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But Is It Interesting?

What is the logical form of critical judgements of contemporary art?¹ The question appears dry to the point of being unworldly. After all, wasn't the attempt to legitimate art judgements as distinctive logical types abandoned long ago, in the wake of critiques of the false universality of the European aesthetic tradition? Doesn't the generic character of contemporary art practice undermine the possibility of such judgements? More generally, given the collapse in authority of twentieth-century Western art criticism over the last forty years, what claim to cultural or social legitimacy can still be made for it? Even so-called autonomous art, it's been argued, has been integrated into the culture industries, often via its own distributive circuits, destroying its critical potential as a distinctive kind of cultural experience.

At a certain level of description: yes, all these things have taken place. And yet the opening question persists; and not just as part of the continuation of that past world itself, in the market for 'contemporary' versions of traditional art practices, wrapped up in the consoling discourses of traditional aesthetics—luxury goods with added spiritual value. The question persists by virtue of the problems posed by the consequences of its disappearance. These are problems concerning the very existence of art, but also of criticism, as cultural-political practices that oppose themselves to the current state of things and orient towards other futures; they concern the legitimation of public funding for art institutions and practices, and bear upon the reflective

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented in different forms on a variety of occasions, most recently to the conference 'Conceptual Labour and the Immersion of the Object: Philosophy in Aesthetics—Aesthetics in Philosophy', Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 5 April 2024, for which I am grateful to Sebastian Lederle for the invitation.

experience of everyday life—about who ‘we’ are, who we relate to and the ways in which we live our relations to others.

One way of addressing the question is to reflect on some elements of the art-critical discourses of the 1960s, written when minimalist, conceptual and performance artists in Europe and North America broke with then-dominant practices of medium-based modernism; and to track these back to their—often unconscious—intellectual sources, and forwards to their current significance and uses under different social conditions. For this was the break that came to be seen as inaugurating contemporary art in the form in which we think of it today: as an institutionally validated set of practices, extending beyond the bounds not only of established mediums but of medium-based concepts of ‘the arts’—painting, sculpture, poetry, music—as such. Two threads are of particular significance. First, and most familiar: reflections on the concept of ‘art’ as a generic singular, as opposed to historically received concepts of ‘the arts’, plural, derived from Renaissance systems. Second, and less generally recognized: the use of the concept of ‘the interesting’ to displace the traditional categories of aesthetics—‘the beautiful’ and its Romanticizing sister-concept, ‘the sublime’, in particular. It is ‘the interesting’ as a primary critical category that I will explore here.

From Judd to Schlegel

Art judgements of ‘the interesting’, I shall argue, may be seen as the constitutive ground of modern art judgements as such, within which those of contemporary art comprise a distinctive type. Such judgements are formally ‘subjective’ (in Kant’s broad sense), yet they nonetheless require a discursive elaboration grounded in the social and geopolitical relations of the historical present; that is, in the relations of both subject-formation and object-formation. In

this respect, they are ultimately judgements of truth-content—artistic truth-contents as carriers of historical truth. It is thus via ‘the interesting’, I shall argue, that politics enters art judgement.

When the American artist Donald Judd wrote in 1965, ‘A work need only be interesting’, he was speaking for a generation of practitioners who rejected the formal parameters of modernism that had come to dominate critical discourse in the US in the 1950s, in favour of apparently new and uncharted critical waters, where an interest in subjectivity was combined with social concerns. Yet in opposing ‘the interesting’ to medium-based criticism, Judd was also, unknowingly, reviving a concept of art developed by Friedrich Schlegel, in his 1797 study of modern poetics. In the preface to *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Schlegel wrote that ‘In the entire realm of the science of aesthetics the deduction of the interesting is perhaps the most difficult and complicated task.’² If the Romantic conception of ‘originality’ was a clear extension of Kant’s concept of ‘genius’, Schlegel’s concept of ‘the interesting’ was equally clearly a rejection of Kantian ‘disinterest’ as underpinning aesthetic judgements. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790), Kant argued that

Kant’s pure aesthetic judgements are *indifferent*: not only to the difference between art and not-art, but to the subject of judgement’s practical relations to the world.³

Pure aesthetic judgements are ‘indifferent’ to the distinction between art and not-art because they take no interest in the historical, economic or social relations governing the object being judged; they are indifferent to the conditions that determine whether an object is or is not art.

² Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, [translator? Place published and year, and page numbers].

³ ‘The satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence [*Existenz*] of an object is called interest’: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790), trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge 2000, p. 90. On conceptually conditioned or adherent (*anhängende/adhaerens*) beauty, see *ibid.*, pp. 114–6.

Art judgements, on the other hand, are necessarily ‘adherent’, in Kant’s terms, or conditioned by art concepts of various kinds.⁴ In the Western tradition, these are concepts of painting, sculpture, poetry, music, architecture and the rest of the institutionalized arts; in non-Western traditions, they are conditioned by a variety of different cultural practices of making and doing; in contemporary art, by the institutionalized concept of ‘art’ itself. It is the Kantian notion of pure aesthetic judgement—not confined to art, nor dependent on its concepts—that has, for over 230 years now, made using the word ‘aesthetics’ as the name for philosophical treatments of art so profoundly confusing. Kant himself recognized the problem, as later did Hegel, but each failed to resist the then newly established German usage of ‘aesthetics’.⁵ Art discourse is still living with the consequences of that confusion. Even those whose thought protests the identification, such as Schlegel himself, acquiesced to the new usage—see his choice of the term ‘the science of aesthetics’ (*der ästhetischen Wissenschaften*) in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*—albeit in tension with the metaphysics of his concept of art.⁶

Schlegel considered what he called ‘the applied poetics’ of the interesting—‘poetry’ being a metonym for ‘art’ in this discourse—to be part of a ‘historical philosophy of art’ (which Wilhelm von Humboldt had just declared to be that most ‘interesting’ of all things: the philosophy of history).⁷ In *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Sianne Ngai

⁴ On conceptually conditioned or adherent (*anhängende/adhaerens*) beauty, see Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, pp. 114–6.

⁵ Compare Kant’s famous footnote [quote?] in *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer, Cambridge 1997, A21/B35 n, p. 156, with his usage in the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgement Power’, Part 1 of *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. See also Hegel’s *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford 1975, p. 1.

⁶ Kant famously insisted that ‘There is no science [*Wissenschaft*] of the beautiful, only critique’: *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, # 44 and 60, pp. 184, 228. In insisting upon a ‘science of aesthetics’ Schlegel was self-consciously violating the Kantian transcendental problematic in favour of a historical philosophy or science of art.

⁷ There is ‘no object as interesting as the philosophy of history’: Wilhelm von Humboldt, letter to Karl Gustav Brinkmann, 19 December 1793, cited in Marie Louise Krogh, *Temporalities and Territories: The Geopolitical Imaginaries of German Philosophies of History*, PhD dissertation, Centre for Research in Modern Europe Philosophy, Kingston University 2020, p. 151.

treats ‘the interesting’ in recent usage as a distinctively ‘postmodern aesthetic category’.⁸ Though also offering a genealogical account, I would oppose both those codings, ‘postmodern’ and ‘aesthetic’. Instead, I propose a dialectical construction of ‘the interesting’ that draws on the term’s emblematic appearance in Judd’s 1965 essay ‘Specific Objects’ and in Schlegel’s 1797 preface to *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, viewed from the standpoint of the post-conceptual condition of contemporary art.

Instead of filling in the gaps between Judd and Schlegel, my aim will be to construct a dialectical image of the concept of the interesting today, as produced by the relations between the two critical-historical situations of 1797 and 1965. Walter Benjamin wrote that the historical structure of the dialectical image derives from a ‘non-temporal’ figural relationship between a specific ‘now’ and a specific ‘then’ that produces a particular ‘recognizability’ (*Erkennbarkeit*) in the constellated image—‘image’ because the main moments in the development of the concept are placed into the same hypostasized conceptual space.⁹ The dialectical image I will try to trace is internally more complicated than Benjamin’s binary ‘now-then’ construal, since it requires the inscription of more than one ‘then’ into its configuration—the relationship between the ‘now’ of globalized contemporary art, the ‘then’ of 1795 Jena, mediated by the ‘now/then’ of 1965 New York, the inaugural moment, emblematically, of the ‘now’ of generic contemporary art.

If ‘the interesting’ is now the primary category of criticism of modern and contemporary art, as it already was of modern poetry for Schlegel, the question becomes: what does it mean to judge a work of art ‘interesting’ today? What do ‘we’ find interesting at present? The question

⁸ Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetics Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge MA and London 2012, Chapter Two.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project* – [needs reference](#)

is at base that of the historical articulation of the objective conditions of the subject of judgment, the question of who ‘we’ are. *Contra* Kant’s approach, this is a question without transcendental guarantee. For the cultural-political communities that make up the non-market-oriented sector of contemporary art’s practitioners and their audience, we might for example say: today, what is most ‘interesting’ are the legacies of European colonialism and patriarchy in the present. But what is the structure of the claim to interestingness for these things? This is a claim that supervenes to extract a general relevance from the concerns of particular communities. What is ‘of interest’ to one group dissipates through the contemporary art world, via its networks of criticism, curation and creation, to reach other groups with similar concerns in other places; this move from the particular to the general, the consensus it creates, makes an artwork or its methodology ‘interesting’.

Furthermore, how do judgements of individual works engage the world in such a way as to demonstrate the social significance of the works, while at the same time remaining specifically art judgements? This remains the central but as-yet unanswered art-critical question. If the first question asked of a work of contemporary art is simply, ‘is it interesting?’, the question that is asked by art criticism is, ‘is it artistically interesting?’ The significance of an individual work of post-conceptual art derives from the way in which answers can be given to these two questions and, in particular, to the dynamic relations between them: the general ‘interestingness’ of an artwork and its specific interest as ‘art’.

‘Interesting’ is not, in strictly Kantian terms, an ‘aesthetic’ judgement since it is not non-conceptual. Rather, the interesting operates within the broad logical field of Kantian reflective judgements. More specifically, a judgement of the interesting retains the indeterminacy of reflective judgements in general, but within the medium of a form that engages the objectivity

of the subject in its relations with the world. This renders the temporality of reflection historical. Schlegel takes various elements of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement, separates and repurposes them. If the judgement of the interesting is associated with a feeling, it is not that of pleasure in the harmony of the subject's own faculties, but of pleasure in the existence of the novelty of the object—or, put in subjective terms, pleasure in their own objectivity as a historical subject, hence in their openness to a future different from the present. It is in this latter respect that the 'new' becomes closely linked with the 'experimental', as a constitutive experience of the modern.

My hypothesis, then, is that 'the interesting' is the primary category of judgement of contemporary art—qua generic and postconceptual art—precisely because what makes an artwork 'interesting' is the set of relations into which it enters. It cannot be artistically interesting in its purely aesthetic presentation, but only through its relations to other works—and thereby, at the level of the whole, to the historical development of the idea of art; and, more broadly still, the historical development—the forms of experience—of the societies in which it is produced and received. 'Interesting' is the methodologically primary category of art judgement because it has a double structure. First, it is a meta-critical category: it is the judgement that deems a work worth judging. Second, integral to that, it is a critical category, insofar as it requires a determination of the grounds on which the work is being judged worthy of judgement, which becomes a justification of the judgement itself. This is the sense in which the proto-Romantic concept of the interesting is closely connected to the subsequent Romantic category of criticizability, which Benjamin famously reconstructed in his 1921 dissertation 'On the Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism', along with the related early-Romantic idea of criticism as the discursive completion of the work, through the constructive unfolding

of its meaning.¹⁰ The *interesting*, the *new*, the *criticizable* and the *incomplete* are constitutive aspects of the early-Romantic conception of the modern artwork, which retain their significance for contemporary art.

2024, 1797, 1965

Judd's famous aphorism unwittingly echoed the anti-neo-classicism of Schlegel's preface, resurrecting a non-medium-based criticism in the process. Yet Judd's essay was, as Ngai puts it, 'explicitly misread' by its opponents—Michael Fried, in particular—who interpreted Judd's 'only' to mean that a work 'merely' needs to be interesting.¹¹ Whereas Judd was elevating 'interesting' to a judgement *of quality*, he was read as saying that artists and critics needn't concern themselves with quality at all. Rarely in the history of art criticism has the glossing of a single adverb had such a destructive effect. Although Judd clarified his position—the 'interesting' is a judgement of quality, with 'quality' being a late-Greenberg, early-Friedian mantra—the precise meaning of the category and the structure of the judgement it involves remained undeveloped in Judd's writing, as in that of others who used the concept to inject the primacy of the individualizing experience of the present into art judgement.

Schlegel, on the other hand, schematized a historical deduction of the interesting—'deduction' here being used in its Kantian legal sense of justification, or evidential proof, rather than strict logical validity. This produced what Schlegel called a 'splendid justification of the moderns' (*glänzende Rechtfertigung der Modernen*). He thereby also relativized the interesting, not only historically, but within his own present, the late 1790s, which he diagnosed as a time of 'the

¹⁰ A point made by Sianne Ngai: *Our Aesthetics Categories*, p. 275, n3. **Plus WB references?**

¹¹ Ngai, *Our Aesthetics Categories*, p. 163.

crisis of the interesting’—for Schlegel, there was too much that was only interesting—and hence a crisis of artistic modernity, at its very outset.¹² (In this respect, there was in Schlegel himself already an element of the reflective historical objectivity that would later come to distinguish Hegel’s philosophy of art from German Romanticism: ‘The moment indeed seems ripe for an *aesthetic revolution*, by which the objective could become dominant in aesthetic education.’¹³ Meanwhile, ‘There is a host of interesting things in the world’, Hegel wrote in the ‘Preliminary Conception’ to his lesser *Logic*, ‘Spanish poetry, chemistry, politics, music are all very interesting, and we cannot blame a person who is interested in them. But if an individual in a definite situation is to bring something about, they must stick to something determinate and not dissipate their powers in a great many directions.’¹⁴)

The interesting is thus not critically absolutized by Schlegel, as it would be by Judd. Rather, it is the critical term that grasps the present, at the transitional moment in which the ‘modern’ was differentiated from the ‘ancient’ or ‘classical’. As such, it was projected as a necessarily transitional form: ‘the interesting in poetry has always only a provisional validity’—to which Schlegel added, somewhat startlingly, ‘much like a despotic government’.¹⁵ This is the time of despotism of criticism, we might say. Judd’s absolutizing position is to some extent justified, however, insofar as it is the permanence of this transition that came to characterize the modern as such. ‘The modern’, in its Baudelairian interpretation, is not the name of a defined historical period, but a form of temporality and (in Foucault’s phrase) a ‘critical ontology of ourselves’.

¹² Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, pp. 96 (translation amended), 40. This founding of a concept while simultaneously throwing it into crisis (something that also happens in Kant with the philosophical concept of ‘the subject’) is a distinctive mark of the modernity of a philosophical concept.

¹³ Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, p. 45.

¹⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic (with the Zusätze)*, 3rd ed. 1830/additions 1840, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris, Indianapolis 1991, addition to # 80, pp. 126–7. Hegel continued, in anti-aesthetic mode: ‘In art, for example, the understanding manifests itself in the fact that the forms of the beautiful, which are conceptually diverse, are maintained in their conceptual distinctiveness and are presented distinctly. The same holds for single works of art too.’

¹⁵ Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, p. 100. Schlegel is presumably alluding to his own 1796 ‘Essay on the Concept of Republicanism’, in which he defended the legitimacy of insurrection.

Constructed in this manner and seen from the standpoint of Schlegel's relation to Kant, the concept of the interesting takes on the form of a problem: that of the structure of its constitutive under-determination—neither 'determinate' nor 'indeterminate', in Kant's simple binary sense, but openly and incompletely *determining*. The claim that something is interesting selects it out and makes a claim for attending to it, in preference to other objects, as a simple judgement ('it is interesting') without, at least initially, specifying why. It thus gives rise to a search for determinations or reasons as to why it is interesting. This is the inductive aspect of reflective judgements. It is this lack of determinacy that leads Ngai to associate the interesting with aesthetic judgement, in Kant's reflective sense. However, here, the lack is not that of a purely reflexive structure but of the 'endless perfectibility', or 'infinite approximation', which the early Romantics would associate with the work's constitutive incompleteness.¹⁶ *Under-determination*, as it is better conceived, is a necessary feature of the ongoing process of the collective determination of meanings, whereby it is the difference between individual and collective judgement that sustains that process of reflection. The conceptual under-determinacy is the product of this gap between individual and collective judgement—or individual subject and imaginary social subject. This is why the 'demand' of beauty involved in Kant's conception of aesthetic judgement—the assumption in claiming that something is beautiful, for example, that others will assent—was for Hannah Arendt the basic form of political judgement.¹⁷

Between the ideal and the real

¹⁶ Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, pp. 99–100.

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Chicago 1989.

In Schlegel's account, the interesting is subject to a historical justification as the 'ideal of modern poetry', in direct opposition to Winckelmann's Hellenistic idealization of the ancients. By contrast, the modern appears as the time of subjective feeling and subjective freedom (a freedom that Hegel would subsequently identify with thinking itself). Whereas in the 'natural culture' of the ancients, the ideal supposedly appeared as real, in the '*artificial* aesthetic culture' of modernity, a gap has opened up between the ideal and the real. 'After the completed natural culture of the ancients decisively decayed and was hopelessly degenerated', Schlegel wrote, 'a *striving for an infinite reality*, which soon became the general mood of the age, was instigated by the loss of a finite reality and the destruction of a perfected form.' Modernity was thus characterized by a lack of the universality for which it nonetheless strives.

The interesting, then, is inherently imperfect, since it is constituted by the standpoint of an ideal towards which it aspires but can never reach. It has the structure of Kantian morality, not aesthetics. The interesting, for Schlegel, is always an 'interest in the reality of the ideal' and hence a 'reflection on the relation between the ideal and real'—the specific inadequacy of the real, one might say. This is what the Left Hegelians called 'criticism'. In the words of the early Marx, it is 'the measurement of the particular actuality by the idea'. This is why for Adorno, art 'criticizes society by merely existing'.¹⁸ Its striving—the product of the transposition of the structure of Kant's moral philosophy into the realm of culture—is thus the historical condition for the subsequent 'endless perfectibility' of the 'artistic disposition'. Under these circumstances, the interesting appears as a concern for what Schlegel calls 'the individual object of the idealizing imagination of the poeticizing subject'. This takes the poetic form of the *characteristic*, which is the technical term here for 'the presentation of the individual'.¹⁹

¹⁸ Karl Marx, Doctoral Dissertation, 'Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophies of Nature', Notes to Part I, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 1, Marx: 1835–1843*, London 1975, p. 85, translation amended. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, [complete reference] p. 226.

¹⁹ Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, pp. 99, 96, 97 (translations amended), 35, 99.

‘The goal of modern poetry’, Schlegel writes, ‘naturally becomes *individuality* that is *original* and *interesting*’. These two qualities are connected, insofar as the interesting is defined by Schlegel as ‘every original individual that contains a *greater quantity of intellectual content or aesthetic energy* . . . than the receptive individual already possesses.’ There is an echo here of Diderot’s conception of the ‘law of composition’ as a ‘law of energies and interests’. The interesting can never be merely imitative, because imitation is essentially unfree. Schlegel’s exemplar is Shakespeare, who is taken to have invented the genre of ‘the interesting tragedy’, and *Hamlet* in particular because of its demonstration of a ‘limitless disparity’ between thinking (the ideal) and the individuality of ‘active force’ (the real).²⁰

Schlegel’s is not a text on Greek poetry but a text on the *study* of Greek poetry, which requires, for its definition, an understanding of its dialectical opposite, modern poetry, or what Schlegel calls the ‘poetry of interest’.²¹ This provisional, in-between state of a relation between the real and the ideal registers the Latin etymology of the interesting: *inter esse*. And it is this state of between-ness—‘in’ but not ‘of’ the real as such—that registers the peculiar, broadly imagistic ontological status of the modern European conception of the artwork, now problematically globalized. This ‘between’ is not ambivalence, which oscillates indecisively; it is a definite yet under-determined relation.

The interesting becomes a self-contained historical category at those moments when historical consciousness moves away from infinite approximation to the ideal—of which Greenberg’s modernism is perhaps the last great example—to a sense of the ineliminable difference between

²⁰ Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, pp. 32, 35, 100, 33.

²¹ Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, p. 97. Schlegel was the first to recognize that ‘Beauty is . . . not the ideal of modern poetry’: p. 199. Here, through the occasional character of interest, modern poetry approaches the essay.

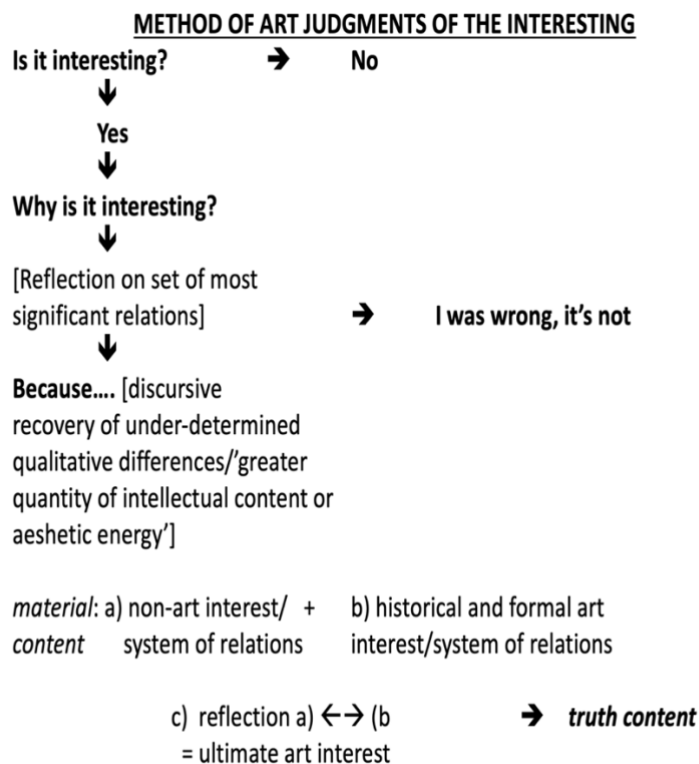
the real and the ideal, within the real. At that point, the critical choice is between a transcendently idealizing aesthetic formalism—late Greenberg’s recourse to a psychologizing Kantianism—and a focus on the relational structures of an infinite multiplicity of individualities: the ‘content-based’ criticism of ‘the interesting’. This remains a critical form, as opposed to a merely descriptive empiricism of the work’s features—or ‘commentary’, as Benjamin dubbed most so-called criticism—insofar as the claim that something is interesting is a claim, or a demand, on the interest of others. It has the structure of proto-universal communicability that Kant ascribed to a pure aesthetic judgement, yet here without the Kantian disinterestedness that had underpinned their universality, without the ‘ground’ in transcendental subjectivity. The ‘ground’ of the interesting is thus not purely aesthetic, but must instead be discursively redeemed in a critical discourse about the truth-content of a work, and so also about its historical truth-content, or its place within the totality of social relations. It is this relational quality that makes its content conceptual, however sensuously and materially diverse its modes of presentation.

The interesting is thus the meta-critical form within which, initially, all discourse about art’s combined claim on reality—through its material participation in it—and specific distance from it—through its idealizing form-based self-enclosure—takes place. It depends on that crucial non-art element within the work of art that became, for Adorno, a condition of its ‘autonomy’, or paradoxical internal separation from the real, within the real. In quasi-Adornian terms: the worldly engagement of interest involved in the idea of ‘the interesting’ at once connects the artwork to an ‘outside’, internalizes that outside as part of the content of the work, and then re-externalizes part of that internalized outside, in its new internal meaning. It thereby acquires an existential significance, since it is the existence of the subject itself that is engaged by what it finds interesting. At the same time, it is the idealizing self-enclosure or ‘illusion of autonomy’,

as Adorno put it, that both makes all art fictional and ties it to the future through a common *inexistence*. The prospect of actualization connects the fictional to the possibility of change, thereby making it ‘interesting’.

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What, then, is the logical form or structure of ‘the interesting’ as the primary critical judgement of contemporary art? Diagrammatically, it looks something like this.



Such is the rendering explicit of the unconscious schema of a reflective art-historical criticism of ‘the interesting’. These are not ‘concept-based justifications of feeling-based judgements’—

Ngai's aesthetic formulation²²—but discursive, other-oriented elaborations of judgements that are at once conceptual and affective because they are existential: judgements made by historical beings.

One might note here that the deeper critical history of 'the interesting' goes back to the Renaissance (as does the concept of 'taste', *gusto*). The Italian term *interessante* was connected colloquially to pregnancy—a meaning also found in Russian.²³ 'To be in an interesting condition'—*essere in stato interessante*—meant to be expecting a baby, that is: 'between' conception and birth, a condition in which both creation and crisis were possible outcomes. As a critical category, then, that which is 'interesting' always evokes a future with which the present is replete, accompanied by the anxious knowledge that any pregnancy may fail to reach its full term. There are no naturalistic guarantees and pregnancies, of course, can be terminated in various ways: a fact which casts Marx's image of socialism growing in the 'womb' of capitalism into a new light. This is the inherent temporal logic of the interesting, connecting it to the Romantic concept of the new not as creation *ex nihilo*—a theological notion, revived by Deleuze—but as qualitative historical difference, produced from the ever-renewed multiplicity of relations within the present.

While the sense of 'interesting' as 'worthy of attention' developed later, in the eighteenth century, the financial meaning of 'interest' likewise dates to the Renaissance. Interest is a financial gain to be collected in the future, in return for agreeing to risk a loan in the present. The greater the risk, the greater the interest; hence the sense of 'interesting', meaning risk-

²² Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, p. 173.

²³ Mikhail Epstein, 'The Interesting', *Qui Parle*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2009, pp. 75–88.

filled, times. This temporal structure is also detectable in the art-critical use of ‘interesting’: a promise yet to be fulfilled, suspended between a present risk and an uncertain future reward.