Since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a marked revival of interest in both Kant and aesthetics. This revival has been accompanied with a move beyond the theoretical positions that sought to displace the notion of aesthetics and often requires a rethinking of the relationship between criticism and philosophy. I wish to present here an account of Kant’s ‘invention’ of aesthetics that allows its terms to become both operative within and yet also transformed by the practice of critical engagement with literary and visual works of art. It is important to mention however that the context for this reinvention of an aesthetic criticism is one that should embrace the different kinds of artworks, as an exclusive focus on the literary tends to reduce the discussion of art to an account of language, a reduction partly responsible for the prior tendency to dismiss aesthetics.

Alongside this attentiveness to the distinction between literary and visual works should also come a challenge to the attempt of many thinkers to dismiss aesthetic considerations in favour of historical readings. The historicist orientation in criticism has had a long vogue despite the general recognition of the real problems that such concentration has, not least in accounting for its own conditions of possibility. The real reason for the continuing production of works that present an opposition between ‘contextual’ reading and aesthetics is a wide acceptance that aesthetic accounts of works do not involve historical considerations. I would like therefore here to present an account of aesthetic criticism that makes clear the nature of its historical purchase. This account of a Kantian aesthetic criticism will be presented by first making clear the expansive sense the term ‘aesthetics’ has for Kant, secondly arguing for the vital importance of understanding Kant’s decision to discuss the critique of taste in the same work as he presents a critique of teleology, thirdly describing the ‘ends of criticism’ and fourthly setting out the type of criticism that can be produced by the approach that thus emerges.

The multiple senses of ‘aesthetics’ in Kant

It is not generally noted that each of Kant’s three critiques contains a discussion of something termed ‘aesthetics’. I will here briefly revisit the three distinct senses given
to the term ‘aesthetic’ in Kant’s three critiques, suggesting thereby an agenda for an expansion of the term beyond the restricted notion which presently is the major one accepted.

Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* opens with a section entitled the ‘transcendental aesthetic’. In this part of the work Kant treats of the contribution to knowledge provided by sensibility. The use of the term ‘aesthetic’ to describe the notion of sensibility was widely accepted at the time Kant wrote the first critique and Kant uses it in this work to discuss an ‘immediate’ relationship between cognition and an object as opposed to a mediated relationship between the two, as is provided by concepts and judgements. The reason why Kant here is not just presenting an account of sensibility *per se* is his transcendental purpose. As Kant puts it:

> Since that within which the sensations can alone be ordered and placed in a certain form cannot itself be in turn sensation, the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori*, and can therefore be considered separately from all sensation.4

The way in which sensations are presented to us in their specific vividness is what Kant terms a *matter*. This *matter* is contrasted with that which permits us to receive this matter as such, and this is termed by Kant *form*. Since Kant identifies the matter here with the term ‘sensation’ itself we need to separate sensation from that which makes us capable of receiving its inputs, and this we can term ‘sensibility’. If there is something that organizes and permits reception of sensation then the enquiry into this must be an enquiry into something that is not derived from experience and is hence *a priori*. Since we are here enquiring into sensibility we are forced to the view that there is such a thing as *a priori* sensibility.5

We will see that this notion of *a priori* sensibility is important in reviewing Kant’s other enquiries into something termed ‘aesthetics’. In the second critique sensibility is approached not in terms of the capacity of receipt of sensation but rather in the sense of ‘feeling’. Here what Kant wishes to suggest is that there is a ground for thinking of feelings in a non-empiricist manner. The ground for this second sense of the term ‘aesthetic’ is that Kant has uncovered within this work the pure basis of morality. This argument leads him to consider the relationship between the moral law and motivation to act in accordance with it. The examination of this latter must turn on the question of an *a priori* feeling, otherwise we would be faced with the irresolvable paradox of a pure law and a merely pathological motivation. So, if the argument about the purity of morals is to carry conviction it is essential that Kant should demonstrate that there are pure feelings. Given that the moral law acts as a counter to the demands of sensuousness the first feeling that it produces in us is humiliation. But humiliation has also a positive correlate in the form of respect for the moral law, a feeling ‘produced by an intellectual cause, and this feeling is the only one which we can know completely *a priori* and the necessity of which we can discern’.6 Further, respect is not a ‘drive’ to morality but rather ‘morality itself, regarded subjectively as a drive’ and which is produced in us by the example of another person following the law.7

The basic notion of intellectual feeling given in the second critique is made much
more intricate in Kant’s subsequent works, particularly *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. But whilst these works suggest that the picture given in the second critique requires further elaboration they do not present reasons for rejecting the basic notion of the ‘aesthetic’ of this work. The reason for describing the discussion of pure feelings as an ‘aesthetic’ is not merely because Kant does this himself. It is also the case that many contemporary moral theories also relate the importance of thinking of feeling in morality and, indeed, so did theorists in Kant’s time. That the term ‘aesthetic’ should include a clear reference to ‘feeling’ is a crucial development in the second critique and connects it to the demonstrations of the third critique. It is essential however to be clear that ‘feeling’ should be understood not merely as a reference to a set of empirical states but, if we are undertaking to set out a description of feelings which we characterise as ‘aesthetic’, that these feelings should be understood to be pure in nature.

It is in the third critique that Kant turns to examining the credentials of a ‘critique of taste’ to be entitled an ‘aesthetic’. In section VIII of the first introduction to the work he described how the connection between the presentation of an object and a feeling of pleasure or displeasure has come to be termed an ‘aesthetic’ relation even though in this relation we do not find a cognition presented (as is the case with the intuitions discussed in the transcendental aesthetic). Rather, what is occurring in the relation in question is that we have given to us a presentation of intuition to which no concept corresponds and this lack of correspondence can take the form of either pleasure (as is the case when we describe something as beautiful) or displeasure mixed with pleasure (as when we describe something as sublime).

It is important for Kant to distinguish between the aesthetic judgements that are thought of as involving only particular sensations and those which affect the basic judgement itself in its intrinsic nature. The former type of relation to an object does not fall within the province of a transcendental enquiry as it concerns only things found, contingently, to be ‘agreeable’ whilst a transcendental enquiry is concerned with that which seems to us to involve a necessary relation to pleasure and displeasure. So, just as the description of ‘feelings’ as aesthetic in the second critique only applied to pure feelings, here it is also the case that not all types of relation to an object that involve pleasure or displeasure are included in the province of an ‘aesthetic’, only those that involve a necessary relationship.

The *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* concerns itself with the two forms in which there is an experience of the essential nature of subjectivity, in relation to the beautiful and the sublime. The experience of the beautiful harmonises a relation between the subject and what it relates to such that the beauty perceived and the one perceiving it appear to be intimately united, which is why beauty provokes a ‘lingering’ and a feeling of peacefulness that we term ‘taste’. The experience of the sublime is much more violent and entails a conflict involving alternate feelings of attraction and repulsion, which is why Kant does not address the sublime under the heading of ‘taste’ but rather places it in close proximity to moral feeling by describing the feeling of the sublime as an ‘intellectual feeling’.

The distinction between taste and intellectual feeling parallels the distinction
between the relation to nature in terms of law and the relation to morality in terms of law. Just as the comprehension of the world as ordered is productive of pleasure and a feeling of relation between perceiver and perceived, the experience of the beautiful involves a sense of the connection between the one experiencing something as beautiful and that which is so experienced. Similarly, the relation to the moral law involves a mixture of feelings, as is evidenced in the attraction and repulsion of humiliation and respect, an admixture given a clear parallel in Kant’s description of intellectual feeling in the case of the sublime. These parallels should help us to see that there is, on the one hand, a connection between the experience of beauty and the thought of purpose and, on the other hand, a notion of the necessity of a conflict involved with our relation to morality that is paralleled in some of our aesthetic experiences.

These parallels between the discussions of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* and Kant’s other critical works indicate the systematic placing of the former. They also suggest the dependence of the whole critical system on an expanded notion of ‘aesthetics’. The relation between the three forms of enquiry Kant terms ‘aesthetic’ can now be summarised. The transcendental aesthetic explicates the a priori conditions of sensibility, the second critique provides us with reasons for thinking that there are pure feelings and the third critique details the relationship between pleasure and displeasure and necessity. All three forms of ‘aesthetic’ therefore reveal the non-sensuous grounds of sensuousness.

**The unity of the third critique**

The *Critique of Judgement* is concerned to describe the relationship between the general structures of law outlined in the first critique as the basis of a nature in general and the laws that contingently prevail in the world we happen to inhabit. In other words, the question arises, given the demonstrations of the first critique, of why we describe such things as the law of gravity as laws when the operation of them in our world seems contingent and the notion of law itself is intrinsically necessary in its thought. In order to treat of this question Kant finds it necessary to return to the topic of how ‘judgement’ should be described. Whilst the importance of the topic of ‘judgement’ in the first critique is undeniable (the understanding itself is described there as a ‘faculty for judging’ and the discussion of the notion of schematism is given as part of the doctrine of judgement), the ‘reflective’ aspect of judgement is relegated to an appendix to the transcendental analytic. Since reflective judgement deals not with the nature in general that is at issue in the first critique, but rather with the contingencies of the world we happen to inhabit, it must address the problem of relating the ‘laws’ we discern in this world to the thought of law presented in the first critique. So this type of judgement cannot rely on the understanding to provide it with laws but since it is dealing with nature (and not freedom) it also cannot rely on reason. Therefore there is, for this type of judgement, no pre-given mode of operation. It thus has to deal with appearances ‘artistically, in terms of a principle that is universal but also indeterminate’, which is ‘a purposive arrangement of nature in a system’.

In order to justify the principle of purposiveness what Kant has to do in the third
critique is to show how the concept of ‘art’ (or technē) arises and what the connection is between ‘art’ and the cognition of nature as possessing laws. Once we have described the task of the third critique we can begin to see why it contains both a critique of aesthetic judgement and a critique of teleological judgement. What Kant is treating in this work is a logical purposiveness in nature (a teleo-logic) and an aesthetic purposiveness in nature, and the division between logical purposiveness and aesthetic purposiveness repeats the division in the first critique between a transcendental aesthetic and a transcendental logic.

This description also helps us to grasp the notion Kant has of the term ‘art’. The connection between the terms is clear in the sense of a ‘making’ that is the product of a form of cultivation. This suggests that the question of ‘culture’ will be of some significance in grasping the manner in which Kant describes art and that it will also be the key to a criticism of works of art. It should be remembered however that Kant is also describing the capacity of our judgement to ‘make laws’ as itself ‘artistic’ due to the fact that this reflective capacity involves a use of universal but indeterminate concepts. Kant refers to the universal but indeterminate concepts through the principle of ‘purposiveness’. It is the principle of purposiveness that enables us to treat the regularities of experience through the notion of law. Similarly, there is such a principle in operation in both creating and judging works of art.

**Kant and fine art**

The manner in which Kant treats the work of art in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* has rarely been regarded with much enthusiasm. One of the reasons for this is that it has been thought, perhaps under the influence of Hegel’s account, that Kant has less interest in works of art than in natural beauty. There is a passage where Kant refers to the ‘superiority’ of natural beauty over artistic beauty, but it is worth noting that the place where Kant states this is during a discussion of the ‘intellectual interest’ in the beautiful before he has set out the distinction between fine art and the thought of art in general. When Kant turns to discussing ‘fine art’ he describes its purpose as involving the standard of the ‘reflective power of judgement’. This involves fine art in an intimate relationship to nature as its artistry is dependent for its effect on a certain type of self-effacement that involves us in looking upon it as ‘natural’.

The manner in which this impression of a natural power is conveyed to us by fine art is through the rule that is responsible for its production, a rule that Kant terms ‘genius’. Just as the ability to perceive nature as purposive requires a relationship to take place between the presentation of a regularity and a reflective giving of law, so the production of an object after the rule of genius requires a self-renunciation of determinate results in favour of simple attention to the act of creation as such. This attention relates, however, in the production of fine art, to the ‘material’ that is worked on whilst the active formation of this material ‘requires a talent that is academically trained, so that it may be used in a way that can stand the test of the power of judgement’. The relationship between the talent that is required to make formation artistic and the genius
that is required to find the material worked on exacting is an intricate one that par-
allels the relation between receptivity to sensation as such and the active formation of
sensibility in the provision of our formative role in placing sensuousness within its con-
ditions.

The creation of a type of beauty that is the product of the combination of cultiva-
tion with intimate receptivity is responsible for a ‘superiority’ that fine art has over
natural beauty, namely, the beautiful description of things that we would find ugly in
nature itself. To be able to exhibit things in this manner is what requires genius, but
genius itself is based on the possession of ‘spirit’ (Geist). Kant terms this ‘the animat-
ing principle in the mind’ and states that it is ‘the ability to exhibit aesthetic ideas’.20
An aesthetic idea is a presentation to which no concept is adequate, ‘so that no lan-
guage can express it completely and allow us to grasp it’ or, in other terms, an intui-
tion that exceeds the powers of a concept to govern it through the rules of
understanding (which is why Kant also terms this type of idea a presentation ‘of the
imagination’).21 This involves a relation to the understanding, but one which is
expressive of an idea rather than a concept.

Whilst the discussion of ‘genius’ gives us a clear clue to the production of a work
of art, it is only the combination of this with ‘taste’ that allows us say that we have
‘fine art’. If genius is governed by the imagination in its freedom, then taste requires
the introduction of a lawfulness that tempers the fertility of reference to aesthetic ideas
and gives them form. Because of this, taste, like judgement in general, ‘consists in dis-
ciplining (or training) genius’.22 Before looking further at the conditions for this train-
ing, conditions which will lead us beyond the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement and to
the Critique of Teleological Judgement, it is first necessary to look in more detail at the
very notion of ‘fine art’ itself, as so doing will help to defuse the notion that an aes-
thetic criticism is one that is blind to history.

The fact that the opening sections of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement concern a
discussion of ‘pure judgements of taste’ has led to a misleading reading of Kant’s
account of fine art. Whilst the notion of a pure aesthetic judgement is outlined by
Kant to be ‘disinterested’, this term is not applicable to his account of works of art.
Kant explicitly states this when he writes that judgements that concern works of art
‘have to assess the thing’s perfection’ and that this entails that they are not purely aes-
thetic judgements.23 Rather, the judgements of works of art approximate to the Ideal
of Beauty described in the Analytic of the Beautiful rather than to the pure judge-
ments of taste accounted for there. Because of this a relation to a concept is at work in
judging and producing works of art. The incorporation of conceptuality into the
production of works of art is described in the notion of ‘aesthetic ideas’ – presenta-
tions of the imagination which prompts much thought but to which no concept can
be adequate, which is why ‘no language can express it completely’.24 But the incorpo-
ration of such aesthetic ideas into the production of a work, which is the work of
genius, can only be given through the training that results from taste. This training
requires an essential involvement of the artist with history. To understand this involve-
ment of the work of art with the history of art is integral to the act of criticism and
this shows the centrality of a historical purchase for an aesthetic criticism. It is this
The notion of a discipline or training that requires an effective step beyond the account of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* towards the *Critique of Teleological Judgement*. The reason for stating this is that the production of forms of an exemplary kind involves a clear relationship to the history of the production of artworks and, with this, an account of the conditions of *culture*. Kant describes culture as the production in a rational being of ‘an aptitude for purposes generally’. This production requires two conditions.

Kant terms these conditions two forms of culture, though in fact they are part of the unitary complex that culture itself constitutes. The first is what he terms a culture of skill and this is required for the promotion of purposes at all, but its condition is the development of a culture of discipline which is necessary in order to free us from the ‘despotism of desires’. The fact that it is within the discussion of the *Critique of Teleological Judgement* that we are led to this idea of discipline as a precondition for the exercise of freedom is in itself very instructive about the unity of the whole third critique.

Whilst the most obvious sense of teleology is in relation to the understanding of organisms it is also the case that Kant’s key example of final causation is a cultural relation involving the notion of ‘rent’. The recursive logic of final causes operates in culture through the production of inequality and conflict in history, a production that ensures competition and distortion, a process which we could term a ‘cunning of nature’ or to use Kant’s own expression ‘a deeply hidden and perhaps intentional endeavour of the supreme wisdom’. This ‘deeply hidden’ endeavour directs the conflict within which the history of humanity is found to an overall goal of further production of culture and is the prime means of ‘discipline’ for nations as inequality is the means of disciplining individuals. This important set of claims is key to the understanding of what discipline is involved in taste. Taste is analogous in its action on the work of art during its production and in the course of its judgement to the cruel and vigorous elements of culture itself. A final way of putting the relationship into focus is through Kant’s contrast between mechanism and teleology. Just as ‘mechanism’ involves only a linear causal relation as opposed to the recursive causality of final causes and this leads the former to produce only limited operations incapable of ‘spirit’ (because of lacking life), so also the interaction between the artwork and its criticism is one of connection between that which is filled with life and the fixity that produces death. Criticism’s ends can include the destruction of a work just as easily as its perpetuation and reproduction.

The ends of criticism

To describe the implications of the agenda for criticism that emerges from this account of Kant requires revisiting the notion of ‘ends’. There are four types of ‘ends’ that need to be distinguished: we can think of an ‘end’ as the limit of something; we can describe an ‘end’ as something’s purpose; we can think of an ‘end’ as something’s purpose; we can think of an ‘end’ as a conclusion or destination; finally, we can think of an ‘end’ as an ‘affinity’ between elements or as a notion of ‘co-determination’ of parts. Whilst the notions of limit and purpose are
closely interconnected for Kant, as to think of a purpose of something is limit our comprehension of it to the terms of that purpose, these elements of ‘end’ are still analytically distinct.

The limit of the criticism of a work should be given in terms of the relationship between setting rules for its comprehension in a lawlike manner and recognising that this law has to be referred to the nature of the work itself and not simply pre-set. Hence, the act of criticism has to involve a reflective judgement, which uncovers the law within the work and relates the law ‘of’ the work to the thought of law in general. This limitative element of the ‘end’ of criticism is connected to the purpose of criticism itself, this purpose being one of relating the work to the formation of culture. The purpose of criticism in other words is to further sharpen the process of relationship between the elements of skill and discipline within a culture, providing conditions for ‘disciplining’ the work in the process of inaugurating its entry into the historical network of works. This disciplinary aspect of criticism is both its promise and its danger. The promise of criticism at this level is that its introduction of the work assessed into the network of works will permit new reflection on the corpus of works already assessed; the danger is that it will simply kill the work and permit no new growth to emerge from it.29

Whilst the danger of criticism’s foreclosure of a work is one sense of the understanding of ‘end’ as destination the real sense of this notion of criticism is its relationship to the Idea of the work, an Idea which we can grasp as contained within the possibility opened by the work and which is not a destination in the sense of a finish but an infinite possibility that permits further critical reaction and the elaboration of an embedded presence of the work within culture as part of its own criticism. This notion of a ‘destination’ indicates the infinity of criticism and the way in which criticism lives through its own history. This aspect of criticism is another element of the negotiation that an act of criticism involves, as without a relation to the history that has made possible its intervention in relation to the work the criticism produced has the tendency to be merely a ‘view’ or opinion which does not itself have any ‘spirit’. For criticism itself to possess ‘spirit’ is for it to be involved with the ‘life’ that is its own historical condition. However, this relation is again something that requires a reflective negotiation, as a determinative relation to the history of criticism reduces each critical act to a mere repetition and does not permit the reopening of the engagement with the work that will allow the conflict that is the life of culture. Hence, there is the same danger and the same opening for each act of criticism in relation to its own history as there is for this criticism’s relation to the possibility of the work confronted, and the case is further complicated when we include discussion of the criticism directed upon the particular work, a relation which soon involves considerable complexity.30 Hence, not merely the production of the work and a recognition of its entry into the set of works is an historical act but the critical relation to the history of the criticism of a work is a further historical act, and these twin historical conditions require thinking in relation to their own possibility, a thinking that has precisely been ruled out by recent forms of historicism.

The notion of ‘end’ as affinity or co-determination involves assessment of the work...
criticised in relation to its conditions of production and is often the most decisive element of the critical act, not least because there are many conditions of production for a work and the relation of the work to the different elements of culture can again enrich relation to the work or simply produce a reductive response to it which permits no new invention. Understanding the conditions of the work involves grasping the strife of which it is part and negotiating a relation between the work and this strife, without either ceasing prematurely to close the strife or simply articulating this strife as exterior to the work’s immanent sense. This relationship to the work involves not a simple rendition of ‘contexts’, as is all too common, but rather seeing the work as emerging from a medium that is specific to itself and grasping this medium not simply as a sociological or historical given but as marking an originary irruption and thus as saturating any ‘context’. Grasping the nature of this irruption clearly involves a sense of what makes the originary work possible. This is endless work as there are no definable ‘facts’ that could close this accounting; hence the accounting should overflow the arena of facts and reshape them. In other terms, this grasp of the medium that permits the work’s emergence is one that should reshape the work’s ‘backgrounds’ in the work’s image instead of fashioning the work in the image of the circumstances of its arrival.

The listing of the thoughts of end and the thinking through of how they relate to acts of criticism should help us to see that Kant’s notion of aesthetic judgement is not intended either to freeze works within some straitjacket of formal beauty or to foreclose a relation to history as integral to the comprehension of their aesthetic import. The key element underlying all these disparate considerations, however, is the relationship between art and life, culture and the reproduction of its conditions through a reference of both to law and its reflective comprehension. The combination of these considerations suggests strongly that works are engaged in the same difficult negotiation with death that is, in fact, a condition of life itself. It is this ultimate relationship between life and death, work and its destruction, that is involved in the critical relationship to works of art.

Practical exemplifications: Wyndham Lewis and Robert Mapplethorpe

The works of Wyndham Lewis provide us with a case study for the application of this view of criticism to the understanding of artistic productions. Lewis’s work has been subjected to the same range of assessments as most other authors, from the classic description of it in terms of certain types of basic writing patterns to the relation of it to psychoanalytic or Marxist categories. If we turn to the novels of Lewis from a Kantian direction, however, we can see the vital character of his work as consisting precisely in its negotiation with the characteristics of life itself. This is clearly seen in such a work as *The Revenge for Love*, a work in which description of the political struggle engaged in by the leftist artists and writers of the 1930s against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War is set out as involving a struggle between the engagement with life and the surrender to the forces which mechanise life. This can be seen in the passages where the characters are given lucid moments, as when Margaret, at a party, is driven to reflect on those around her as being ‘big portentous
wax-dolls, mysteriously doped with some impenetrable nonsense, out of a Caligari's drug-cabinet, and wound up with wicked fingers to jerk about in a threatening way – their mouths backfiring every other second, to spit out a manufactured hatred, as their eyeballs moved.\(^{33}\)

This vivid description, which involves references to drugs, the cinema and wax-dolls, conjures up an image of the various forces that are included in the mechanical reproduction of modern humanity and is one of the characteristics that stamps Lewis's work as a whole and the narrative of *The Revenge for Love* in particular. Within the space of this work there is the perception, stated by Margaret, but involving the consciousness of the majority of the characters, that living is a ‘fever’ and that the characters are merely ‘all ghost-persons together’.\(^{34}\) This collapse of the vitality of the characters is orchestrated within the work as part of the elemental struggle with the condition of their own life, a condition that is shaped by impersonal forces that are mechanising existence.

This sense of a struggle between mechanism and life is Lewis's version of the relationship between teleology and mechanism elaborated within Kant’s *Critique of Teleological Judgement*. Just as Kant reveals the ‘deeply hidden’ intention of cultural history to be the reproduction of conditions of strife that constantly endanger life itself, so Lewis sets out the intensification of this conflict within conditions of mechanical modernity. The depth of Lewis's engagement with this difficulty in his novels encompasses a whole range of different types of situation from the isolation described by him in *Self Condemned* to the eschatological involvement of *The Human Age*.

The fact that Lewis’s work can be addressed in this manner is itself a tribute to the type of criticism that is possible from a Kantian position. If, however, it were simply the case that the assessment of a work, whether by Lewis or anyone else, was an application of a pre-set notion of criticism and did not involve an alteration of the terms of that criticism, we would not have described a reflective criticism at all. The engagement with works has to alter the terms of the criticism otherwise the immanence of the law of the work has been missed. In the case of Lewis we can note a continuous setting out of instability in the relation between life and death, automation and humanity.\(^{35}\) The introduction into the terms of the criticism of what is required by the nature of comprehension of the work offers a living futural character to criticism as it enables it to engage with its own conditions of possibility and articulate its own methods in a manner that consistently requires invention.

Whilst Lewis’s work, as a literary work, reveals its effects through a process of linguistic display, it relies heavily on the relationship modern literature has to mechanised production of images. The arrival of cinema and photography as contemporary means of production altered the condition of literature in terms of both its production and its criticism. The quotes from Lewis that refer to cinema directly are only the most obvious sign of this intrusion of visual art into modern literature. The writing that Lewis produces is in fact much more heavily involved with modern images than this suggests. Lewis understood his work to be based on tracing an ‘external’ relationship to character in which behaviour and physical appearance become the source for
understanding rather than an appeal to a deep ‘inner’ self. This understanding of the nature of the character in terms of a fixity that is grounded in their physicality emerges from the nature of figures that are given to us statically in photographs and through a kinetic procession in cinema. This behavioural engagement with personality is part of the increasing becoming-artificial of humanity.

In conclusion therefore it is worth looking at the placing of literature in relation to visual art and to tracing out the connection between the two required for an aesthetic criticism as well as indicating something of the distinction between them. The photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe are a reference of some import for discussing the nature of visual media. In the posthumously published collection *Pictures* the most explicitly erotic of Mapplethorpe’s photographs are presented together.36 There is for example the four-picture sequence *Helmut and Brooks* (1978), *Fist Fuck* (1978), *Double Fist Fuck* (1978) and *Fist Fuck* (1978). These works caused considerable controversy and have been at the centre of battles about censorship. The point of discussing them is not to revisit this debate but to suggest, in agreement with Arthur Danto, that a defence of these works cannot be based on a ‘formalist’ discussion of them as ‘figure studies’.37 I do not accept that such a purely ‘formalist’ reading of the works is Kantian. Rather, a Kantian appreciation of these works has to begin from assessing them reflectively in terms of the type of entry they have into the world of works of art. As a fourfold sequence they make a powerful collective statement, but it would not be ‘formalist’ to relate them to the conditions of their framing, conditions always of central significance to Mapplethorpe. Hence *Helmut and Brooks* displays the action it portrays through a geometric spacing of the figures that places the apex of the buttocks central to the composition, a centring that ensures the eye follows a curve upwards to the back of the chair and downwards to the inserted face with a smoothness that is clearly classical. Similarly, the first *Fist Fuck* places a figure’s profile in full view, albeit with a backwards vision that permits a sliding portrayal of the man on the floor and allows a graceful upwards movement of the eye towards the point of the fist’s insertion. *Double Fist Fuck* by contrast offers a foreclosure of its subject which places its elements in a bare relationship that simply and compellingly allows the connection between the limbs involved to be presented. Of the four, only the second *Fist Fuck* might be thought to be unsuccessful in terms of the relationship the tableau has to the history of visual works. Here the figure that is entering is presented standing, with a forward thrusting movement that prevents a clear focus on his form and renders the composition less harmonious.

This limitative criticism of these works, which places them within the conditions of their talented production, is only the first part of their appreciation. The purposive orientation of the works and their criticism is to alter the way in which the conventions the work has utilised can be understood and this involves the fact that the shapes of the presentations given affect much other subject matter that is governed by the same rules of portrayal. We can see this in relation to Mapplethorpe’s own work, where portraits of film stars and pictures of flowers cannot be viewed without a sense of how their portrayal partakes of the eroticism of the works just referred to, and in relation to works of other photographers who use or abjure these conventions. Cultural awareness of the
works and the intertwinement between their compositional possibility and the subject they present affects the comprehension of Renaissance paintings of angels as much as it does the history of photography.

A criticism of these works that has ‘spirit’ will relate them in unexpected ways to the history of which they are part and will in the process ensure that this history bears the traces of its effect. As for example Thierry De Duve has ensured that it is now part of the history of thinking of Duchamp that we think also of Kant, so also this reading has ensured that Kant’s name is now connected to that of Mapplethorpe. The ‘medium’ of production of Mapplethorpe’s work is not simply photography but the place of photography in relation to the arts as these are placed after the invention of photography. This placement requires the comprehension of this history as one of a displacement that constantly requires an invention of criticism, an ‘invention’ that pretends neither to collapse the appreciation of works into the form of one type of art (as is done with semiotic criticism) nor to suggest that distinct art forms are not integrally related. This double vigilance, attending both to the specificity of a medium and grasping its emplacement in a wide history that it alters due to its originariness, is key to a futural criticism.38

This involvement of criticism with its own invention is the condition of criticism having a future at all. The involvement of aesthetics with teleology in a unitary relation that comprehends works as parts of a ‘culture’ that they both continuously create and are judged by is a recursive process and hence part of what the third critique has enabled us to recognise. For criticism to become reflective concerning itself is for it to live up to the challenges of the transcendental conditions of its own possibility, a challenge Kant himself did not feel he was in a position to meet.39 In suggesting that the resources for criticism to meet this challenge are certainly available I wish to propose a new future for aesthetics as integral to the criticism of works, a future that will enable a different type of criticism than is generally practised, a criticism that will remain open to its own conditions of transformation.

Notes


2 The reflexive problematic that historicism is caught in is described well by Fredric Jameson at the opening of his book The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Routledge, 1981): ‘Always historicize! That is the transhistorical imperative.’ The
fact that a work could begin with such a slogan with no apparent sense of irony is an index of the degrees of absurdity historicism very quickly reaches.

3 A classic sign of unease about this view within Marxist circles was, however, expressed by the publication by New Left Books (ed.), *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977), in which Rodney Livingston, Perry Anderson and Francis Mulhern introduced and contentiously discussed texts by a range of authors classified as ‘German Marxists’ (and including the Hungarian Georg Lukács). More recently T. Eagleton, in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), attempts to retrieve a relationship to the history of aesthetics but does so whilst multiplying reservations about the discipline and indicating very little grasp of its conceptual history, a fact he puts down in the preface to the book to the fact that he is ‘not really qualified to write the book’.

4 *Kant, Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), A20/B34.

5 For a more extensive account of the transcendental aesthetic and its relationship to the other forms of ‘aesthetics’ in Kant see G. Banham, *Kant and the Ends of Aesthetics* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

6 *Kant, Ak. 5*: 73. All references to works other than the first critique in this chapter are to the standard edition, the *Akademie* edition of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1908–13), and are cited as Ak. volume: page number.

7 *Kant, Ak. 5*: 76.

8 See Banham, *Kant*, ch. 10 for a fuller account of the later works in which Kant treats of moral feeling. I am currently working on a sequel to this book in which I will set out the density of Kant’s moral psychology in much more detail than can be attempted here.

9 Kant uses the term ‘aesthetic’ at Ak. 5: 90 but indicates that the term is used by ‘analogy’. It is rare to discuss the ‘aesthetic’ of the second critique although there is the important precedent of L. W. Beck. See Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), ch. XII, and for an account of the reasons for its particular place in the architectonic of the second critique see Banham, *Kant*, ch. 1.

10 It is almost a commonplace for contemporary critics of Kant to suggest that he has little room for feeling in his account of moral motivation, an accusation that seems to me quite false. For a critical assessment of Kant’s position see N. Sherman, ‘The place of emotions in Kantian morality’ in O. Flanagan and A. Rorty (eds), *Identity, Character and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 149–70 and for a more positive assessment see A. Reath, ‘Kant’s theory of moral sensibility: respect for the law and the influence of inclination’, *Kant-Studien*, 80 (1989), 284–302. The most influential current criticism of Kant on feeling is B. Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), to whom C. Korsgaard replies in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and contrast this with the more reliable K. Ward, *The Development of Kant’s View of Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972).

11 *Kant, Ak. 5*: 192.

12 For a discussion of the notion of a ‘general aesthetic’ as underlying and uniting the disparate forms of aesthetic that Kant discusses see Banham, *Kant*, particularly chs 1 and 10.


Longuenesse presents a compelling argument for the importance of ‘reflective judgement’ in the first critique, an argument similar to that given in Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*.

14 The second part of the transcendental analytic is described by Kant as the ‘analytic of principles’ or ‘doctrine of judgement’ and comprises an immense part of the work: A130/B169–A292/B349. The relationship between this notion of judgement and the key notions of transcendental psychology treated within the work, such as the transcendental imagination, would be worth extensive analysis given the immense richness of the questions involved. I will undertake this work elsewhere.

15 Kant, Ak. 20: 214.


17 Kant, Ak. 5: 301.

18 Kant, Ak. 5: 306.

19 Kant, Ak. 5: 310.

20 Kant, Ak. 5: 314.

21 *Ibid.* Kant is very cautious in setting out the reason for calling these presentations ‘ideas’, a terminological choice which is as interesting in its way as his gradual extension of the term ‘aesthetic’ as it indicates a correlation between the imagination and reason (the latter involving the production of ‘ideas’ as described in the first critique).

22 Kant, Ak. 5: 432.

23 Kant, Ak. 5: 311.

24 Kant, Ak. 5: 314.

25 Kant Ak. 5: 431.

26 Kant, Ak. 5: 432.


28 Kant Ak. 5: 433.


31 Although there are considerable differences between the approach advanced here and that of Gillian Rose, the notion of keeping the middle ‘broken’ and not attempting to ‘heal’ it is one with which I am in fundamental accord. Cf. G. Rose, *The Broken Middle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

32 For a classic type of analysis see J. Meyers, *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation* (London:
Athlone, 1980) and for the application to Lewis’s work of psychoanalytic and Marxist thought see F. Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). The outline I am merely sketching here of an alternative type of criticism of Lewis to those in these works has been set out at much greater length in Banham, ‘The uncanny purposes of machines’, *Wyndham Lewis Annual* 1996, 20–30.


34 Lewis, *Revenge*, p. 163.

35 This involves the addition to the vocabulary of Kantian criticism of the ‘uncanny’ and the ‘diabolical’. For an illustration of the necessity of these terms and an illustration of their appreciation see Banham, ‘teleology, transcendental reflection and artificial life’, ‘The uncanny purposes of machines’ and ‘Mourning Satan’.


37 A. Danto, *Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). This ‘formalist’ defence was at the centre of an obscenity trial provoked by the photographs.

38 For a more extensive engagement with Mapplethorpe in relation to Kant and Duchamp see Banham, ‘Mapplethorpe, Duchamp and the ends of photography’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 7:1 (2002), 119–27. This whole issue is devoted to the relationship of aesthetics to the appreciation of works of art.

39 ‘Since this enquiry into our power of taste, which is the aesthetic power of judgement, has a transcendental aim, rather than the aim to [help] form and cultivate taste (since this will proceed, as it has in the past, even if no such investigations are made), I would like to think that it will be judged leniently as regards its deficiency for the latter purpose’ (Kant, Ak. 5: 170).