

## Literature, Autonomy, and the Complexity of Aesthetics

### Casey Haskins

There is an elegant vignette about the power of art embedded within *Das Leben der Anderen*, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's haunting film about an agent of the East German Stasi who is assigned to spy on a playwright to find evidence of politically subversive activities. The plot's turning point occurs when the impassive, inhumanly dutiful agent, Wiesler, eavesdrops on Dreyman, the playwright, as the latter plays a composition titled "Sonata for a Good Man" on the piano. Suddenly a single tear appears on Wiesler's otherwise expressionless face; shortly afterward, we see him reading with fascination Brecht's poem "To Those Born After" in a book he steals from Dreyman's apartment. These experiences go on fatefully to influence his decisions about what to do with the intelligence he collects on Dreyman in ways that make clear that, rather than being just another Stasi apparatchik, Wiesler turns out to be – to the audience's surprise, and even to his own – a good man himself.

If only this poignant story's tacit assumptions – that our tastes in art correlate with our moral characters, and that art can make good things happen – were always and unambiguously true in the real world. Has history not shown that for every Wiesler whose indifference to the lives and fates of others is melted and transformed by a story, image, or melody, isn't there also an Eichmann or a Gauguin or a Lenin (who is mentioned in similar connection in *Das Leben der Anderen*) whose love of the same story, image, or melody goes together psychologically with moral insensitivity or cruelty? Here we encounter one of the great self-interpretive puzzles of modern culture. On the one hand, a venerable and familiar aestheticist tradition running from the romantics and Nietzsche through twentieth century modernism answers the last question cheerfully in the affirmative. Yet an equally strong tradition within Western philosophy of art, from Plato through romanticism on into later movements such as Marxism and pragmatism, maintains that aesthetic values are not fully intelligible without some reference, however oblique, to morality, if not also vice versa. Political values enter this equation as well, insofar as the norms of politics always require moral grounding.

The broader problem that we confront here, however, concerns our image of art as a source of value of any kind, and it is a staple of the literature in modern philosophy of art. The problem takes the form of an antinomy, and reflects the difficulty which many philosophers, critics, and others encounter in trying to fully reconcile two basic intuitions about such value or, alternatively, to rationally reject one in favor of the other. The first of these intuitions affirms a certain autonomy in aesthetic experience relative to the claims of morality and other aspects of experience, and holds that what makes an artwork – literary, musical, painterly, cinematic, etc. – valuable *as* art is the intrinsic value (e.g., beauty) of the experience it affords. The second intuition, denying such autonomy, denies the first claim's centrality to a definition of art, maintaining instead that the value of a poem, a sonata, a film, and so on *as* art resides equally if not more in its instrumental efficacy, its ability to affect us in ways that promote further valued ends, e.g., cognitive advancement (as may occur when we read a historical novel), psychic relief (epitomized, for example, in the Aristotelian account of tragic catharsis), or transformed political consciousness (as in the reception of some of Brecht's work). Although this antinomical way of conceptualizing the philosophical problem of artistic justification became popular only in modern times, its roots go back at least as far as Socrates' famous challenge to the lovers of poetry in the *Republic* to demonstrate, as a condition of giving poets the respect accorded other artisans, that poetry is "not only pleasant but useful to states and human life".

### The Modernist Image and the Quarrel over Aesthetics

The dialectical conflict between these two intuitions about how to justify valuations of literary or other artworks is one of two traditional faces of what we might call modern aesthetic theory's "autonomy problem."<sup>1</sup> The problem's other face concerns not justification per se but causal explanation. Instead of "What makes Brecht's poem valuable as literature and as art?", the questions now are: "What caused this poem, – as a work of art – to come into existence? Is it the product, primarily, of an internal history of creativity and stylistic development that is limited to literature itself or, a little more broadly, to art as a whole (that is to say, autonomistically); or is it primarily the product of the same larger social and historical causes that make everything else in culture possible?"

Both of these metacritical questions about autonomy are bound up with the proverbial "critical" turn modern aesthetic theory took with Kant's *Critique of Judgment* at the end of the eighteenth century. From this point on, expressions like "the aesthetic" and "art" were increasingly understood as referring metaphorically to a *place* where modern selves, beset with the proverbial anxiety, belatedness, and disenchantment of their age, can go to make things whole and right. Because of its centrality for all subsequent modernist art theory and criticism, I call this image of the aesthetic as a place the "modernist image". This visual metaphor is an example of what W.J.T. Mitchell has termed a "metapicture" – a visual image that, upon becoming entrenched in the ordinary language of a historical culture, functions both to condense and to reaffirm a more elaborate raft of theoretical ideas.<sup>2</sup> As the modernist image became increasingly entrenched within intellectual and eventually folk culture, a raft of new distinctions began increasingly to shape art-critical discourses of various kinds: form versus content; form vs context; intrinsic aesthetic value vs utilitarian or practical value; pure vs impure modes of judgment; "interested" vs "disinterested" (including politically interested) modes of pleasure and perception; fine art vs mechanical or agreeable art (or essentially high art vs low art, which mutates into the modernist-era avant-garde vs kitsch distinction); and "aesthetic" vs "ordinary" principles of historical development, epitomized in art historical writers like Riegl and Wölfflin. By now, higher-order, metadisciplinary distinctions between autonomously aesthetic and heteronomously nonaesthetic modes of knowledge and expertise were getting rapidly entrenched, along with other emergent conceptions of bureaucratic expertise, in academic life, as epitomized in Max Weber's social-theoretic discussion of the "spheres of value" of modernity. It's on this basis that twentieth century modernist critics like Clement Greenberg could be believed when they talked, for example, about how each of the arts now understands that it has the historical task of reflexively identifying its own special, unique, irreducible domain of formal procedures which lie at its essence and whose knowledge is the special epistemic province of the elite modernist critic.

With the emergence of materialist (Marxist) sociology as a dialectical reaction against idealism in the mid-nineteenth century, the autonomist and internalist tradition in aesthetics came under pressure from new modes of heteronomist and "externalist" explanation. With these developments, the general motif of autonomy became, poignantly, at once an expression of modernity's efforts to preserve a certain moral integrity in its self-interpretations and institutions and a source of rupture in that integrity. Autonomy became, like Plato's fabled pharmakon, paradoxically both modernity's cure and its symptom – a point that would be amplified and complicated, towards the end of the twentieth century, in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Thus the internalism of the modernist image came increasingly to generate externalist reactions, in the forms of various increasingly common Marxist and other modes of socially, historically, and semiotically inflected structural thought. Their impulse was to offer alternative – and subversive – accounts of what aesthetic pleasures, representations, forms, and associated modes of agency and experience, as

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<sup>1</sup> I survey the history of the autonomy problem more fully in "Autonomy: Conceptual and Historical Overview," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (University of Chicago, 1994).

described by the more autonomizing modes of idealist aesthetics, “really” mean and where they “really” come from.

Thus was born what I call the mainstream modern Quarrel over Aesthetics – the central, mythic dialectical conflict within aesthetics from the eighteenth century to the present. Its basic structural permutations allow, first, for a thesis or antithesis in the form of autonomist assertion and heteronomist counterassertion, and, second, for attempts at synthesis in the form of claims, which take innumerable forms in the mainstream humanist and Marxist literatures; that art, or some particular art, like architecture, painting, music, literature, etc, is *both* autonomous *and* heteronomous. This very general pattern of dialectical action and reaction would come to embrace all of the main critical debates of the modernist era, including and especially those surrounding aesthetic modernism and the avant-gardes for the first several decades of the twentieth century, and its structure persists even throughout many of the critical battles about art and its theory which we associate with postmodernism. But a further wrinkle enters this story as we consider that, over the last few decades, the autonomy problem faced by anyone who would arrive at an authentic position regarding the methodology of literary or other kinds of criticism is no longer just an abstract philosophical conundrum about which (if not both) of two dialectically competing paradigms is the right one; now, it also involves asking which of variously competing intellectual communities one should align oneself with. If one is an academic scholar, this can mean deciding whom one should primarily write for (especially if one seeks advancement within the profession), which journals to publish with, which conferences to attend, and so on. What appeared initially as a philosophical problem, that is, has now mutated into a problem about the politics of the critical disciplines.

Although this problem is now part of our global postmodern-era conversation about culture and its values, each region of the world obviously has its own intellectual-political landscape. From an American vantage point at least, this problem in literary studies tends to show itself in terms of a tension between the disciplinary orientations that presently surround, on the one side, traditional humanistic approaches to thinking about what makes literary texts “great literature” or “works of genius” or worthy of canonization, and, on the other side, approaches that are typically referred to now, with deceptive simplicity, as “Theory.” (To “do Theory” in this context usually means to draw upon an amalgam of neomarxist and poststructuralist explanatory approaches, often further tailored for application to more specific problem areas concerning race, gender, class, etc.) To identify with the first way is to side broadly with autonomy; to identify with the second way, to side broadly with heteronomy. A good example of the first more humanistic sort of stance in the American metacritical literature can be found in the work of Harold Bloom, who writes at the beginning of his book *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, that

Either there [are] aesthetic values, or there are only the overdeterminations of race, class, and gender. You must choose, for if you believe that all value ascribed to poems or plays or novels and stories is only a mystification in the service of the ruling class, then why should you read at all rather than go forth to serve the desperate needs of the exploited classes? [...] If literary canons are the product only of class, racial, gender, and national interests, presumably the same should be true of all other aesthetic traditions, including music and the visual arts. Matisse and Stravinsky can then go down with Joyce and Proust as four more dead white European males.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, an example of the heteronomizing stance of “theory” can be found in the editor’s introduction to a prominent guide to the field, *Critical Terms for Literary Study*:

The basic premises of criticism have been interrogated, again and again, from perspectives as diverse

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (Riverhead Books, 1994).

as feminism, deconstruction, Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and reader-response theory [...]. Value and meaning do not transcend history and culture, just as literature itself does not. Interpretation— the process of producing textual meaning—is therefore rhetorical. It does not live in a realm of certain truths; it lives in a world where only constructions of the truth are possible, where competing interpretations argue for supremacy [...]. Authors and readers are constituted by their cultural placement. They are defined inside systems, of gender, class, and race. They operate inside specific institutions that shape their practice. They have been brought up inside powerful systems of value, especially powerful because these systems present values as inevitable rather than as ideological.<sup>4</sup>

The dialectic – or culture war – between the sensibilities expressed in such passages is now, in a way it was not a half century ago, a staple of any graduate-level education in literary and other humanistic disciplines. It is a sign, at the same time, of how politicized that education can sometimes be that just as many such programs in some countries (for example in America) used to recognize the legitimacy only of the first sort of approach, so do many now recognize only the second, without offering much in the way of tools that might invite students to stand back from the quarrel and try re-describing it in fresh ways. If one reads passages like these as projecting case studies not only in “problems of literary theory” but in the sociology of knowledge, it becomes obvious that the nineteenth century autonomy problem in aesthetics has mutated – as, sooner or later, do all normative disputes of sufficient importance to their larger culture – into a more complex problematic of theory and practice at once. It is a problematic which in its general structure is hardly unique to literary studies. Now, it possesses familiar counterparts in the critical literatures of virtually all the art-interpretive and explanatory disciplines – musicology, art history, film theory, architectural theory, and so on.

Part of the complexity of this situation stems from the stubbornness of the more abstract philosophical problem about art in which it is historically rooted. For notwithstanding the many different kinds of professionalized expertise that had come to surround the arts between the nineteenth and mid- twentieth centuries, few – idealistic humanists and their materialist, historicist, and other critics alike – seemed able or willing to consider that the Quarrel over Aesthetics, with the autonomy problem at its center was in fact insoluble as traditionally framed. The deeper reasons for this situation – to make short a longer philosophical story – reflect a paradoxical fragmentation of intuitions about how to represent the relationship between nature and the human, a fragmentation lying at the heart of modern philosophy’s discussion of its methods.<sup>5</sup> For decades humanists and

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas McLaughlin, Introduction to Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds. *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (University of Chicago Press; 1995), pp. 1, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Casey Haskins, “Paradoxes of Autonomy: Or, Why Won’t the Quarrel over Artistic Justification Go Away?” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58: 1 Winter 2000. As I argue there, it was none other than Kant himself who offered an early account of this fragmentation in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, although he didn’t make its connection with aesthetics explicit and was doubtless not thinking of such matters when he wrote the first Critique. I refer to that work’s famous third “antinomy of pure reason” which essentially says that reason in its purely theoretical capacity (as opposed to its more practically regulative capacity) cannot decide between a view of the world wherein everything that happens has a spatiotemporal cause and a view wherein some events (say acts of pure, autonomous moral willing) don’t. The relevance of this antinomy to the “deep structure” of the Quarrel over Aesthetics becomes clear once one notes that Kant’s notion of moral autonomy is also the source of his faculty-psychological conception of aesthetic autonomy, which was seminal for all subsequent discussion of autonomy in aesthetics and philosophy of art. My own interpretation of Kant’s contribution to this discussion is not, I hasten to add, a “Kantian” interpretation, however, in that I don’t see the antinomical structure he identified as a transcendental feature of all mental activity so much as the contingent product of a specific historical tradition of philosophy whose findings have, for some but not all subsequent traditions, played a mythically regulative role.

others seemed unable and unwilling to consider that the quarrel, traditionally framed as a clash between broadly idealist and materialist paradigms of knowledge, was rooted in a stalemate in conceptual as well as evidential senses, with nothing like a Kuhnian-style paradigm shift in aesthetics hovering on the horizon. If the idea of art and the aesthetic was in some ways a symptom of modern disenchantment, the Quarrel over Aesthetics had become something more like a collective neurosis, replete with its collective “patients”’ feelings of persecution by and obsessive will to vanquish an antagonist (epitomized in the hermeneutics of suspicion that fueled relations between Marxist and mainstream humanists during the Cold War years and to some extent even now) together with these collective patients’ resistance to reviewing aspects of their respective histories that might cast all concerned in a more humanizing light. In consequence of such developments, the diverse professionalized constituencies of the late twentieth century aesthetic field were unable to stop an increasingly politicizing dynamic that throughout the twentieth century was setting in between aesthetic disciplines that identified with the autonomist temper of traditional humanism, on the one hand, and the newer forms of Theory that identified with the counterdisciplinary impulse of postmarxist materialist thought, on the other. To this extent the Quarrel over Aesthetics seemed poised, like a neurotic symptom writ large, to undergo repetition unto oblivion – unless it could be, if not revolutionized in dramatically Kuhnian terms, then at least re-described in some fresh, interdisciplinarily reenergizing way.

### **Redescribing the Quarrel over Aesthetics**

One finds gestures towards this sort of re-description in various writers associated with late modernism or postmodernism, even though much of postmodern art theory and aesthetics preserves the Quarrel over Aesthetics’ basic dialectical structure. The gestures I mean come from, among others:

- (1) Adorno, who did more than any earlier twentieth-century thinker to expose the paradoxes and contradictions in the discourse of modern aesthetics, if not modern philosophy more generally. He famously speaks in *Aesthetic Theory*, for example, of how autonomist and heteronomist modes of describing modern art – corresponding to the twin aspects of what he calls art’s “double nature” – contradict one another and how anyone who would philosophize about art must simply incorporate that contradiction into the explicit structure of their theory rather than pretend it’s not there. Adorno also observed that another sort of contradiction surrounds the way in which, on the one hand, moral autonomy, that is to say moral *freedom*, is considered a fundamental trait of the modern juridical subject, yet this then serves as a justification for arguments that such subjects are bound by *law*, both internally and externally imposed. At the same time, Adorno continued in his aesthetics to maintain a provocative, if somewhat selfconsciously tortured, version of the stance I earlier referred to as instrumental autonomism.
- (2) Foucault, who in *The Archeology of Knowledge* offered an influential re-description of the field of human knowledge as constituting not so many autonomous enclaves of methodologically inviolable, and in some cases normatively incommensurable, disciplinary expertise à la Weber, but rather a plurality of more contingently rooted “discourses” whose authority for the culture lay not in something like transcendental considerations, as reflected in the Kantian theme of the incommensurability of “transcendental (or philosophical)” and “empirical (or social scientific)” modes of reflection. The landscape of human knowledge, far from possessing any sort of traditional metaphysical or transcendental center, is rooted – and uprooted – in contingent dynamics of history and power. One also gets a less Nietzscheanized version of this line in pragmatism.
- (3) Derrida, whose discussion of the Kantian theme of the *parergon* in *The Truth in Painting* dealt a fateful, if not fatal, blow to naïve interpretations of artworks and texts generally as possessing neatly

demarcated “insides” and “outsides”. To identify the supposedly determinate inside or content or constitutive meaning of a text or artwork is to project a “frame” around it that supposedly excludes other contents or meanings, even while doing so paradoxically affirms the reciprocal dependence of all that lies within the frame on all that lies without for *its* meaning. The binaristic attempt to draw a strict line between insides and outsides of works or texts was a residue, again, both of the classical picture discussed earlier and of the newer modernist idiom of art and the aesthetic – or, at a lower level, an artistic object or text of painting, literature, architecture, and so on – as a realm or place whose contents can be kept insulated from, and purified of tainting influence by what lies without. In arguing this way, Derrida – along with other poststructuralists – helped undermine what was left of twentieth century humanist culture’s confidence in the meta-picture of aesthetic autonomy. This, again, was the image of art or the aesthetic as a place insulated from other places, a place where things could happen that could happen nowhere else (and about which – a key epistemological point – all educated parties in the culture could agree *that* they happened there).

Derrida’s contribution to the late- or postmodern debate about the fate of aesthetics was, in the end, mainly negative. Like the abstract negation in a Hegelian dialectic, it undermined the old without putting something unambiguously positive and new in its place. Or to put the point another way, in the work of Derrida, if not also of Foucault and Adorno, the metapicture of art as a self-standing autonomous realm lost its regulative authority for aesthetic reflection. Yet no new meta-picture of comparable authority has yet appeared to take its place in an intellectual culture that remained as politicized at the end of the twentieth century as it was in earlier Cold War era phases of late modernism and postmodernism in the cultural disciplines.

This brings us to a question that at this point should be part of any interdisciplinarily conscious discussion of the fate of the interdisciplinary field of inquiries that aesthetics has evolved into over the last two centuries: Are there signs of anything like such a meta-picture becoming available – in any sense of “available” – to us now?

### **Aesthetics as a Network**

Our intellectual culture does possess at least the beginnings of a shared sense of what such a new, mythically resonant meta-picture for aesthetics might be like, although much self-interpretive work, including cultural-political working-through, remains to be done if we are to create such imagery. In speaking of a meta-picture in this sense, I’m not assuming that the cultural disciplines will undergo – or that they ever have undergone – anything as dramatic as a Kuhnian-style “paradigm shift.” In any case, I believe that one key element of this sort of work will continue to be the project of unpacking both the lower-order world-descriptive, and higher-order meta-disciplinary implications of so-called complexity theory – which has largely focused on scientific matters – for cultural subjects.

One suggestive discussion in this connection is Mark C. Taylor’s *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*. Taylor’s book is a pioneering effort to transpose themes from complexity theory – as developed on other disciplinary fronts by Stuart Kauffman, Ilya Prigogine, and others – into the discussion of the arts. Taylor makes a forceful case that in the present post Cold War, early twenty-first century moment, our culture – which is increasingly not Western culture but global culture – is becoming aware of itself in ways that render useless a variety of explanatory methods and heuristic metaphors that worked in the past to allow us to experience the world as a place with a deep organizational center – a belief in a world order that allowed for collective confidence about matters of value, including aesthetic value. Central to Taylor’s analysis is a distinction between “grids” – binary conceptual structures that have historically played fateful roles in a spectrum of disciplinary inquiries at the heart of what is often meant by modernity – and “networks”, which are more fluid constellations of conceptual and real-world relationships that exhibit multivalent (rather than just

binary) structure and self-reorganizational rather than static dynamics. His language is thick with meta-pictorial implications, as when he writes that

the moment of complexity can be understood in terms of the shift from a world structured by grids to a world organized like networks [...]. The contrast between grids and networks clarifies the transition from the Cold War system to network culture. The Cold War system was designed to maintain stability by simplifying complex relations and situations in terms of a grid with clear and precise oppositions: East/West, left/right, communism/capitalism, etc. This is a world in which walls seem to provide security. Walls and grids, however, offer no protection from spreading webs; as webs grow, walls collapse and everything begins to change [...].<sup>6</sup>

Taylor goes on to connect the grid/network distinction to debates about various themes of artistic modernism, including autonomy, drawing on the work of art critic Rosalind Krauss:

The modernist present figured by the grid is not merely temporal but involves a specific mode of experience embodied in the work of art. In keeping with a tradition dating back to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), modernist art is regarded as autonomous and self-referential [...]. Referring to nothing beyond itself, the modernist work of art provides the occasion for the experience of *simple* presence in the immediacy of the present moment. "The grid," Krauss concludes, "declares the space of art to be at once autonomous and autotelic."<sup>7</sup>

The main point I want to draw from Taylor's discussion is that the grid-versus-network distinction helps us further articulate the limitations of traditional talk about autonomy in aesthetics. For the whole ethos of aesthetic modernism – epitomized in the work of visual art critics like Greenberg and Fried but also in literary humanists like Bloom – depends on the cultural entrenchment of a grid-like representation of human experience wherein art or aesthetic experience happens in a pre-enclosed space set off from a larger unaesthetic world. (One might also add that for writers like those just mentioned, the fully autonomous or pure forms of this experience also presuppose a special epistemic orientation to art that not everyone enjoys – a familiar bone of contention for those working the other dialectical side of the Quarrel). Autonomist thinking is, within this perspective, a kind of grid-like thinking. And so is the entire Quarrel over Aesthetics structure, which contains not just modernist criticism per se but many anti-disciplinary reactions to it, including the now orthodox cocktails of neomarxism and poststructuralism that inform books like *Critical Terms for Literary Study*.

This isn't to say that grid-like thinking is entirely obsolete. For if you think about it, the grid/network distinction is itself, in virtue of its binary character, a kind of grid. (So, by the way, is the Law of Excluded Middle, which – the temptations of postmodern-era fuzzy logic notwithstanding – no sane person should be ready to part with just yet.) We can still talk about artistic autonomy as a counterforce to disenchanted worldliness just as we can talk about divine providence as a counterforce to evil or about bipolar clashes between reified civilizations in an age of global terrorism. But we should also be prepared to have the world not always behave in a way that confirms the pictures of agency projected by grid-like beliefs in the supposedly stark separation between what is "inside" and "outside" the realm of art, as well as more general such beliefs about, for example, the separation between what the humanistic disciplines study (culture) and what the sciences study (nature).

In this sense we might say that the world's complexity carries implications for how we should

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<sup>6</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (University of Chicago, 2001), p.23.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, pp.31-32.

think about the complexity, and the future, of aesthetics itself. By “aesthetics” I now mean not the narrowly professionalized philosophical inquiry originally envisaged by Kant and his contemporaries. Rather I mean an interdisciplinary field – embracing, along with philosophical aesthetics, literary studies, visual art theory, musicology, film studies, and other areas of art-theoretical research and debate – which lacks a single dominant methodological language. It comprises a fluid, evolving intellectual network whose complexity is comparable to that of other such networks with which it is also in contact, such as those in philosophy and the sciences. On a network model, an image of multinodal, historically evolving interactivity between disciplines will begin to eclipse the older images of bipolar conflict – implicit, I have argued, in the literature of the Quarrel over Aesthetics – that dominated humanistic thought generally from the romantic period through the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> Having the option of thinking about aesthetics in this way does not, of course, preclude our being able to think about the arts using the older idiom of autonomy and heteronomy, with its accompanying meta-pictures of experience and disciplinary life. But we are living in a twenty-first century world – of which our various art worlds, including that of literature, are all parts – that places a premium on our ability to change some of our older meta-pictorial habits for thinking about the arts. And about much else too, of course, not the least being politics. As Taylor notes in *The Moment of Complexity*, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall was itself among the most dramatic symbols of the withering away of certain modes of Cold War grid-like thinking about many subjects – with one of these subjects, in aesthetics, being the tired opposition of Marxist/materialist versus “idealist” approaches to thinking about art. (It is fitting here that *Das Leben der Anderen*’s story comes to a conclusion, and its main character comes into a new self-knowledge, shortly after the tearing down of the Wall). In aesthetics, in any case, the networking theme offers us at least a few fresh clues as to how to make some of our newer intuitions about the connections of literature and the other arts to the rest of the world more explicit.

*In this article Haskins addresses what he calls the autonomy problem in aesthetic theory. The controversy here is, firstly, whether a work of art derives its value from its being art as such or from its instrumental (for example moral) efficacy and, secondly, whether the causes for its existence are autonomistic or heteronomistic. Haskins analyzes (the backgrounds of) the dialectically structured modernist form of this debate and its ramifications for academic politics – the dialectic between “traditional humanistic approaches” and “Theory”. He then goes on to show that the issue at hand is insoluble in its traditional form and thus stands in need of a redescription. After discussing Adorno, Foucault and Derrida in this light, he concludes with an account of the potential of complexity theory in the course of reformulating our ideas of the connection between art and the world.*

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<sup>8</sup> I argue for the idea of aesthetics as a network more fully in “The Disunity of Aesthetics: A Reply to J.G.A. Pocock” *Common Knowledge* 11:2 Spring 2005. For a more sweeping account of the histories of intellectual networks in philosophy and elsewhere, see Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Harvard University Press, 1998). Collins’ book contains a few suggestive asides about the sociology and politics of literary theory. For a more extended discussion of how literature itself comprises an evolving global network which carries important implications for literary theory, see Pascale Casanova, *La republique mondiale des lettres* (Editions du Seuil, 1999).

*interdisciplinarity.*