Strengths and Weaknesses in Greenberg’s Aesthetics

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Art criticism…develops and grows…with the development…of the philosophy of art.¹

René Wellek once perceptively observed that the superior critic knows what he is assuming. Using the terminology developed by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,² it could furthermore be said that the superior critic is fully paradigmatic. Kuhn’s well known research suggests that proper science, and by implication any other professional practice, is marked by its working with a well defined paradigm. In Kuhn, “paradigm” is essentially a three-dimensional concept, marked by i) clear, consistent and appropriate perceptual categories through which to view the world, ii) a well defined set of puzzles to solve or questions deemed worth asking, and iii) established, agreed upon procedures to answer them. Underlying any paradigm is a set of assumptions—the assumptions that Wellek demands the critic be aware of. While there may be no evidence that Greenberg was aware of Kuhn, he was nonetheless the paradigmatic critic *par excellence*, and he took great pains to ensure that his critical practice was founded on selected principles drawn from his reading in leading philosophers of art, most especially Immanuel Kant, Benedetto Croce, and R.G. Collingwood.

Greenberg made no claim to be professionally involved with philosophy and in fact described his aesthetics as “home-made,” but he was forthright about both his sources and the assumptions he made on the nature of art and of critical judgment. He stands head-and-shoulders above less paradigmatic critics, some of whom he rather intemperately criticized in “How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name.”³ It has not been sufficiently noted that Greenberg’s paradigm changed over time and that the Greenberg most often discussed and so widely criticized is a later and much more narrow Greenberg that of the 1940s. This paper outlines the paradigm practiced by the later Greenberg, suggests four major weaknesses in his aesthetics, and argues that they are responsible for some of the lacunae in his criticism.

Greenberg’s governing perceptual categories

It is commonly observed, both by historians and Greenberg himself, that Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790), or at least “Analytic of the Beautiful,” is a major source for Greenberg. Here Greenberg goes straight to the heart of the matter, for Harold Osborne, like so many others, thinks of the *Critique of Judgment* as “still the most important single work in modern aesthetics.”⁴ Kant rejected views that had been fairly common up to his time or just before, in particular, that art has a specifiable end or purpose—for instance that the importance of art lies in mimesis (truth to nature), or in its being capable of instructing and elevating. That is, in Kant’s predecessors art was often defined in terms of instrumental values. Kant brushed such views aside and placed art in its own category separate from function. In Kant’s view, the aesthetic is one of three separate domains of human experience equal in dignity, if not importance, to the theoretical (or cognitive) on the one hand and the practical (including moral) on the other. Greenberg’s focus on art as art, his insistence on its autonomy, and his disdain for functional claims for art all trace back to Kant’s aesthetics, which he first examined
“really closely, in ‘41 or ‘42”<sup>5</sup> and which over time took an increasingly central position in Greenberg’s aesthetics.

But Greenberg’s perceptions of art and the art world were also governed in part by a later adumbration of Kant’s philosophy, outlined by British philosopher R. G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art* (1938), an annotated copy of which Greenberg retained in his library in his later years. Collingwood provided a taxonomy of art and pseudo-art experiences, separating art proper from six other experiences: amusement, “magic,” puzzle, instruction, propaganda, and exhortation. His criterion for differentiating them was the ends-means distinction, arguing, “These various kinds of pseudo-art are in reality kinds of use to which art may be put,”<sup>6</sup> so that the six pseudo-arts were all examples of extra-artistic “craft” in which the ends/means distinction does apply: the end is fully specifiable, and the means to achieve it can be reached by reason. The function of amusement, for instance, was defined as the deliberate arousal of feelings the audience is familiar with and likes to have. Simple “thrillers” would be an example, and the “cruelest and most brutal” kind of amusement is pornography.

These distinctions lie behind Greenberg’s celebrated article, “Modernist Painting” (1961), where he postulates that a pressing danger made advanced artists in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century want to purify their art of any extra-artistic aspects. That danger was “leveling-down” - the demands of the art establishment and the mass art audience for titillation, reassurance and escape; that is, the arts “looked as though they were going to be assimilated to entertainment pure and simple,”<sup>8</sup> and Greenberg, like Collingwood, had the utmost disdain for entertainment or, as Collingwood puts it, the “pseudo-art” of amusement.

Cabanel’s titillating *Birth of Venus* (1863), the most popular picture of the Salon of 1863, purchased by Napoleon III, would be a case in point, as would E.J.H. Vernet’s *Joseph’s Coat* (1853), where its glowing colours and resplendent finery offered distraction from the grey surroundings of northern Europe in the throes of industrial revolution.

Collingwood also influenced Greenberg in his assumption that art “explains to us what we already feel, but it does not do so discursively or rationally.”<sup>9</sup> This is an idea central to Collingwood’s philosophy of art and quoted in both Rubenfeld’s biography<sup>10</sup> and Donald Kuspit’s 1979 book on Greenberg but otherwise seldom noted in commentary on Greenberg’s aesthetics. To be fair to Greenberg’s critics, it should be noted that This Collingwoodian assumption is not often so explicit in Greenberg. To Collingwood, art is a kind of eureka! experience:

> Until a man has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions... the end is not something foreseen and preconceived, to which appropriate means can be thought out...<sup>11</sup>

For Greenberg, the experience of art is invariably linked to the experience of quality. Perhaps this conviction owes not so much to any aesthetechnician as to the painter, Hans Hofmann, who wrote, “art may be taught only upon the basis of a highly developed sensitivity for quality.”<sup>12</sup> For Greenberg an essential feature of artistic quality was established by Kant in the Second Moment of “Analytic of the Beautiful” (“On the Judgment of Taste as to Quantity,” sections 6-9). There Kant argues that the disinterested pleasure of the Beautiful is a universal one—“universal” is the key concept of the Second Moment—“grounded in [what one] can also presuppose in everyone else.”<sup>13</sup> Taste that is not barbaric is a kind of sensus communis (section 20 of “Analytic of the Beautiful” and also section 40 of “Analytic of the Sublime”), i.e., a universal faculty. While each
individual may have his or her own sensuous taste—liking or disliking particular colours, for instance (section 7)—Kant postulates that aesthetic judgments of reflective taste “could... be considered valid for everyone” (section 8). As Kant observes, we demand this agreement. If others judge art differently, we deny that they have “taste,” assuming that “common validity” to judgments of our reflective taste. He concludes that while the experience of beauty is completely “free” (“favour is the only free satisfaction”—section 5), it is nonetheless a “necessary” one that “could demand universal assent” (section 22). Greenberg takes all this for granted, citing Kant’s comment that the viewer acts “in accord with humanity.”14 Thus if Olitski is good for Greenberg with his educated and practiced eye, he should be good for everyone. His most emphatic argument along these lines was in “Can Taste Be Objective,” where he claimed to have superseded Kant in the understanding of this issue. Greenberg acknowledges that “Kant believed in the objectivity of taste as a principle or potential,” but to him this is a “failure” on Kant’s part.15 Greenberg concluded that “the consensus of taste makes itself a fact, and makes the objectivity of taste a fact—an enduring fact.”16

Then there is Greenberg’s penchant for examining visual relations. That would have been confirmed for him by the Third Moment, where Kant observes that with artistic painting and music, “The charm of colors or the agreeable tones of instruments can be added, but drawing in the former and composition in the latter constitute the proper object of the pure judgment of taste” (section 14). This is a distinction that has become standard, whatever the writer’s vocabulary, e.g., John Hospers’ distinguishing between the elements of aesthetic surface, e.g., “colors or sounds taken singly,” and aesthetic form.17

Greenberg’s inclination to focus on form would be reinforced by the Third Moment (“of judgments of taste, concerning the relation of the ends that are taken into consideration in them”, sections 10-17), which argues that works of art seem to be designed, but they are designed for no purpose (“without an end”) except our apprehension, our perceiving and experiencing them; they are “purposive” rather than purposeful (section 10). “Purposive” is the key concept of the Third Moment. Thus “the judgment of taste has nothing but the form of the purposiveness of an object (or the way of representing it) as its ground” (section 11).

Greenberg’s focus on form would be even more supported by Croce. In his Aesthetic, knowledge has two forms, a logical one from the intellect and an intuitive or imaginative one, including perception. That is, intuition is knowledge free from concepts. Expression, emotional valence, is an inseparable part of intuition. Therefore any distinction between form and “content” is false. Unlike Kant, Croce ties feeling in from the outset of his analysis. In art “feeling is a feeling that is formed, and form is a form that is felt.”18 Again, Greenberg has an imprimatur to focus on form, to the neglect of any analysis of feeling, even though he had written an article entitled “‘Feeling Is All’.”19 So, as much as he objected to the term “formalist,”20 Greenberg’s eye was consistently on form.

The questions Greenberg deems worth asking

Donald Kuspit has argued that Greenberg “totalizes” judgment,21 and certainly questions of relative quality in art are central to his criticism. For Greenberg, the nature of this question was established by Kant. In the First Moment of “Analytic of the Beautiful” (“Of the Judgment of Taste as to Quality” – sections 1-5) Kant tells us that aesthetic judgment is neither “cognitive” nor
“logical” (section one) and which applies when we ask – properly – whether something is beautiful. Putting the question properly means we want to know “how we judge it in mere contemplation” (section 2), i.e., for its “aesthetic” beauty of form, which provides pleasure of its own specific kind. This assumption recurs in Croce when he demands that we ask when something gives us pleasure “whether that pleasure is an aesthetic pleasure.”

Kuspit notwithstanding, Greenberg does ask other, important questions consistent with his aesthetics: how tensions are established and resolved in works of art (he has a supreme talent for that), how artists place themselves within tradition and relate to their influences, and so on.

The later Greenberg’s paradigm should be defined also in terms of his rejected questions, and those are often influenced by Kant also. The First Moment specifies that the pleasure art gives is a “disinterested” pleasure—disinterestedness is the key concept of the First Moment—that does not depend on any appetitive interest, for instance an appetitive interest in the subject of the artist. “Taste is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction without any interest. “The object of such a satisfaction is called beautiful” (end of section 5). Greenberg has no interest in iconography, and his relative lack of interest in the subject would seem confirmed by the First Moment.

Most notably, the later Greenberg was determined not to discuss “content” directly. He believed content is so locked up in form that it remains “indefinable, unparaphraseable, undiscussable.” Indeed, “The unspecifiability of its ‘content’ is what constitutes art as art.” If by “content” Greenberg meant the affective charge of the work of art, perhaps he could take comfort in this self-denying ordinance from Kant’s observation that “Taste is always still barbaric when it needs the additions of charms and emotions for satisfaction, let alone if it makes these into the standard for its approval.” (Third Moment, section 13).

In the Fourth Moment (sections 18-22) Kant advances the argument about the universal nature of art. He says that the beautiful “is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce” (section 18). Greenberg would not have known Guyer’s translation published after the death of the critic and was probably more familiar with that by Walter Cerf: “...exemplifying a universal rule one cannot state.” Section 18 can be read as consistent with Greenberg’s belief that art must be deeply felt, but the critic should not attempt to say what is felt: “one cannot state.”

The later Greenberg also rejected any efforts to understand the genesis of art, its root in the persona of the artist, and his or her sources of creativity: “there’s nothing to be said about inspiration—it’s a mystery.”

On the basis of his aesthetics, and of personal inclination also, Greenberg deliberately limited the range of his critical enquiry. As we shall see, that was not always the case.

The procedures Greenberg uses to answer those questions

“Complaints of an Art Critic” (1967) is Greenberg’s most forthright explanation of how he practices aesthetic judgment. To him, “Esthetic judgments are immediate, intuitive, undeliberate, involuntary,” rather than rational. They happen to the critic through his “ungovernable taste,” are ‘received, not taken,” and he owes his readers good faith in reporting them. Thus there are no rules for judging art, and there are no fully specifiable criteria to apply, for they are “hidden from consciousness, unobservable,” although there may be some general desiderata with at best an open-textured definition, i.e.,
recurrent grounds for supporting aesthetic judgments already achieved, such as “hard-won unity.” The operative basis for judgment is the felt response of the critic—his primary datum—and the reference point is the agreed upon masterpieces of the past.

Greenberg’s method again owes to Kant, to his understanding that artistic judgments are based on feeling and cannot be proven. Kant tied his notion of the beautiful to what he calls feelings of pleasure (as opposed to displeasure): I favour (like) it; I don’t favour (like) it. These feelings have nothing to do with cognition, with what we know. We don’t reason them out. Kant asserts, “There can be no objective rule of taste that would determine what is beautiful though concepts” and to seek a “universal criterion .... is a fruitless undertaking” (section 17). The Third Moment, then, supports Greenberg’s principle of No Criteria (“esthetic judgments can’t be proven... or really even argued.” Croce does the same: “every work has its own particular law.” Greenberg’s practice in the studio, where he would often produce artistic judgments after the first glance at a work, was calculated to render judgment “immediate,” bring intuition to the fore and preclude any role for reason in reaching his judgments.

**The strengths of Greenberg’s aesthetics**

Clearly Greenberg profited enormously from his unusually thorough immersion in the thought of Kant, Croce and Collingwood. It saved him from a number of possible critical errors, e.g., Wimsatt and Beardsley’s well known Affective Fallacy and Intentional Fallacy. It provided him with considerable rigour in separating non-aesthetic pleasures from aesthetic ones. Having a better command of aesthetics than his contemporaries, he was emboldened to be a firm upholder of quality—a kind of Superego of the art world—although he was widely condemned for being too exceptional in his criticisms. Leo Steinberg, in particular, complained, “I dislike their interdictory stance ... prohibitive function.” This is ironic, given Greenberg’s insistence that “Good taste is catholic taste. Good taste likes anything that’s good and dislikes anything that’s bad.”

One of the greatest positive consequences of his aesthetic position was that Greenberg gained enormous focus on visual syntax and was encouraged to become the brilliantly perceptive eye that he was, although his brief study with Hofmann must be given credit too. Greenberg appreciates the dialectical nature of the medium to a degree that most other critics can barely approach. We see the results in his close criticism, such as the dense and brilliant “Pasted-paper Revolution”/”Collage” article and in Greenberg’s highly effective workshop criticism in the studios of numerous major artists.

In the end, his philosophical sources confirmed in Greenberg an urge to respect the limits of criticism as a discipline by not aiming for more precision than it can properly offer. The question is, did Greenberg draw those limits correctly?

**The dimensions of art criticism as such**

Before considering the weakness of Greenberg’s aesthetic position, it would be helpful to lay the groundwork for considering how complete a critical practice his aesthetics allowed. Just what would a complete critical practice include?

Art criticism is no mere single activity. It is useful to view criticism as a set of activities, although the early critics collectively—and perhaps the majority of twentieth-century critics individually—may have engaged in only some of them. While there seems to be no widespread agreement on the activities that might be said to comprise “criticism,” for the sake of discussion I will argue that there are at least six functions, or kinds of functions, that critics have at various times seen as essential to their activity.
Greenberg’s Aesthetics

i. As Croce observed, art criticism has often been “conceived... as a harsh and tyrannical pedagogue, who gives capricious orders, imposes prohibitions, permits liberties.” That is, critics who view their function as primarily pedagogical may dictate to the artists that they do this and not that.

ii. Croce observed that criticism has also often been taken as inherently judgmental, and indeed its etymology points to this function. In the Greek, Krites is a judge, one who can give an authoritative opinion.

iii. The genetic phase of art criticism “is a study of the factors that have shaped a work of art.” These factors can be either individual—personality and the personal history of the artist—or environmental—the social milieu, cultural climate, etc. This function could focus on the creative process itself.

iv. The “immanent phase of art criticism is a study of the major features within the work of art itself:... materials, form, expression, and function,” but especially form. This third function is inherently descriptive and encompasses a wide range of practice, from Modernism to early versions of Semiotics.

v. Immanent criticism has often been extended beyond description into the realm of interpretation. The interpretative critic aims to find an encoded meaning within the work, which might be conscious or unconscious, intended or otherwise. That meaning can be deemed by the critic as any of: an archetypal image, a fundamental myth, a recurrent narrative structure, a recurrent theme, a pattern of antimonies, and so on. This function, then, encompasses the main activities of Jungian, semiotic and structuralist criticism, and of many Marxists.

vi. Artistic judgments depend ultimately on some set of fundamental beliefs and values, and Croce has argued that “art criticism, when it is truly aesthetic or historical,... develops into criticism of life” and adds, “This is seen in truly great critics.” Critics themselves have often thought this the case. Both Arnold and Ruskin aimed their criticism at the very salvation of England. As Arnold saw it, “Modern poetry can only subsist by its contents: by becoming a complete magister vitae.” C.S. Lewis detected such a philosophical difference in his dispute with Leavis over Paradise Lost: “It is not that I see different things when we look at Paradise Lost. He sees and hates the very same that I see and love.... We differ not about the nature of Milton’s poetry, but about the nature of man, or even the nature of joy itself.” A few of the most ambitious critics do take into account this sixth function of criticism, which I refer to as the “meta-critical” dimension.

Weaknesses in Greenberg’s aesthetics

This paper argues that there are four problematic aspects to Greenberg’s aesthetic position. Greenberg’s philosophy of art, as clear and powerful as it may seem, has a number of contradictions and lacunae.

I. While it is not obvious that Greenberg was aware of any internal inconsistencies in his practice, there are at least two conflicting approaches to the aesthetic attitude in his oeuvre. One is exemplified by his book on Miro (1948). In this first approach aesthetic
distance is a dynamic process of transformation of mental states, as seen in Miro’s works from 1935-39, which Greenberg declared “his greatest height so far.” Examples would include Head of a Man (1935) and Still Life with Old Shoe (1937). Greenberg argues that here “Miro sports with his fears... and sportiveness implies the decorative.” At that time, during and just before the Spanish Civil War, Miro’s was a decorativeness of felt necessity, in contrast with that of the later Miro, who is gratuitously decorative and, Greenberg implies, lacks inner necessity. In 1948, then, Greenberg took content as a specifiable process, not as unspecifiable, and had an implicit theory of creativity. Art is an act of mental distancing, a kind of transcending, but not mere denial, and it emerges in response to at least somewhat identifiable life experiences. Likewise he saw the old masters, Delacroix, and the cubists too, as “dissolving... emotion into the abstract elements of style.” This aspect of Greenberg’s earlier criticism, i.e., his dynamic concept of aesthetic distance, has seldom been noticed; the exception is Donald Kuspit who observed that in Greenberg’s criticism of the 1940s “When strong temperament and intense emotion have to be mastered - in effect renounced... the aesthetic transposition of such temperament and emotion” results in great art. By the time of the “Counter-Avant-garde” article (1971) Greenberg stated this premise directly: “art is an act of mental distancing,” but by then the creative process is lost to his analysis and the concept of distance is diminished, undefined, generalized, in part because the critic has shifted his attention from the particular situation of the artist to that of the viewer: “You become relieved of, distanced from, your cares and concerns as a particular individual coping with you particular existence” and relish instead “exalted cognitiveness”—with “nothing specific to know;” thus “The pleasure of esthetic experience is the pleasure of consciousness: the pleasure that it takes in itself.” To the later Greenberg, this is Kant’s “exalted informedness.”

Thus the second tendency, pronounced in most of later Greenberg, disdained psychological considerations and prioritized Kant as he understood him and so incorporated some of the limitations of that great philosopher’s aesthetics. I would argue that Kant did not specify fully enough either the nature or the limits of disinterestedness. Within this second tendency in Greenberg’s criticism, mental distance can still be an issue, but basically as a static state of mind marked by detachment. Thus the emphasis falls on the reception of art to the exclusion of how and why art is created by actual artists.

II. Greenberg was embarrassed by his book on Miro and never took up its personal-genetic analysis again. Despite his interest in Croce, who did have a concern for the genesis of art, Greenberg consistently neglected the sources for artistic creativity. Hilton Kramer rightly observed that in Greenberg “Artists appear ... as anonymous inventors and manipulators of form machines;” and “There is in ... [his] writing a fear of the personal element in art, an embarrassment in the face of anything but the formal and the historical.” Unlike his immediate predecessor within modernist art criticism, Roger Fry, Greenberg has relatively little interest in the persona of the artist and the sources of his creative impulses, so that his criticism, both in the studio and on the page, with its heavy emphasis on the finished work, could be charged with what I call the parthenogenetic fallacy. The genetic function of art criticism is the null set in Greenberg after 1948. He did acknowledge that “There is no good art without inspiration” but insisted that “there is nothing to be said about” it because it is “a mystery,” despite the example of one of his favourite critics, Roger Fry, who believed otherwise.

The reason for this failing may lie in Greenberg’s excessive focus on Kant, his less thorough involvement with Croce, and his lack of knowledge of psychological and psychoanalytic theories of art. Perhaps Greenberg was disinclined to be further involved
with Croce because that philosopher did not allow for degrees of artistic merit. Croce maintained that “The beautiful does not possess degrees” although ugliness does. Greenberg flatly rejected that idea: “it is the very nature of art to contain infinite degrees of value.”

III. There is a necessary place for content/feeling in art and Kant did not adequately explain what it is—he had no psychology to put it into perspective. A careless reading of Kant therefore runs the risk of empty formalism. Greenberg’s was an incomplete version of both Kant’s and Croce’s aesthetics, neglecting in particular the speculation of Kant in the Fourth Moment of “Analytic of the Beautiful” that art “exemplifies a universal rule one cannot state,” i.e., what I take to be Kant’s brief flirtation with the General-Content Hypothesis later developed by such neo-Freudians as Hanna Segal, where the General Content Hypothesis holds that there is some constant in artistic expression, whatever the artist, whatever the medium, whatever the time or place. When Croce argued that art is liberating since feelings are contemplated and therefore “resolved and transcended,” he offered a more serviceable opportunity for Greenberg to build on his insight into Miro’s creative process. Croce said of the artist’s feelings, “By objectifying them, he removes them from him and makes himself their superior” and “the feeling is altogether converted into images.” But Greenberg, or at least the later Greenberg, did not incorporate that portion of Croce into his aesthetics, and the opportunity was lost. Bullough’s seminal article on Psychical Distance was likewise not imported into Greenberg’s aesthetics, although Greenberg did refer to it very late in his career, however parenthetically. And despite his intense interest in psychoanalysis, neither was Hanna Segal’s key work.

Segal would have been a particularly valuable addition to Greenberg’s sources in aesthetics, for she defines art in terms of unconscious processes that are central to the maturation of every human being. Segal applied the psycho-analytic theories of Melanie Klein to argue that both the production and reception of art are an adult recapitulation of that important process in the maturation of the child—unfortunately labeled “mourning”—whereby the child comes to terms with his separateness from his mother and his ambivalent feelings towards her. Segal’s model suggests a number of grounds to support judgments of art, in particular, grounds for separating less successful art from good art. All of those criteria are in the realm of feeling and based on considerations of the maturity of the artistic personality and the struggle of the human mind to come to terms with the inevitable disappointments and frustrations of a lived life. Her model could have been the basis for a meta-critical aspect of Greenberg’s criticism, as they were for Adrian Stokes, one of the most brilliant of all twentieth-century art critics. But Greenberg did not aim for meta-criticism. In fact I doubt he had a concept of it.

I have argued that Kant’s aside that the aesthetic “exemplifies a universal rule one cannot state” (section 18) could have been another useful stimulus to a potential meta-criticism, but unfortunately the implications are unclear. Section 21 makes the issue a harmony of the cognitive powers and rejects psychological foundations. It is not obvious what Kant’s harmony of the cognitive powers entails for the aesthetic or what in 1790 he would mean by psychology. By temperament Greenberg would not be attracted to further speculation of this kind. In the hands of Roger Fry, speculation into the General-Content Hypothesis led him to postulate his concept of “the esthetic state of mind,” which he thought was characterized by vitality, but with passivity at its root. That was an insight with suggestions of a meta-critical dimension to his criticism: an appreciation of one of the basic conflicts of the human mind, such as he brought to bear in his masterful book on Cézanne.
IV. After he fell away from Marxism, Greenberg’s aesthetics was not rooted in any general philosophy that might have been the basis for a wider critical stance. Despite Trotskyite leanings in his youth, the later Greenberg (Greenberg II) basically took the existing social and political order for granted, and was a staunch supporter of the war in Viet Nam. And while he recommended psychoanalysis to numerous artists, he was strangely immune to depth psychology’s contribution to our understanding of the basic human condition, at least in his criticism. In the end, the value of art for him is nothing more than “heightened cognitiveness-without-cognition”\(^62\)

**Conclusions**

There is no gainsaying that Greenberg was one of the greatest critics and that his greatness was considerably enhanced by his involvement with aesthetics. And yet he could have done more, made his criticism more complete. Perhaps Kuspit was correct to argue that Modernist criticism commits what Whitehead calls the fallacy of misplaced concreteness,\(^63\) that it never sees painting as a “solution to the problem of how to be in the world.” One could read some of Greenberg’s most illuminating articles, and, as insightful as they are, not get the sense that, as Croce put it, “the artist must have a share in... the whole drama of human life.”\(^64\) David Smith said it very well: “There’s no such thing as *truly* abstract. Man always has to work from his life.”\(^65\) He was not alone in that insight. Barnett Newman’s letter to the *NY Times*, co-signed by Gottlieb and Rothko, observed, “There is no such thing as good painting about nothing.” Greenberg of the 1940s and early 1950s—what I would designate as Greenberg I—strove to incorporate an account of the role of feeling in both the production and the reception of art. But, as Florence Rubenfeld has observed,\(^66\) by the time *Art and Culture* was published in 1961, much of that effort was edited out by the critic and not ever taken up again. If only Greenberg, like Roger Fry, had been more sensitive to the human dimension of art and art criticism! But perhaps it would be unwise to demand that a critic like Greenberg, who gave us so very much, should have given even more.

**Notes**


2 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago and London, 1962). While in the physical sciences there are few paradigms at any one time, and competing paradigms cannot co-exist for long, in art criticism there continues to be a wide number of competing paradigms.


7 Collingwood, *op. cit.*, p. 84.


13 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, etc.; Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 97. All quotations from Kant are taken from this source unless otherwise noted.

14 *Homemade Esthetics*, *op. cit.*, p. 111. In response to a question from the audience, Greenberg interpreted Kant as follows: “What he meant was, we are pretty much alike along general lines. And it is the general lines that come in play when we're developing our taste.”


16 Ibid., p. 23. (Emphasis added.)


21 Donald Kuspit in “Art Criticism,” *Partisan Review*, 48:1 (1981), p. 43. The quotation continues as follows; “Greenberg importunately totalizes evaluation in the hope of detotalizing interpretation…”


24 *Ibid.* In later writings, Greenberg referred to content as “ineffable” and credited Suzanne Langer with the idea. (*Homemade Esthetics, op. cit.*, p. 142.)


26 *Homemade Esthetics, op. cit.*, p. 190.)


28 *Homemade Esthetics, op. cit.*, p. 69.

29 Contemporary critical theorists and practicing critics typically argue that an artistic judgment “is probably prior temporally, and is prior logically, to the particular observations the critic uses to support it.” (Colin Radford and Sally Minogue, *The Nature of Criticism*, Sussex: The Harvester Press and New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1981, p. 46). Philosophers such as Frank Cioffi and Arnold Isenberg maintain that in critical arguments we begin with our conclusions.


31 *Guide to Aesthetics, op. cit.*, p. 43.


35 “The Pasted-Paper Revolution” appeared in *ARTnews*, 57:5 (Sept., 1958), pp.46-49, - 61. A substantially revised version of it was published as “Collage” in *Art and Culture* and dated 1959. Greenberg had never been happy with the title provided by the editors of *ARTnews*.


43 Joan Miro, op. cit., p. 42,


48 Ibid., p. 9.

49 Ibid., p. 113.

50 In conversation, Syracuse, ca. 1984.


52 Homemade Esthetics, op. cit., p. 190.


54 Homemade Esthetics, op. cit., p. 158.


56 Croce, Aesthetic, op. cit., p. 21.


58 Homemade Esthetics, op. cit., p. 65. The reference is in a footnote, where he suggests that Bullough's text is "the classic essay on esthetic distance,"

60 Roger Fry, “Some Questions in Aesthetics” in *Transformations* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926), pp.1-43. Fry is not consistent as to exactly what he is discussing, the state of attention required by works of art of the audience or the emotional impact they produce.


66 Rubenfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-3. Greenberg remarked in the Preface to *Art and Culture* that “Not only has much been altered, but much more has been left out than put in” (p. vii).