ART + OBJECTS

GRAHAM HARMAN

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First published in 2020 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
101 Station Landing
Suite 300
Medford, MA 02155, USA

ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-1267-6 (hardback)
ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-1268-3 (paperback)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Harman, Graham, 1968- author.
Title: Art and objects / Graham Harman.
Description: Medford, MA : Polity, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2019008491 (print) | LCCN 2019017058 (ebook) | ISBN 9781509512713 (Epub) | ISBN 9781509512676 (hardback) | ISBN 9781509512683 (pbk.)
Subjects: LCSH: Aesthetics.
Classification: LCC BH39 (ebook) | LCC BH39 .H367 2019 (print) | DDC 111/.85--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019008491

Typeset in 10.5 on 12 pt Sabon by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International Limited

Cover illustration: Beuys, Joseph (1921-1986): Telefon SE (Telephone T R), 1974. New Digitale (1)(A) York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Multiple of two cans with paint additions and string, each 4 3/4 x 3 15/16" (12 x 10 cm); other (string): 70 7/8" (180 cm). Riva Castleman Endowment Fund. Acc. n.: 914.2005.© 2017. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

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Abbreviations

I	Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism,* Vol. 1
II	Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism,* Vol. 2
III	Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism,* Vol. 3
IV	Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism,* Vol. 4
AAM	T.J. Clark, "Arguments About Modernism"
AB	Robert Pippin, *After the Beautiful*
AD	Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*
AEA	Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art*
ANA	Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*
AO	Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*
AOA	Robert Jackson, "The Anxiousness of Objects and Artworks"
AAP	Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy"
AT	Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*
AW	Arthur Danto, *Andy Warhol*
BBJ	Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*
BND	Hal Foster, *Bad New Days*
CGTA	T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art"
CJ	Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*
CR	Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*
DB	Gavin Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book*
ES	Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*
FI	T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*

GD	Graham Harman, "Greenberg, Duchamp, and the Next Avant-Garde"
HE	Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*
HMW	Michael Fried, "How Modernism Works"
KAD	Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*
LW	Clement Greenberg, *Late Writings*
MM	Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism*
NO	Bettina Funcke, "Not Objects so Much as Images"
OAG	Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*
OC	Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria*
OOS	Roger Rothman, "Object-Oriented Surrealism"
OU	Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*
PA	Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*
RR	Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*
TC	Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*
TN	Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*

. . . le chef-d'oeuvre qu'on regarde tout en dînant ne nous donne pas la même enivrante joie qu'on ne doit lui demander que dans une salle de musée, laquelle symbolise bien mieux, par sa nudité et son dépouillement de toutes particularités, les espaces intérieurs où l'artiste s'est abstrait pour créer.

Marcel Proust, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur*, p. 199

Preliminary Note

It is well known that Modernism in the visual arts finds an intellectual basis in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), and more recently in the work of the pivotal American critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. Kant is often called a "formalist" in his approach to art, despite not using the term in this connection. But he does speak of formalism in his ethical theory, and we will see that the reasons that motivate the term's appearance in one case apply to the other as well. Use of the word "formalist" to describe Greenberg and Fried encounters more resistance, at least in circles where these authors are viewed favorably, and special efforts are made to exempt Fried from this designation. Stephen Melville, for instance, laments "what is still far too often presented as Greenberg and Fried's Kantian formalism," while Richard Moran objects that formalism "seems an inapt term to characterize [Fried's] brilliant readings of French painting . . ."[1] The present book will nonetheless speak of Greenberg and Fried as Kantian formalists, though I am far more sympathetic to these authors than most who do so; indeed, I regard both authors as classics whose importance goes well beyond the sphere of art. Although I am well aware that Greenberg was cold to the word "formalism," and that Fried remains even more so, the term fits them perfectly well in the sense to be developed in this book. My goal in saying so is not to impose unwanted terminology on anyone, but to renew focus on what is living and what is dead in Kant's approach to art, and in his philosophical position more generally. No intellectual figure dominates the past two-and-a-half centuries like Kant, and previous attempts to get beyond him have never really gotten to the heart of the matter – the titanic efforts of German Idealism notwithstanding. Thus, we remain haunted by Kant's strengths and limitations to this day.

Beginning in the 1960s, the prestige of formalism in the art world was rivalled and then eclipsed by a general anti-formalist attitude that can be called "postmodern," for lack of a better term. This occurred through various practices that flouted the principles of modernist art: especially the formalist credo of the autonomy and integrity of the artwork reflected in the epigraph from Proust above. Yet the new generation of critics who lent their authority to the turn away from High Modernism were too quick to jettison formalism without safeguarding its most important insights. This has left the arts – like philosophy in its continental branch – in a wilderness defined in philosophy by misguided opposition to realism, and in art by a superannuated commitment to the now grandfatherly spirit of Dada. Object-Oriented Ontology (abbreviated OOO, pronounced "triple O") is in a good position to salvage treasures from the apparent wreck of formalism, because it *must* do so. As a philosophy committed to the autonomous existence of objects apart from their various relations, OOO endorses the basic formalist principle of the self-contained object, while flatly rejecting the further assumption that two specific *kinds* of entities – human subject and non-human object – must never be permitted to contaminate each other. This strict taxonomical segregation of humans from everything non-human stands at the center of Kant's revolution in philosophy, rarely for better and often for worse. The present book is meant as a challenge to both post-Kantian philosophy and post-formalist art, on the shared basis that both trends rejected their predecessor doctrine for the wrong reason. OOO remains allied to the formalist ban on *literalism*, though in a different sense from Fried's: one that I will also call "relationism." By literalism I mean the doctrine, or often the unstated assumption, that an artwork or any object can be adequately paraphrased by describing the qualities it possesses, which ultimately means by describing the relation in which it stands to us or something else. Nonetheless, OOO embraces *theatricality* despite Fried's intense – though disarmingly intricate – anti-theatrical sentiments. Stated differently, I will argue for a non-relational sense of the theatrical. I will also refuse Greenberg's unified flat canvas in favor of a model in which every element of an artwork generates its own discrete background.

It is often the case that philosophical books on art begin with expansive scruples about the respective meanings of such words as "art," "aesthetics," and "autonomy." Sometimes this is done with informative thoroughness, as in Peter Osborne's recent *Anywhere or Not at All* (*ANA* 38-46). While recounting the history of a term is never enough to justify etymological purism, it can certainly help

shed light on what is lost through shifting meanings. The Greek word *aisthesis* refers, of course, to perception, and there was a specific historical process through which "aesthetics" came to refer to the philosophy of art, and yet another specific process through which various twentieth-century artists and theorists decided to reject the identification of art with aesthetics. Osborne takes sides in this story, as most others do: "The new, postconceptual artistic ontology that was established – 'beyond aesthetic' – came to define the field to which the phrase 'contemporary art' most appropriately refers, in its deepest conceptual sense" (*ANA* 37). At the same time, he accuses his opponents of a "confusion about autonomy" (*ANA* 37) that can only be cleared up through a historical account of the relation between Kant and Jena Romanticism. This recommendation is not philosophically neutral, since Osborne is inspired by Hegel – as mediated by Adorno – in a way that the present book is not. In particular, I reject Osborne's claim that not Kant but only the Romantics managed to argue for the autonomy of art, and I do so because Kant's isolation of art from conceptual paraphrase, personal agreeableness, and functional utility (as in his chilliness toward architecture) is sufficient to protect art from Osborne's assertion that "most of what has always been and continues to be of most significance about art . . . [is] its metaphysical, cognitive, and politico-ideological functions . . ." (*ANA* 42-3). The obvious downside of Osborne's approach is that it tends to drown what is most distinctive about art – and philosophy – in a swamp of arch disquisitions on mass media and the commodity-form. Art is autonomous for the same reason as everything else: however significant the relations between one field or object and another, most things do not affect each other in the least. Any attempt to explain art in terms of capital or popular culture shoulders a heavy burden of proof in explaining why these outside factors ought to outweigh what belongs to the artwork in its own right. It is not enough merely to assert that "all these relations [are] *internal* to the critical structure of the artwork" (*ANA* 46). Such claims face the doom of what Arthur Danto calls a "metaphysical sandpit" (TC 102), as will be seen in Chapter 6.

Nonetheless, to avoid any confusion in what follows, allow me to define briefly what I mean by the terms "autonomy," "aesthetics," and "art." By *autonomy*, I mean that while all objects have both a causal/compositional backstory and numerous interactions with their environment, neither of these factors is identical with the object itself, which might well replace or dispense with much of its backstory as well as its environment. By *aesthetics* I mean something even further

afield than usual from its original Greek root: namely, the study of the surprisingly loose relationship between objects and their own qualities. This will be explained in what follows. By *art* I mean the construction of entities or situations reliably equipped to produce beauty, meaning an explicit tension between hidden real objects and their palpable sensual qualities.

This book was nearly complete for many months before I was able to add the final chapters; something in the argument felt wrong, for reasons hard to identify, and the publisher suffered patiently through the resulting delay. I was finally able to finish due to a lucky accident that requires a bit of personal history. In the late 1980s I was an undergraduate at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, a classical liberal arts institution that hosts a stimulating Friday night lecture series. On one of those nights during my junior or senior year, a fiftyish Michael Fried made the short trip from Baltimore to give us a sparkling preview of what would soon become his 1990 book *Courbet's Realism*. Though I remember being blown away by Fried as a speaker, I had no sense at the time of his reputation or significance, and could not have foreseen that his work as an art critic and historian would become important to me as a philosopher many years later. Having long regretted my youthful lack of preparation to fathom the depths of his lecture on Courbet, I made sure to nominate Fried for the visiting speaker series at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) in Los Angeles after joining the faculty there in 2016. Less than two years later, the SCI-Arc administration delivered on my wish: Fried arrived on campus in early February 2018 for two lectures and a tireless Saturday masterclass, topped off with a marvelous Sunday talk on Caravaggio at the Getty Museum. It was a rare treat to see this living master at work for the better part of a week. More concretely, from hearing Fried speak and from asking a number of strategic questions, I was finally able to see my way through to finishing this book. He will not agree with most or even much of it, but I hope he will appreciate how his important body of work has sparked yet another parallel line of thought in philosophy. As witnessed by the recent appearance of Mathew Abbott's edited collection *Michael Fried and Philosophy,* I am not the first to owe philosophical thoughts to Fried, and am undoubtedly not the last.

Introduction
Formalism and the Lessons of Dante

This is the first book to address in detail the relation between art and Object-Oriented Ontology (hereafter OOO), in the wake of a number of earlier publications on the topic.[1] For the purposes of this book, "art" means visual art, though the principles developed here could be exported – *mutatis mutandis* – to any artistic genre. What ought to make OOO's relation to art of especial interest to the reader is that this new philosophy treats art not as a peripheral subfield, but as the very heart of our discipline, as in the well-known OOO call for "aesthetics as first philosophy."[2] But what does it mean for aesthetics to serve as the basis for all philosophy, and why would anyone accept such an apparently deviant thesis? To develop these questions is the purpose of this book.

The title *Art and Objects* was recommended by an editor at Polity, and I could hardly refuse such a straight-to-the-point suggestion. Nonetheless, it could lead to one of two possible misunderstandings. The first is the verbal similarity of the phrase "Art and Objects" to the titles of two other works that lead in different directions from my own. One is Richard Wollheim's 1968 book-length essay *Art and its Objects*, a lucid piece of analytic philosophy not discussed directly in the pages that follow. The other similar title, no doubt more familiar to readers of this book, belongs to the provocative 1967 article "Art and Objecthood" by Michael Fried. This latter coincidence is more important, since Fried unlike Wollheim *has* had a significant impact on my thinking about artworks. Nonetheless, our respective uses of the word "object" have precisely the opposite meaning. For Fried, "object" means a physical obstacle literally present in our path, as he famously complains in the case of minimalist sculpture. For OOO, by contrast, objects are always absent rather than present. OOO's

real objects – as opposed to what we call sensual objects – can only be alluded to indirectly; they never take on literal form, and need not even be physical.

That brings us to the second and broader misunderstanding to which the title of this book might lead. Positive talk of "objects" in an arts context is often assumed to mean praise for mid-sized durable entities (sculptures, statues, glassworks, easel paintings) at the expense of what seem to be more free-form art media (performances, happenings, transient installations, conceptual works). In a OOO setting, however, "object" has a far broader meaning than solid material things. For the object-oriented thinker, anything – including events and performances – can count as an object as long as it meets two simple criteria: (a) irreducibility downward to its components, and (b) irreducibility upward to its effects. These two types of reduction are known in OOO as "undermining" and "overmining," while their combination – which happens more often than not – is called "duomining."[3] OOO holds that nearly all human thought involves some form of duomining, and tries to counteract it by paying attention to the object in its own right, apart from its internal components and outward effects. This is admittedly a difficult task, since undermining and overmining are the two basic forms of knowledge we have. When someone asks us what something is, we can answer either by telling them what the thing is made of (undermining), what it does (overmining), or both at once (duomining). Given that these are the only kinds of knowledge that exist, they are precious tools of human survival, and we must be careful not to denounce these three forms of "mining" or pretend we can do without them. Yet my hope is that the reader will come to recognize the parallel existence of forms of cognition *without* knowledge that somehow bring objects into focus, despite not reducing them in either of the two mining directions.

Art is one such type of cognition; another is philosophy, understood in the Socratic sense of *philosophia* rather than the modern one of philosophy as a mathematics or natural science *manqué*. As I wrote in "The Third Table," art has nothing to do with either of the famous "two tables" of the English physicist Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington: one of them being the physical table composed of particles and empty space (undermining), the other the practical table with distinct sensible qualities and the capacity to be moved around as we please (overmining).[4] For precisely the same reason, the celebrated distinction of the philosopher Wilfrid Sellars between the "scientific image" (undermining) and "manifest image" (overmining) cannot do

productive work for us.[5] Instead, art like philosophy has the mission of alluding to a "third table" that lies between the two extremes of cognition recognized by Eddington and Sellars. Already, those familiar with Fried will see that art in the OOO sense entails the exact opposite of the *literalism* that he associates with objecthood, though this is a mere difference in terminology that does not yet run counter to Fried's core principles.

It is well known that the OOO program emphasizes objects considered apart from their relations, which cuts against the grain of today's relational fashion in philosophy, the arts, and nearly everywhere else. By "relational" I mean the notion that an artwork (or any object) is intrinsically defined by some sort of relation with its context. In philosophy these are called "internal relations," and OOO upholds the counter-tradition that takes relations to be external to their terms: so that, in all but exceptional cases, an apple remains the same apple no matter the context in which it occurs. Now, to consider an object apart from its relations obviously sounds like the well-known "formalism" in art and literary criticism, which downplays the biographical, cultural, environmental, or socio-political surroundings of artworks in favor of treating such works as self-contained aesthetic wholes. In this connection, I have written some admiring things about the long unfashionable Greenberg, who deserves the title "formalist" despite his own resistance to the term.[6] We will see that the same holds for Fried, who is also a formalist in my sense despite his ongoing displeasure with that word. Robert Pippin's complaint that "there persists a myth that Fried's work is 'formalist,' indifferent to 'content'" certainly hits the mark, but only if we accept Fried and Pippin's definition of formalism as denoting indifference to content.[7] It is true that no one should accuse Fried of suppressing the content of paintings in the way that Greenberg usually does, but I will claim that there exists a more basic sense of formalism than this.

Given OOO's emphasis on the non-relational autonomy or closure of objects from their contexts, it is no surprise that there has been some wariness toward object-oriented thought in those aesthetic quarters where formalism is in low repute, even among those who feel sympathy for us on other grounds. Claire Colebrook, the prominent Deleuzean, worries aloud that OOO literary criticism will merely amount to a continuation of formalist business as usual.[8] My friend Melissa Ragona at Carnegie-Mellon University reacted as follows when I first posted the cover of this book on social media: "Excellent move from the old days of discussing Clement Greenberg to Joseph Beuys!"[9] Some months earlier, the Munich-based artist Hasan Veseli

had interrupted an otherwise positive email to express the following reservation about my past writings on art:

> My art friends and I can't understand why you go on and on about Greenberg, although we do get your point (background, flatness). In retrospect it feels that his writings were already assigned an expiration date at the time that he wrote that stuff (probably because of his problems with subject matter, making art just a formalist exercise). Notable critics, from today's perspective, are the likes of Rosalind Krauss, David Joselit, Hal Foster, Arthur Danto . . .[10]

In my continuing fondness for Greenberg, I am outnumbered in the art world by his detractors. Nonetheless, I would respond by saying that there are perfectly good reasons to "go on and on" about him, even if his theories seem linked with a kind of art that lost its cutting-edge prestige a half century ago, and even if some of his theories can be shown to be wrong. The issue, as I see it, is that formalism was at some point simply denounced and abandoned rather than assimilated and overcome, as some literary critics have also argued in their own field.[11] A similar thing happened in philosophy to another theory that stressed the isolation of autonomous things: the unloved doctrine of the thing-in-itself beyond all human access. Here we have crossed into the long shadow of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose three great *Critiques* sounded the formalist keynote in metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, respectively. We will see that Kantian formalism, conveniently centered in his recurring term "autonomy," consists of an intriguing combination of breakthroughs and deficiencies. Until the deficiencies are addressed and assimilated rather than circumvented by makeshift means, such as the vacuous claim that autonomy is inherently "bourgeois" or "fetishistic," there is a risk that philosophy and the arts – their fates more closely linked than is commonly believed – will continue to amount to little more than an ironic contempt for formalist claims.[12] I hold that this is exactly what happened in the first post-formalist philosophy (better known as German Idealism) and a century and a half later in post-formalist art. In both cases, important new possibilities were gained that had been foreclosed to formalism, but an even more crucial breakthrough was lost. One of the broadest claims of this book is that there will be no further progress in philosophy or the arts without an explicit embrace of the autonomous thing-in-itself. Moreover, we need to draw the surprising *theatrical* consequences of this point, despite Fried's understandable wish to banish theatricality from art. David Wellbery restates Fried's position with wonderfully flamboyant rhetoric:

> The (essentially 'theatrical') instigation of a frustrated yearning, a vertiginous sense of transport toward the never-to-be-achieved completion of an additive series, elicits a form of consciousness that is essentially non-artistic. Thought, work-internal differentiation, lucidity, and self-standing achievement are sacrificed for the sake of the *frisson* of a mysteriously agitated, portentous emptiness.[13]

Let us all stand united against "mysteriously agitated, portentous emptiness" – though I still find much of aesthetic value in Richard Wagner's operas, which Wellbery seems to detest. The idea of theatricality defended in this book is not that of histrionic melodrama.

I took up these themes in 2016 in *Dante's Broken Hammer*, a book whose first part is devoted to the *Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri, and whose second part challenges the thought of that most un-Dantean figure, Kant.[14] As mentioned, *autonomy* is perhaps the most central of Kant's terms, unifying as it does the chief insights of all three of his *Critiques*. His metaphysics features the unknowable thing-in-itself, unreachable in any direct fashion; opposed to this noumenal thing is human thought, structured according to our pure intuitions of space and time and the twelve categories of the understanding.[15] Each of these realms is autonomous, even if Kant speaks in contradictory fashion of the thing-in-itself as *cause* of the world of appearance, an inconsistency on which the master was hammered by his first wave of converts.[16] In ethics, Kant's commitment to formalism is openly declared.[17] An action is not ethical if it is motivated by any sort of external reward or punishment: whether it be fear of Hell, the desire for a good reputation, or the wish to avoid a bad conscience. An act is ethical only if performed for its own sake, in accordance with a duty binding on all rational beings. Stated in technical terms, ethics must be "autonomous" rather than "heteronomous." Contextual subtleties play no role in Kant's ethics: in his most famous example, lying cannot be justified even when done with the best of intentions and yielding the most admirable results. Indeed, context is what must be rigorously excluded for an act to count as ethical at all.

This leads us to Kant's philosophy of art, another triumph of formalism, even if he does not use that exact word in this portion of his philosophy.[18] Beauty must be self-contained in the same manner as ethical actions, unrelated to any personal agreeableness. Here as in his ethics, what is at stake for Kant is not the art object, which cannot be grasped directly any more than the thing-in-itself, and cannot be explained at all in terms of criteria or literal prose descriptions. Instead, beauty concerns the transcendental faculty of judgment

shared by all humans, which serves as the guarantor that anyone of sufficiently developed taste ought to agree on what is beautiful. The same holds for our experience of the sublime, whether it comes in the "mathematical" version of something infinitely large (the nighttime sky, the vastness of the sea) or the "dynamical" version of something infinitely powerful (a crushing tsunami, the discharge of a nuclear weapon). Here once more, Kant holds that the sublime is really about *us* rather than the apparently sublime entity, since the crucial feature of the sublime is that it overpowers *our finite selves* with an experience of infinite magnitude.

Nonetheless, Kant mixes two very different senses of formalism in a way that is fateful, in the negative sense, for modern philosophy and art theory. The important kernel of truth in his ethics should be clear enough: an action whose purpose is to gain rewards or avoid punishment is not really an ethical act, though we can never be entirely sure that any given act is free of ulterior motives. From here it is a small step toward recognizing the substantial truth of his aesthetics: an artwork is not beautiful just because it happens to please or flatter us in the manner of, say, Augustus Caesar reading Virgil's fulsome praise of his dynasty in the *Aeneid*.[19] Nonetheless, I hold that Kant is *overly specific* in his claim as to what must be separated from what in order to establish autonomy. For him as for nearly all modern Western philosophers, the two primary elements of reality are human thought on one side and everything else (a.k.a. "the world") on the other, and it is these two realms in particular that must be prevented from contaminating each other. In my opposition to this sentiment, I follow the French philosopher Bruno Latour's interpretation of modernity, in *We Have Never Been Modern*, as the impossible attempt to isolate and purify two distinct zones called human and world.[20]

At any rate, if the main problem with Kant is his formalist obsession with separating humans from everything else, we know which great figure in intellectual history resembles him least: that would be Dante, who wishes not to separate humans from world, but to fuse them together as tightly as possible.[21] Dante's cosmos is famously composed of *love*, in the sense of someone's passion for something: whether it be good, bad, or downright evil. The basic units of reality for Dante are not free autonomous subjects, but amorous agents fused with or split from the targets of their various passions, and judged by God accordingly. This is the sense in which Kant is the perfect anti-Dante: someone who promotes cool disinterest in ethics as in art, since to do otherwise would meld thought with world when, according to Kant, these two must be kept separate at all costs.

In his admiring critique of Kantian ethics, the colorful German philosopher Max Scheler looks very much like a twentieth-century Dante for philosophy. While Scheler insists Kant is right that ethics must be self-contained and not just a tool to attain certain "goods and purposes," he remains skeptical toward what he calls the "sublime emptiness" of Kant's call to universal duty.[22] Scheler's alternative model displays at least two salient features missing from Kant's theory. In the first place, ethics is less a matter of duty internal to human thought than an assessment of the things that one loves and hates, whether properly or improperly: an *ordo amoris* or rank order of passions.[23] In the second place, Scheler finds Kant's ethics too sweepingly universal, since any given person, nation, or historical period has a specific ethical calling that belongs to it alone. More generally, Scheler's theory entails that the basic unit of ethics is not a thinking human in isolation from the world; rather, the unit of ethics is a *compound* or *hybrid* (the latter is Latour's term) made up of the human ethical agent and whatever they take seriously enough to love or hate. Ethical autonomy thus gains a new meaning: no longer a clean separation of humans from world, but that of any specific human–world combination from all that surrounds it. Note that this does not amount to a regression into what the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux has concisely termed "correlationism": a type of modern philosophy that focuses on the correlative relationship between thought and world, while denying us the right to speak of either in isolation. For one thing, both humans and the objects they love remain independent of their relations, since neither is fully exhausted by them. And more importantly, the ethical relation between human and object is itself a new autonomous object whose reality cannot be fully grasped by either of these elements or by any external observer. The real embraces us from above no less than eluding us below.

The relevance to art of this ethical detour will now perhaps be clear. It had seemed to me until recently that there was no Scheler-like figure in the arts to critique Kant's aesthetics on analogous grounds. But it now seems clear that Fried is the man for the job. True enough, his concept of "absorption" seems to perform the basically Kantian labor of keeping us at a distance from the artwork through the preoccupation of its elements with each other, resulting in a "closure" that ensures their obliviousness to the beholder. Yet even in Fried's account this is true only for a number of French painters of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century anti-theatrical tradition – as theorized by the philosopher Denis Diderot – along

with certain trailblazing forerunners such as Caravaggio.[24] For it is Fried himself who has shown that, no later than the work of Jacques-Louis David, it becomes increasingly difficult to read any painting as straightforwardly theatrical or anti-theatrical – and that in the crucial career of Édouard Manet, the need for a painting to face and acknowledge rather than negate and close off the beholder becomes unmistakable.[25]

In aesthetics no less than ethics, Kant insists on the separation of disinterested spectators from the objects they contemplate. It is noteworthy that Greenberg and Fried do it the *opposite* way from Kant, by asking us to focus on the art object while subtracting the human side of the equation. This can be seen in Greenberg's rejection of Kant's transcendental approach to art in favor of something closer to Humean empiricism and, of course, in Fried's vehement if qualified distaste for theatricality.[26] What Kant shares with Greenberg and Fried is the assumption that autonomy must mean one very specific autonomy in particular: that of *humans* from *world*. This probably explains Fried's unease with such recent philosophical trends as Latourian actor-network-theory, the vital materialism of Jane Bennett, and OOO itself, all of them committed in different ways to a flattening of the Kantian human–world divide.[27] The analogy in aesthetics for Scheler's anti-Kantian ethics would be the view that the basic unit of aesthetics is neither the art object nor its beholder, but rather the two in combination as a single new object. Despite Fried's probable hostility to such a notion on anti-theatrical grounds, we will see that he comes surprisingly close to adopting it in his historical work. Though I will end up endorsing something much like the theatricality that Fried condemns, this by no means ruins the autonomy of the artwork, since the compound entity made of work and beholder is a self-contained unit not subordinate to any external practical or socio-political purpose. This admittedly strange result will require that we jettison a number of typical formalist principles in aesthetics, though mostly not the ones that post-formalist art has seen fit to abandon. At the same time, we will be led to some new and important considerations for philosophy.

Chapter 1 ("OOO and Art: A First Summary") gives an overview of OOO aesthetic theory, which conceives of art as activating a rift between what we call real objects (RO) and their sensual qualities (SQ). This will return us to the long unfashionable phenomenon of beauty, which we grasp by contrast with its eternal enemy: not the ugly, but the literal. An examination of metaphor is the easiest way to see what is wrong with literalism, though metaphor also turns out to