacement. By placing art, philosophy, and the history of art in relation to one another, he established a pattern of disciplinary contouring that remains potent today. As we see in Kiefer’s image and the other migrations I have examined, however, “Kant” could not draw the outlines he envisions by staying strictly within the bounds of his own field. Neither could he control the repercussions of his work. Nonetheless, being a boarder – voluntary or otherwise – and creating borders are neither random nor exclusive activities. Kant was a notorious stay-at-home, a voracious reader of travel literature who rarely left his home town. Perhaps he was solely concerned with the structure or “form” of national boundaries as well as those between disciplines, not with their empirical realities. Recently, creation and patrolling of borders typified by Kant has come under broad suspicion in Postmodernism, as Kiefer’s image shows us. “The boundaries that traditional reason draws between the integral, non-contradictory thing and its others are now seen as a process of excluding contents that were included in a more complete, if also more chaotic, whole before reason began its divisive work” (McGowan 1991: 19). As the epitome of reason’s claims to autonomy through the establishment of domains, Kant is also now under suspicion in art history especially, as it tries to understand and revise its inclusions, exclusions, and relations with other fields. But Kant is not to be forgotten. While it is the structuring, emplacing quality of his thought that has allowed his name to travel so far in art history, he turns out not to be the absolute protector of disciplinary borders that he might appear to be. As Kant’s multifarious writings and reception show, border zones are necessarily fluid and even vague, and there must be outsiders and outsiders (such as Kant) to define the separated territories. Even for those who oppose his ideas, then, Kant is a necessary and worthy interlocutor.

## Notes

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- 1 On Hegel and art history, see Keith Moxey’s article in this volume, as well as Cheetham 1991, Gombrich 1984, Hart 1982, Melville 1990, and Podro 1977.

- 2 “Die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen Kunstgeschichte und Kunstphilosophie . . . standen von Anfang an im Zeichen der beider massgebenden Klassiker der deutscher Aesthetik, im Zeichen Kants und Hegels.”
- 3 There are major exceptions to this pattern of overlooking Kant’s influence in the discipline: See for example Karen Lang 1997, Thomas McEvelley 1991, Michael Podro 1982, and David Summers 1989, 1993, 1994. Stephen Melville (1990) has made the suggestive comment (regarding Panofsky’s choice, as it were, of Kant over Hegel) that “the explicit problematic of historicity recedes” (p. 10) when Kant is used as an inspiration in art-historical writing.

My belief is that these excellent studies prove the rule that Kant’s ideas are usually seen as remote from the discipline of art history and from artistic practice. Julius von Schlosser’s groundbreaking 1924 *Die Kunstliteratur* ignores Kant, as does his pupil Ernst Gombrich in a 1952 piece published in 1992 and Evert van der Grinten (1952). Heinrich Dilly (1979) says much about Hegel’s influence but little about Kant’s. As we have seen, Stephen Melville (1990) also claims Hegel’s as the greater influence, as do Elkins (1988) and Gombrich (1984), even though the latter tellingly focuses on Kant as a corrective at the end of his article. To find Kant’s influence acknowledged, we need to look to overtly “philosophical” work by Panofsky, of course, and to now largely forgotten writers such as Krystal (1910) and Passarge (1930). The extent to which the employment of Kant (and by implication Hegel) in art history can be seen as paradigmatic of a general relationship between philosophy and art history is one of the issues I address in my book *Moments of Discipline: Immanuel Kant in the Visual Arts*, now in progress.
- 4 In *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Haunt*, Mark Wigley has examined brilliantly the spatial relationships among philosophy, art, and architecture that proceed from Kant’s “architectonic.” On this theme, see also Sallis 1987. My own claim is that some of Kant’s specific arguments and insistence on a disciplinary logic of inside/outside helped to shape the discipline of art history as well as individual artistic practice.
- 5 I coin this term to suggest an ongoing impact from Kant’s ideas that can be seen as more eclectic than the nineteenth-century philosophical movement known as neo-Kantianism.
- 6 Kant’s name is “dropped” in art history both in that it is often mentioned as an authority and in the contradictory sense that it is omitted from most official histories of the field (see following note). On the use of names in contemporary theory, see Jay 1990.
- 7 Gombrich’s use of Kant in an article on Hegel shows a philosophical disposition well known to his readers, as Mitchell has shown (1986: 152). Rhetorically, however, it is odd to have Kant’s name “dropped” in the essay’s finale.
- 8 On Kant and humanism, see Moxey 1995: 397.
- 9 I thank Dr. Anne-Marie Link for bringing this article to my attention.
- 10 For a lucid discussion of “analytic” vs. “Continental” readings of the third *Critique*, see McCormick 1990.
- 11 On art history as a discipline, see *Art Bulletin* 77, 4 (December 1995); Bal 1996a, b; Bryson, Holly, and Moxey 1991, 1994; Cheetham 1992; Holly 1996; Mitchell 1995; Moxey 1994; Preziosi 1989, 1992, 1993a, b. Regarding the humanities generally, see Chamberlin and Hutcheon 1992; Greenblatt and Gunn 1992; Kreiswirth and Cheetham 1990; Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylan 1993.
- 12 See Bal’s thought-provoking reflections on the difference between a “paradigm” and a “discipline” – and her own relations with both – in Bal 1996a, b.
- 13 On space and place, see Casey 1993. Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of aesthetic judgment, *Distinction*, is also relevant in this context.
- 14 Christie McDonald writes that “Kant codified a certain consensus emerging from eighteenth-century thinkers which put philosophy at the center of the disciplines” (1992: 38). See also Derrida 1992 on Kant’s own assertion of reason – and philosophy as the domain which alone can deploy it fully – as superior within the university. In his essay “Tympan,” Derrida argued that philosophy “has always insisted upon assuring itself

- mastery over the limit" (1982: x). I would modify Derrida's "always" and insist on the primacy of this activity during the Enlightenment and especially in Kant's work, which in its aim to master art through aesthetics was the direct heir of Baumgarten. Art history is not alone in its relationship with the "master discipline" philosophy. John S. Nelson writes: "Philosophy, history, law, literature, economics, anthropology, sociology, and psychology . . . each thinks that its rules or procedures of inquiry come fundamentally from philosophy" (1993: 165).
- 15 Wigley holds that art/architecture is foundational for philosophy, not ornamental, but also – in a reading of Derrida that I agree with – that architecture "derives its force precisely from its ornamental role" (1993: 64, 93).
- 16 For a list of the people included in the three works, see Rosenthal (1987: 157).
- 17 "Die kantische Philosophie, das Verständniß der grossen Dichter, die Gedanken der Humanität, das war es, das deutsche Volk jetze mehr alles Andere mit Interesse erfüllte."
- 18 "Von innere Notwendigkeit bedingt war es, dass mit dem Aufschwung deutscher Dichtung, wie der Musik und Philosophie, auch die bildenden Künste sich ebenfalls zu einer Widergeburt anschickten" (p. 1).
- 19 References are to the pagination of the German edition; Pluhar's translation.

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